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Going Left or Right? A Study of the Policy Rationale of the Chilean Center-Left Coalition *Concertación* in Education

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Abstract. What does it mean to deliver left-wing policies in education nowadays? During most of the 20th century, political parties of the center-left traditionally fought for a welfare state and a comprehensive public education. However, in an era of advanced capitalism, these same parties have tended to advocate and even deepen neoliberal and new public management reforms. In Chile, the center-left “Concertación” coalition governed for 20 years (1990-2010), inheriting a market-driven educational system established under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. This paper, based on an analysis of official public speeches and documents (in total 62), examines the Concertación’s rationale and political project in school education. The coalition’s aim was to move from a “free market” to a regulated market, through a *balanced formula* that—while preserving the market framework—added greater state investment, compensatory programs, and performance accountability measures. Hypotheses circulated in the country that the Concertación did not deliver further transformations due to legal constraints, international pressure, and “conflict phobia”. Despite historical limitations and internal disputes, the research provides evidence that the government’s educational program, in large part, was true to its own system of thinking. Hence, the center-left coalition did not maintain the market-based model *in spite* of its governmental rationality, but *because* of it.

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¿Ir a la izquierda o a la derecha? Un estudio sobre la racionalidad política de la coalición de centro izquierda chilena Concertación en educación

Resumen: ¿Qué significa implementar políticas de izquierda en educación hoy en día? Durante la mayor parte del siglo XX, los partidos políticos de centro-izquierda lucharon tradicionalmente por un Estado Docente y una educación pública. Sin embargo, en la era del capitalismo avanzado, estos mismos partidos han tendido a defender e incluso profundizar reformas neoliberales y de “nueva gestión pública”. En Chile, la coalición de centro-izquierda “Concertación” gobernó durante 20 años (1990-2010), heredando un sistema educativo impulsado por una organización mercantil, establecido bajo la dictadura de Augusto Pinochet. Este trabajo, basado en un análisis de los discursos y documentos oficiales de los gobiernos de la coalición (en total 62), examina la lógica y el proyecto político de la Concertación en la educación escolar. El objetivo de la coalición era pasar de un “mercado libre” a un mercado regulado, por medio de una *fórmula equilibrada* que agregue mayor inversión fiscal, programas compensatorios y medidas de rendición de cuentas por el desempeño. En el país circularon hipótesis de que la Concertación no produjo mayores transformaciones al esquema heredado debido a las limitaciones legales, la presión internacional y la “fobia al conflicto”. Ciertamente hubo limitaciones históricas y disputas internas, sin embargo, la investigación proporciona evidencia de que el programa educativo del gobierno, en gran parte, era fiel a su propio sistema de pensamiento. Por lo tanto, la coalición de centro-izquierda no mantuvo un modelo de mercado educativo a pesar de su racionalidad gubernamental, sino que debