

# The Teacher's Voice: Citizenship and Neoliberalism: The Case of Chile

**Silvia Redon Pantoja**

*Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso, Valparaíso, Chile*

## **Abstract**

*This research aims to understand the meanings of citizenship education for Chilean teachers. Based on this framework, the concepts of citizenship and education are discussed concisely in relation to their equivalence with the political sphere and the commons. The analysis of 81 individual interviews and 2 focus groups of teachers from the Valparaíso region, Chile, raised various matrix categories. However, this article focuses only on the **Neoliberalism** matrix, which includes discursive lines linked to a subject who sometimes feels defeated, nullified, subdued, self-marginalised, and isolated in a climate of individualistic competitiveness. Another subcategory that emerges from the matrix of neoliberalism relates to discourses that refer to school having become a commodity, in which economic resources are the supreme value and a guiding principle that determines practices and policies, configuring students and families as clients, as exemplified by the logic of vouchers. Finally, teachers complain about the growing culture of bureaucratization in which they are trapped in accountability processes within a framework of pedagogical pragmatism, linked to observable behaviours through standardised measurement by means of standardised tests.<sup>i</sup>*

**Keywords:** *Chile, teachers, citizenship, the commons, neoliberalism.*

## **Prior Clarifications**

In Chile, the Pinochet dictatorship (1973) allowed the configuration of the neoliberal capitalist model at its most extreme (Mayol, 2012; Atria, 2015 2017; Mayol & Azocar & Azocar 2013; Salazar). Not only did he collude with the political class of the conservative right, but, together with it, he constructed the legal bases to perpetuate this model within the political constitution of 1980 (in the middle of the dictatorship), which laid the foundations of a subsidiary State (Atria, 2013, Ruiz 2010) that opened its doors to the capitalist system and allowed for usufruct and for profit to be gained from social rights, legitimizing privatization under the auspices of the dictatorship constitution. Education, health, social security, roads, pharmacies and basic foodstuffs were to become the new merchandise that would increase profits for the oligarch class that supported the dictatorship. It must be remembered that Chile began, at the dawn of the 20th century, a path of great struggle to achieve a State that strengthened social rights, from Aguirre Cerda (1938-1941) to Allende Gossens (1970-1973) strengthening greater popular sovereignty, and achieving great steps forward in matters of educational coverage, the creation of cooperatives, agrarian reform and social organization in a deeply oligarchic-capitalist country – a path of social development that was cut short by a bloody, horrific *coup d'etat*.

On October 18, 2019 a social revolution broke out in Chile, the product of thirty years of post-dictatorship democratic governments that have maintained the 1980 constitution and, therefore, the privileges of a ruling class that has been shamelessly enriched at the cost of indebtedness, precariousness and subhuman conditions for the majority of the population. The 1980 constitution allows the transfer of public resources (from the State) into private hands to administer, organise and profit from these social rights, including education. Thus, public education is effectively exterminated by installing in society a false imaginary that links the quality of the educational system with the achievement of market

standards measured through high-stake standardised tests. These tests create a hierarchy of the student population that privileges cultural capital, erases the learning that takes place within students' communities of origin and masks and hides inequality. In this context, we interviewed Chilean teachers to tell us about a recent law (20.911), promulgated in 2016, which requires a citizen training plan in all Chilean schools.

Citizenship education is a central topic in public education policies and in the social demands of this new century. In the 1980s, this concept became the focus of attention, developing into an unprecedented explosion in the field of theoretical production in education and citizenship during the 1990s and 2000s (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994; Cortina, 1997; Perez Luño, 1998; Bolivar, 1998; Arnot, 2009; Fernández Liria C; Fernández Liria and Alegre Zahonero, 2007; Marí Ytarte, 2007, Cullén, 2007; Bartalomé Pina, 2002; Camps 2007).

The concept of citizenship encompasses two fundamental principles in law and political philosophy that are highly relevant in society: individual rights and the notion of connection with the community, the epistemological origins of which are a subject of debate between liberals and communitarians. Therefore, the theoretical core of citizenship relates to the heart of political philosophy and its reflection on the political subject and its connection with the community. However, there is also a historical, social and contextual explanation that justifies the emphasis on this concept. As welfare states built on a Keynesian logic collapse, the social fabric becomes fragmented and violence arises between pre-existing nationalism and growing cultural diversity resulting from migration, in the context of racial tension, inequalities, the failure of environmental policies and the triumph of the capitalist world system. The growing disillusionment with representative democracy<sup>ii</sup> is evidenced in a disaffection towards the representative political class, which engages in acts of

corruption and detachment from the protection of the common good. Moreover, the engagement of governments sympathetic to the capitalist system in alliances, pacts and negotiations behind people's backs provokes growing apathy in voters, especially among young people.

According to a 2004 UNDP study in Chile, 56% of interviewees believe that economic development is more important than democracy and 55% would support an authoritarian government if it could solve economic problems (UNDP, 2004, p.134). Citizenship, as the coexistence of subjects in a common territory, is configured based on the framework or context that enables it, and that framework is the capitalist system under a neoliberal logic. Therefore, it is essential to analyse, in the first place, the definition of citizenship from its etymological correlation with the political, and then to state briefly the characteristics of the neoliberal context as a normative logic and guiding principle regarding social relations and coexistence. The sections that follow examine: citizenship in its correlation with the political; citizenship as the individual's membership of the modern State: the subject of Law; citizenship as a connection with the community: The Commons; and the framework in which 21<sup>st</sup> century citizenship originates: neoliberal logic.

### **1. Citizenship in its correlation with the political**

As previously noted, the concept of citizenship is the representation of the two fundamental principles in law and the political philosophies in permanent dispute: individual rights and the connection with the community, whose philosophical-political, epistemological, anthropological and social platforms generate the theoretical bases that distinguish liberal and communitarian perspectives. However, along with the dialectic and tension generated by the rights of the subject and its connection with the community, the etymological

origin of the citizenship concept that implies the city, in its Roman origin "*cives*" and in its Greek origin "*polis*", is forgotten.

This equivalence framework between *polis* and *cives*, understood as a community that is shared by those whom it recognizes as its participants (Balivar, 2013, p. 22), is relevant in order to avoid the mistake of separating the concept of citizenship from the political. *Politeia* emerges from the relationship between *polis* and its participants, as constitution of citizenship (Balivar, 2013). According to Balivar (2013), the political is the constitution of citizenship; therefore, by defining the concept of citizenship, we understand the meanings of the political.

The equivalence between citizenship and the political makes visible the emphasis on the common space that subjects share. Common space, or the commons (as the aspect of the public sphere connected with the people and not with the State) is weakened by constructing the subject of a social contract as under a political-legal logic instead of a social and communal logic. The destruction of the political by neoliberalism supposes the mutation of the social contract of the subject of law to encompass as subjects large economic corporations, which operate under the logic of the private capitalist world, destroying the Social State (de Cabo, 2017). Neoliberal states are not guarantors of the commons, the public, social rights nor of the protection of their people as a living community (Polanyi, 2018; Bazzicalupo, 2016, Foucault, 2007).

Perhaps the concept that best defines the political, understood as the good life shared in common, is the Aymara term *suma qamaña*, in which wellness is only possible when everyone is well. For these pre-Columbian peoples, individualism is not part of the sense of the good life or of well-being. You can only be well when the community enjoys well-being (*Albó, 2011*)

## **2. Citizenship as the individual's membership in the modern State: the subject of law**

There are multiple approaches to the concept of citizenship and citizen. In this concise discussion, it is not necessary to develop them, but simply to name some characteristics that I have managed to configure based on theoretical references and my own reflections. The subject-citizen as a subject of law, which emerges from modernity, is characterised by: a subject of law dissociated from the natural world from which he emerges; a universal-subject, configured as a white man by Western culture; a subject of law in terms of private property and possession, dissociated from the commons; and a subject of law alienated in his/her body, his/her history and his/her context.

Modernity has forgotten the most relevant subject when living in a common territory. Indigenous communities considered this now forgotten subject a deity – “living nature”, as an “other” who inhabited the territory in which they lived. However, it was subsequently deprived of all rights. The explosive development of science under a positivist rationality made the *homo sapiens* the centre of the universe, and he forgot the most relevant subject (living nature) and configured it as an object liable to extraction. Omstron (2000) tries to make the rights of living nature visible from the legal and the economic perspective when speaking of the commons. In turn, Mattei (2013) alludes to this commons as our nature that contains us. However, those who have developed the right and value of nature the most, understand it not as a legal dimension, but as a form of existence and coexistence with a nature that speaks to them, that determines the rhythm and harmony of life and that, in its unfathomable superiority and wisdom, welcomes the human species so that it can exist. These world views,<sup>iii</sup> which were held in the Latin American continent more than four thousand years ago, were buried along with the richness of their cultures by the colonising empires under the banners of Development and Civilization. This relates to the

second idea of this universal citizen-subject, who is configured from the archetype of the European white man, as the guiding principle of law and jurisdiction. Under the homogenising banner of freedom, equality and fraternity, the languages and epistemes of the indigenous heritage – the wealth and the wisdom of life – were buried. This ‘civilising’ process also involved suffering, struggle and death for black populations, women, precarious people and minority groups, who obtained few rights in regard to citizenship.

This Greco-Latin heritage, under a Manichaeic logic of the subject of law versus the community, is sustained ontologically in conceptualisations, positions, hierarchies and legal classifications of the subject of law, separated from his constitutive linking network of the commons that allows him to be who he is. It is noteworthy that this subject of law emerges from constitutions dating back more than two hundred years, which still operate before an abstract, obsolete and fallacious legal subject, totally disconnected from his particular historical reality (Cabo, 2017). It is important to note that all these constitutions originated in Europe, beginning with the English Magna Carta, the American Constitution of 1787 and then the Magna Carta of the French Revolution in 1789, from which others then emerged on the colonised continents.

The subject-citizen, who is the subject of law from modernity, emerges as an ideal, a subject without context, without history, thus allowing the comparison of the incomparable (peoples, nations, norms and values) and the installation within citizenship of a normative order that only perpetuates the privileges of those who dominate and have constituted said order, emphasising the right of an individual subject over the collective-subject: the commons as the great Right. According to Foucault (2004), the subject nullifies his body, and he is disciplined and becomes compliant to the normative order instituted by capitalism that applies econometrics to the management of bodies and the world

of life. “It is about inserting (adapting and shaping) individual bodies into the apparatus of capitalist production through discipline and making population a phenomenon functional to the economy” (Bazzicalupo, 2016, p. 23).

### **3. Citizenship as a connection with the community: The Commons**

Even though citizenship is the most relevant dimension, it is also the most forgotten. In general, school texts and didactic emphasis are placed on democracy as the subject's faculty for electing rulers. We will not discuss the antinomy regarding this concept, reduced to the vote in accordance with a numerical normative logic, which reflects nothing of what the concept of democracy means as the power of the people, to the people and for the people. The system of government called democracy is emptied of content by erasing what defines it: the people. Who are the people? Nowadays, the people are disconnected; the State does not represent the people, and the public realm is not a sphere of services and rights for the people. According to Laval & Dardot (2015), the commons is not the State, the public is not the commons and this disconnected citizenship is limited to the private sphere. Therefore, building the commons through education is the only space of compulsory associativity that we have left. What does it mean to build the commons? It means institutional praxis, social fabric woven from connections and relations, dialogic practices, common actions for the commons, a shared good, affections, experiences, spaces and times for the “we”; it means welcoming what is different. It means making dissent a power for dynamic consensus in permanent movement. It means not to ontologise life, but to take notice of it and follow its course. It means understanding that we owe everything we are to the commons. Nothing, from the bipedal position in which we stand, to our ability to think, express thoughts, feel and love, would be possible without the commons.



#### **4. The framework in which the citizenship of the 21st century is originated: neoliberal reason.**

The commons, as the basic constitution of humans, is completely destroyed by neoliberalism. The commons is what defines citizenship as the core aspect of the political. However, the etymological equivalence of the concept of citizenship with the Greek polis (*cives-polis*) refers to the city space as the common territory that allows the participation of those who constitute it. This common territory, far from being the *agora* of ancient Greece (in which women and slaves did not participate) or the space of freedom, equality and fraternity raised by modernity, is nowadays a dispersed territory, configured from transaction, productivity, and profits from a business logic under the capitalist system in a neoliberal world. Given that neoliberalism destroys citizenship and the political, it also implies the destruction of the commons. According to Dardot and Laval (2013) and Brown (2016), we can affirm that neoliberalism destroys every form of the commons and configures subjectivities as ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Brown (2016) points out that:

Neoliberalization transposes democratic political principles of justice into an economic lexicon, transforms the State into an administrator of the nation over the business model (...) and empties a good part of the substance of democratic citizenship and even popular sovereignty (...) Neoliberalization is usually more similar to a termite than a lion ... its form of reason pierces in a capillary way in the trunks and branches of workplaces, schools, public agencies, social and political discourses and, above all, the subject (pp. 42-43).

Neoliberalism penetrates the school as a guiding rationality that reconstructs society and the subject. The democratic State's commitments to equality, freedom, inclusion and constitutionality are subordinated to the project of economic growth, competitive positioning and the growth of capital (Brown 2016). Neoliberalism destroys the commons as collective well-being, making

subjects compete under a logic of winners and losers, legitimising inequality as a social and political principle. The State is rendered purely economic and is only recognised as legitimate in its responsibility for economic growth. Neoliberal rationality also destroys the core of the educational process, divesting it of its humanistic and academic content. Knowledge and thought are traded for training that contributes to the improvement of capital. This means losing the sense of education as a foundation for participation in public life and ultimately for contributing to the public good (Brown, 2016).

It is important to note that, in Chilean schools, there are aspects that smooth the path to a neoliberal culture: the Chilean oligarchic history, which has created a sector that enjoys privileges and leadership positions in opposition to a separate sector of excluded and exploited people; the imported Prussian pedagogical and didactic model (Conejeros, 2015); and the commodification and privatisation of education initiated during the period of military dictatorship in Chile (1973–1990) and perpetuated by social-democratic governments. Teachers experience the culture of their schools from within this terrain of asymmetries and hierarchies.

## **Method**

This research is part of a five-year macro-study of education and citizenship in Chile (2017-2021). In the years 2018 and 2019, the methodology of this study involved the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques to identify and understand the meanings of citizen education in Chilean schools. This article presents only the qualitative results, carried out in 2018 as a result of the analysis of 99 individual interviews and two focus groups. The interviews were conducted with a sample chosen to be broadly representative across the following categories: gender, age, type of school, taught subject, job position in the school and territory. The protocol of the ethnographic interview covered

issues regarding identification, knowledge about citizenship education, continuous training, public policy and didactic aspects of teaching. Furthermore, a section within the protocol asked teachers to talk about their lives in school, networks, the environment, government and democracy. The information from the 99 interviews was organised for analysis and categorization through the NVIVO12 software.

## Results and Discussion

Table nº 1. Characteristics of the teachers interviewed, according to gender and type of school.

PEd: Primary Education; SEd: Secondary Education; P-SEd: Primary + Secondary Education

TEACHERS			WOMEN			MEN			PUBLIC SCHOOLS			VOUCHERS/ SUBSIDIZED SCHOOLS			PRIVATE SCHOOLS		
PEd	SEd	P-SEd	PEd	SEd	P-SEd	PEd	SEd	P-SEd	PEd	SEd	P-SEd	PEd	SEd	P-SEd	PEd	SEd	P-SEd
35	34	29	22	17	15	13	17	15	20	18	8	8	12	12	7	4	10
<b>Total teachers= 99</b>			<b>54</b>			<b>45</b>			<b>46</b>			<b>32</b>			<b>21</b>		

The researchers identified five matrices: neoliberalism, school, authoritarianism, curriculum, teaching role and citizenship. This article only discusses subcategories linked to the category of neoliberalism. From the data, the category of neoliberalism has been created to comprise discourses related to the commercialisation of education; bureaucratisation engendered by the business logic of the new public school management systems; and the configuration of a nullified and submissive, self-marginalised, competitive and individualistic subject. At the same time, it takes account of teachers who face this adverse reality and who are aware of what the capitalist system is destroying in our schools and in our humanity. Diagram No. 1 shows the category of Neoliberalism and its discursive ramifications.

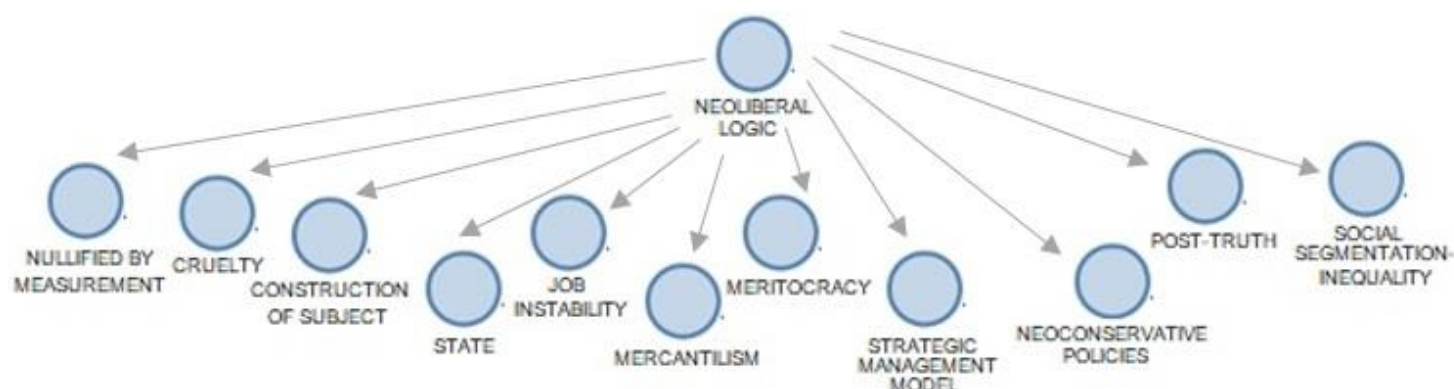


Diagram n° 1. Matrix of the Neoliberalism Category

The category of neoliberalism encompasses several discursive lines about school lacking a sense of community, linking ties, sense of the commons as public space. It is clear that the neoliberal logic is not situated outside but in inside the person; as Brown (2016) points out, it is the termite consuming each cell of the body from within and creating subjectivities that configure ways of being, thinking and feeling. The institutional nature of the school is configured from competitiveness, through standardised tests that generate a logic of reward and punishment, in which the reward or punishment affects salaries, generating fear due to job instability. Students' emphasis on the primacy of the successful subject is another relevant aspect in the configuration of the political space of the school, causing an individualistic culture. The most successful students do not want everyone to achieve the same success since they enjoy the privilege of individual recognition. There is no adherence to the maxim that "Either everyone is saved or no one is", nor any conviction that personal achievement is a product of the network that supports it, that we are what we are because of the commons, which is our biological, emotional and cognitive background.

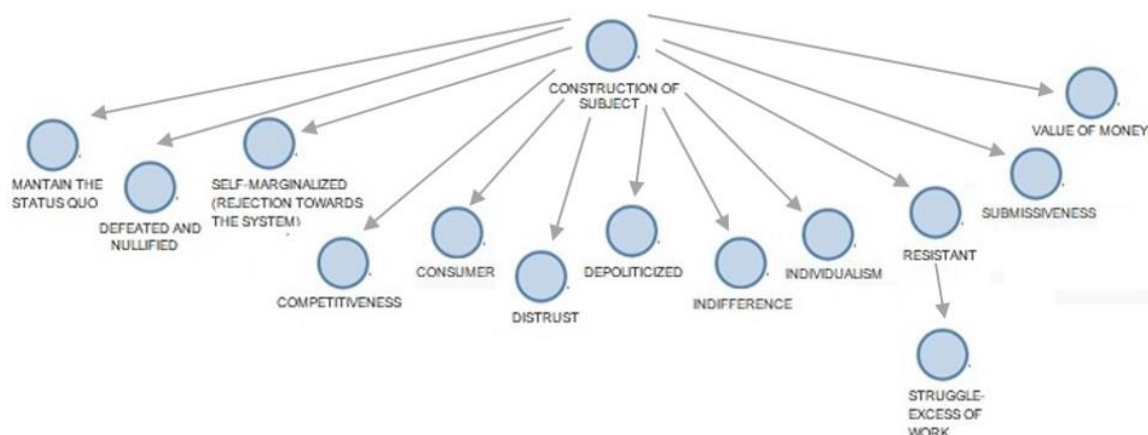


Diagram n°2. Construction of subject as a subcategory of the Neoliberalism matrix

XX: “And that explains what happens with education. This, this capitalist disposition that takes everything from the human being, everything! To turn it into profit, into profit. No matter what was previously considered a human condition, a human right; everything is merchandise, everything is for profit, everything, absolutely everything, everything, everything, there is no exception”<sup>iv</sup>.

XX: “It is neoliberalism! It has affected it [teachers’ mental health] tremendously because neoliberalism drives you to compete, and we are not going to succeed all together, but I am going to succeed alone! And the system wants me to succeed alone, because that is better for the market! So ... and there we have it with the PSU<sup>v</sup> and so on. So, of course, neoliberalism. And that's why I think I focus a little on the sense of the community and how I struggle with the competitiveness that is taking place in the current system. Because, deep down, competition forces you to be a lone individual; and it is useful for you that others fail, because it increases your own success.....”<sup>vi</sup>

The subject-teacher constructed by the neoliberal logic produces multiple discourses about maintaining the status quo, and the hopeless feeling of surrendering or self-marginalisation; these discourses are countered by those of a resistant subject-teacher, who persists and cares about others (students, society, families). These teachers feel hurt by inequality, and this allows them

to resist. The struggle to transform society, which has been reduced to neoliberal machinery within the school, is anchored in teachers' biographies, which are permeated by their political and ethical commitment, and by the inclusion of equality and social justice in their discourse. In this subject-teacher construction, their words are articulated from a critical perspective that begins with awareness and denunciation:

XX: If I'm hungry, should I steal so my children can eat? These are the kind of dilemmas that school gives us the possibility to think about. I believe that, in the current context, we fall short. Given the multiple experiences of inequality in which we are enmeshed, I believe that the notion of citizenship, firstly, is to talk about its context, that is, today, what does it mean to be a citizen for me today, today? <sup>vii</sup>

XX: It's about understanding the ethical challenges of living in a society where everything is influenced by the market, where everything seems to be a product for consumption, for commercial exchange... Most of the time, we are not aware of how our decisions and our ways of life are modelled. <sup>viii</sup>

XX: If we stay within the standard and normative notions, we will create cattle, I think, cattle in the worst sense of the term, people who are absolutely over-adapted to the norm, and shaped by that norm, and if there is no change in that reality, without change, without live participation, without conflict, we end up in a situation that resembles fascism, so I believe that the notion of citizenship is about that – about seeing that we, as human beings, can question our life goals, what we are doing in our jobs, whether our salaries are fair. Are we earning enough? Is it fair that we earn what we earn by doing so much work? Is it fair for workers to work this hard? Are the goods we have enough? Do we like them? <sup>ix</sup>

Another important aspect of these teachers' responses regarding the construction of a critically aware subject, which is linked to the conception of education and the curriculum as ideological artefacts.

XX: Because education is a huge artefact of ideological domination, it is a device for domination. Even though the neoliberal State has passed everything on to the market, it still controls the curriculum; this neo-liberal State has not let go of the curriculum. Even in private schools there is more freedom, right? But you cannot say that in Chile there are many official and formal curriculums: it is a single national curriculum. How do you explain that in an ultra-liberal society? And how do we respond to that?<sup>x</sup>

XX: Well, it's a bit related to the reason why, why when you ask any person, any citizen, anyone walking down the street, "why?" I think it is because of historical trauma. This society has been violently punished first with blood and fire, and then culturally, in the mass media, and economically, it is an unbroken chain that has resulted in a neoliberal intersubjectivity, which runs deep! It runs deep! And it explains a series of reactions and behaviours, not only in Chile, but in several Latin American countries, but particularly in Chile. The fact that our society has fascistic responses to conflicts in society – the death penalty for everything ... And that has to do with civic education; it has to do with education. Then society, this neoliberal society, this neoliberal system has created a liberal society; because it is no longer only the power system – it has convinced people, it has created values, intellectual matrices, neoliberal rationalities within society. It has gained a lot of ground, a lot of ground.<sup>xi</sup>

The teacher refers to the configuration of Chilean society, from the history of the period of military dictatorship that, through death, torture, blood and fire, supported by the economic elite, installed a model of neoliberal society based on fear, which almost forty years of post-dictatorship democratic governments have continued to replicate under the capitalist system. However, teachers have not lost hope of opening a door to humanity and creating awareness of a life shared in common, inclusion and equality through "slits" in this seemingly impenetrable neoliberal block.

XY: But the question would be the other way around; despite everything that has been done against it, people still have a shared sense of humanity that blooms despite everything, and that gives us great hope, great hope from the point of view of civic education, if we think of education as being for the construction of subjects of law; that is, human beings always surprise you, always; society always surprises you, because it is not the end of the story.<sup>xii</sup>

Laval & Dardot (2015) refer to the commons as an instituting practice, not a homogenous “common good” external to the community. According to Esposito (2009), the commons refers to concrete, diverse, usually “uncommon” actions, which must begin with a subject who becomes aware of them (Freire, 1970) in order to begin the transformation. And it must begin with the subject himself changing his practices, generating bonds, debating. Teachers allude to pedagogical practices connected with recognition, greeting, bonding, and it is amazing how they achieve results:

XX: At first, it could be a whole day or, worse, a whole year, without knowing your classmates' names, and I'm not talking about classrooms and classes of 40 students, I'm talking about 10, 15 students. Then I managed to change that dynamic.... and there was a student who greeted me with his hand up, imitating Heil Hitler. This student wanted to be an engineer, but he ended up realizing that he had incredible theatre skills. He ended up expressing himself through his art with all his being! And well ... now, I do not know what XX is doing nowadays; I have not heard from him, but I imagine he followed where his heart led him....<sup>xiii</sup>

The teachers imply that neoliberalism is responsible for everything that is "wrong", and they are right. Although, to be precise, the semantic equivalence they perform in their testimony is related to excessive vigilance through measurement, the competitiveness it entails and, therefore, the absence of community. Even though measurement may appear to be justified by an ideologically neutral scientific approach, it is a totally false construct. The most



evident aspect of neoliberal logic is the destruction of community through the mechanism of competitiveness driven by measurement. The destruction of the collective is concretised in the school by the obsession of the State and of public education policy (The Quality Agency, Law 20529 of 2011) with standardised measurement and the rankings it produces. This supposes a panopticism of control, vigilance and punishment (Foucault, 1976) if the required scores are not achieved, or an increase in the teacher's salary if the scores are obtained. According to Mallamaci (2018), "Societies are formed by the configuration of devices through which they are organised and which distribute functions according to a variety of regulatory systems. This complex network, which weaves servility into the political fabric, is a system of mechanisms that gives allows the social machine to function" (p.47).

XY: The standardised tests definitely also pull you in that direction, to generate (uh ...) individualism, because I have to get a certain score, it is me who has to get it (...) the 'me-me' mindset is very powerful, very powerful.<sup>xiv</sup>

XY: The issue of individualism diminishes the common good, but it also has to do with how this issue of competitiveness is developing within schools. I believe SIMCE<sup>xv</sup> has damaged society, but I also understand that it is a way of... measuring, but this often means that schools end up almost exclusively teaching to test, and that generally generates more competitiveness...<sup>xvi</sup>

Moreover, the teachers' perception of an individualism as a way of living detached from "others" is also a factor. In addition to the absence of community, responses refer to the evident contradiction of teaching citizenship in a country with inequality gaps that diminish rights and ways of inhabiting the social sphere. The discursive lines are connected with competitiveness as a strategy that destroys the sense of the commons, with distrust as the basis of broken connections and with inequality as the main consequence of neoliberalism.

XX: Adults are more and more individualised, more detached; we don't worry that much about each other because the truth is that it doesn't affect us and, so as long as it doesn't affect us, we don't worry about it.<sup>xvii</sup>

XY: We have turned into objects, we have turned into things...and that doesn't do us any good...think about, for example, affective or sexual relations, if they are objectified...then the other is no longer a person. Can there be intimacy between two objects that are not people? It is difficult...then...then, suddenly, perhaps you find that your friend is not really a friend; he is someone you can use to achieve a higher position. Then perhaps we are becoming detached from our deepest condition of being connected to others, of being part of a community, part of a whole...<sup>xviii</sup>

XY: The problem is that there's no autonomy, no autonomy at all!! We live in fear of the quality agency – that they will come and inspect us, that the ministry will come...<sup>xix</sup> And there are constant evaluations, aren't there? There are – constant!<sup>xx</sup>

We're always being assessed and, and, and, and always exposed to criticism!  
Nothing but criticism!<sup>xxi</sup>

However, the pressure of being at the bottom of the pile and the competitiveness that it entails does not only affect teachers but also students, whose bodies and health are impacted by competitiveness. Chile is one of the countries with the highest rates of youth suicide and mental illness, such as depression. According to Saldivia Pihán (2016), the WHO ranks Chile among the countries in the world with the highest percentages of the population suffering from psychiatric illnesses (23.2%),<sup>xxii</sup> which could go some way towards explaining the correlation between Chile's position as the world's neoliberal experiment *par excellence* and the ranking it occupies in terms of suicide and depression.

XX: There was a girl in my class who was under stress, who was losing her hair, because her grades had gone down; from the youngest to the oldest students, competition is evident. <sup>xxiii</sup>

XY: I think that one of the biggest factors responsible for this is the neoliberal model.

There is lack of community; I believe that ... and that this is among the great sins of neoliberalism. <sup>xxiv</sup>

XY: Look, the most critical people, the most intelligent people, feel that they are on the margins of society; they feel they want to be on the margins; they feel like prisoners in society; they feel imprisoned in the system and ... <sup>xxv</sup>

XY: They are being forced to be a certain way and to act a certain way and to live in a certain way, and they feel imprisoned in this system and they look at you and say "But, well, look at you." Students tell you, "You have to come here from such and such an hour to such and such an hour and you are dependent on a salary and if you don't work you face consequences, and you are in debt and I don't want to live like you." The kids who tell you this are kids who have good grades, because they have the capacity... no, they don't feel part of it. <sup>xxvi</sup>

However, although these teachers know what needs to be done for a transformation to occur, there are other teachers who do not see any hope. The standardised school, defined by measurement and its consequent rewards and punishments, does not allow them to envision a light of hope for educational and social change (Foucault, 1976). In the teachers' testimony, the burden of non-recognition, violence and authoritarianism caused by abusive practices is also observed. Biopolitics operates by mutilating the body, subtracting the strength and energy needed to sustain it. It is a body that is humiliated and subjugated by the despotic, authoritarian and violent power that some teachers have to experience, either on the part of families or on the part of educational administrators.

XX: “Hey, like ... get off my back, teacher;” because, of course, they see education as a consumer good; they're paying and this is what they need – it's all about what they want, not what the school offers. So, it makes me feel very sad for the teachers; because it happened to me once with a parent who had a very difficult personality; it was a lot, but I knew how to take it. Also, because I was with the principal...it was not that serious. But I have seen that, for other teachers, uh, they cry, they tear themselves up inside, because they cannot, they cannot keep up, they are not going to raise their voices, they are going to remain in their role as a teacher who just listens, because they don't want to argue using the same violent methods by which they are treated.<sup>xxvii</sup>

XY: As a person, I feel, uh, I feel disregarded, yes, yes; I feel that these things affect the dignity of the subject, the individual, whoever that person is. It is not appropriate. These things should be communicated in private; that is, if something I did bothered you, tell me, but tell me in your office and in a respectful way; don't yell at me; yes, that's it, I am not a child; well, not even children should be treated that way; but I don't know, I'm not your pet, I don't know; I am a professional like you, so respect me! We are colleagues.<sup>xxviii</sup>

XY: The downside, uh, I think it has to do with this same authoritarianism in the school. That is, it is like the owner of the school was a sort of boss or proprietor, and she comes into the school and it is like everyone gets scared; everyone readjusts their ties, do you understand me? It is like: Oh no! The owner is coming! And everyone, including the principal, is like, "Guys, you have to behave well tomorrow, all the attendance and grades have to be up to date, this, this, this, this, this..." There is something about this authority that is very, very powerful. It's a bit scary.<sup>xxix</sup>

One of the most serious problems that teachers think causes the destruction of the commons in schools, especially public schools, is the obsession with standardised measurement. Teachers say that if the school excels in launching inclusive programmes that embrace diversity or in creating interesting plans for

civic education – creative and innovative projects with the community, with the environment, with artistic education – they are not valued. They do not serve the system or the school and so they only last a year; they are discontinued because, for more than fifty years, the only indicator of value and educational quality that has been recognised in Chile is the system of measurement known as SIMCE (System of Measuring Educational Quality ), which is applied every year at fourth grade and in the sophomore year of high school and every two years at sixth and eighth grades (ISCED 2 and 3). Chile is one of the countries with the greatest inequality gaps (UNDP, 2017), generating chasms in terms of cultural and social capital, but, despite that, students are assessed uniformly. This Chilean reality is the main obstacle that teachers encounter and it destroys the possibility of making the school a space of citizenship.

XY: We are failing, the school is failing because the system is failing. In the end, the school is never measured against how much it integrates the children; it is measured against the scores they get in maths, language and communication, and nothing else matters much. <sup>xxx</sup>

XY: (Mmm...) At the Liceo Nacional, they are just SIMCE and PSU trainers... According to the school's mission and vision, they train their students to get into higher education, which is effectively a way of saying that they're teaching for the PSU and, if they're teaching for the PSU, they're teaching for the SIMCE, yes (laughs).

XY: I have to achieve results, that's my job <sup>xxx</sup>

The most relevant problem that teachers face is that outstanding schools and the teachers who work there receive additional economic bonuses. They have no problems with enrolment because every family wants to enrol their children in these schools. In short, everything has an economic value; there is no intrinsic value placed on social rights; life, school and politics are emptied of their own

content and mutate into objects that are traded for their exchange value. “They substitute public education for education financed through individual debts, social security for personal savings and indefinite employment, public services of all kinds for services acquired individually, research and public knowledge for research sponsored by the private sector, and public infrastructure for use fees.” (Brown, 2016: 52)

XX: Look, uh ... since the new principal was hired, everything is about results because, in fact, the results in the standardised tests were very low. So now they are the one overriding objective and are always put first.<sup>xxxii</sup>

XY. The principal is more focused on results this year. She wasn't happy with the results given the drop of 40 points in the sophomore year class's scores.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Excellence is measured against these parameters (uh ...) of course, that is, they say that when students take SIMCE they also complete a survey, among other things, and that these dimensions are evaluated too, but, predominantly, the only things that are valued, what matters, are language, communication and maths.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

XY: When the reports are filed, the school where I work attains very high scores in citizenship education, in promoting fellowship, in diversity, but still the school is not judged to be outstanding. Why? Because it's failing in language, communication and maths. So, you can get 100% in everything else, but if you don't do well in SIMCE ... it is not an outstanding school...<sup>xxxv</sup>

XY: So, obviously, you are under a lot of pressure, it's a lot, not only to keep your job, but also to keep the school afloat; so, obviously, the decisions are going to be “cut this program, cut this hour of physical education, take out this workshop because we are going to need these funds for revision sessions in language and maths.” “In this personal development session, you'll have to teach mathematics” – that happens. It is unfortunate but it is a reality and it is a reality in my school too. In fact, at 6th grade I do an extra hour of maths, and I am not even the maths teacher, in the personal development slot, so they have only one hour of

development instead of two, because we have to work on our maths booklets. <sup>xxxvi</sup>

Life is understood as training in skills (which are usually not knowledge) in mathematics and language, although Chile still has high indicators of failure regarding children and young people who do not understand what they read and do not understand what mathematical language represents. Ultimately, what is configured in the social imaginary and in the subjectivities of the teacher and students is that the mechanics of the school reproduce meaningless value that is fed by the economy and large corporations and that nullifies the value of life. “Capitalism finally devours humanity through neoliberalism, not only with its machinery of compulsory commodification and expansion for profit, but also with its form of evaluation” (Brown, 2017: 55).

XX: Okay, you know how to do maths; that is all you need to know. Now you know language and maths, that is all you need to know, nothing more. And with that knowledge you will go and take the PSU and that’s it, because that is your life; without the PSU there is no life. <sup>xxxvii</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Policies around education for citizenship (law 20.911) in Chile have made notable changes and have produced efforts to improve the content and the didactic and pedagogical strategies used for education for citizenship in schools (Redon; Vallejos 2017). However, these advances in public policy contradict some of the contents of the prescribed official curriculum, which reproduces a normative notion of citizenship as compliant with the capitalist system and trains citizens who will not alter the order instituted by neoliberalism. The accounts given by almost one-hundred teachers construct narratives radically opposed to what is stated in the official curriculum. Teachers highlight the

contradictions between the neoliberal capitalist model and social rights.

Neoliberal logic assumes an instrumental rationality that places at its centre the individual, accountability, meritocracy, homogenisation through standardised measurements as symbols of educational quality, along with the gradual loss of the sense of the commons and the cohesion that is the basis of every community. The entrepreneurial subject himself, deeply immersed in the Chilean social fabric, is compatible neither with the community nor with the strengthening of the commons.

Teachers are trapped in the logic of authoritarian school governance, and they do not have the necessary autonomy to address issues of citizenship and their professional training has not addressed this political component of education. The public school, as the only space of compulsory associativity that we have left for citizenship education and the intersubjective construction of a “we” that allows for the re-reading of the world through categories counter-hegemonic to the neoliberal capitalist system, falls apart and is extinguished by privatisation and the capitalist market. In the Chilean case, teachers have a pressing task, which relies on addressing some of the following factors:

- To establish greater cohesion of networks to articulate the strength of the commons as an instituting praxis fuelled by those who do not give up the fight: “they care about others, society matters to them because they know that its transformation is in their hands”.
- To construct national networks that allow public schools to work on different political, legal, social and trades union fronts.
- To rescue the roots of Suma Qamaña, which belong to the Andean people, who retain the richness of the wisdom of the commons in their worldview.



## Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> The disaffection of citizenship is the product of a structural and procedural dynamic in which the liberal-democratic process reproduces the instituted order and, therefore, in turn reproduces inequality and social and economic injustice. The numerical consensus of the majority is captured by the elite and the economic power.

<sup>iii</sup> The worldviews of pre-Columbian indigenous communities, date back to four thousand years, like the Chinchorro culture. The Aymara, Mapuche, Kollas, and Atacameños communities, maintain until today a coexistence with nature as the Suma Qamaña (living well together). (Farah & Vasapollo, 2011).

<sup>iv</sup> Reference 7-055% Coverage

<sup>v</sup> Translator's note: This acronym stands for *Prueba de Selección Universitaria* (University Selection Test). It is a standardised test used for college admissions in Chile since 2003.

<sup>vi</sup> Reference 1.71% Coverage

<sup>vii</sup> 3 coded references [2.11% Coverage]

<sup>viii</sup> 1 coded reference [2.28% Coverage]

<sup>ix</sup> 5 coded references [7.29% Coverage]

<sup>x</sup> Reference 3 – 1.99% Coverage

<sup>xi</sup> Reference 2 – 0.62% Coverage

<sup>xii</sup> Reference 1 – 1.09% Coverage

<sup>xiii</sup> Reference 3 – 0.94% Coverage

<sup>xiv</sup> Reference 4 – 1.55% Coverage

<sup>xv</sup> Translator's note: This acronym stands for *Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación* (Education Quality Measurement System). It is a battery of tests used in Chile to measure certain aspects of school curriculum.

<sup>xvi</sup> Reference 5- 0,81coverage

<sup>xvii</sup> Coded reference [0.55% Coverage]. Reference 1 – 0.55% Coverage

<sup>xviii</sup> Reference 6 - 1.25% Coverage

<sup>xix</sup> Reference 7 – 1.75% Coverage

<sup>xx</sup> Reference 3-05% Coverage

<sup>xxi</sup> Reference 1 – 1.33% Coverage

<sup>xxii</sup> Major Depressive Disorder and alcohol abuse disorders rank first and second among disabilities, and nearly one-third of the population older than 15 years old has suffered from a psychiatric disorder in their lifetime. Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent, followed by Major Depressive Disorder and alcohol abuse disorders. Benjamin Vicente, Sandra Saldivia, Rolando Pihán. Bioethics Act 2016.

<sup>xxiii</sup> References 7-9 – 0.58% Coverage

<sup>xxiv</sup> References 3-6 – 0.82% Coverage

<sup>xxv</sup> References 1-2 – 0.57% Coverage

<sup>xxvi</sup> Reference 3 – 0.46% Coverage

<sup>xxvii</sup> Reference 1 – 1.51% Coverage

<sup>xxviii</sup> Reference 3 – 0.92% Coverage

<sup>xxix</sup> Reference 4 – 0.40% Coverage

<sup>xxx</sup> 5 coded references [4.23% Coverage]

<sup>xxxi</sup> Reference 3 – 1.33% Coverage

<sup>xxxii</sup> Reference 2 – 0.23% Coverage

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Reference 3 – 0.64% Coverage

<sup>xxxiv</sup> References 5 – 0.90% Coverage

<sup>xxxv</sup> Coded references [2.62% Coverage]. Reference 1 – 0.45% Coverage

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Focus Group - 1 coded reference [0.23% Coverage]

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Reference 1 – 0.23% Coverage

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### Author Details

**Silvia Redon Pantoja** teaches in the Escuela de Pedagogía-Facultad de Filosofía y Educación in the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Valparaíso, Chile, <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4053-6654>  
Email: [silvia.redon@pucv.cl](mailto:silvia.redon@pucv.cl)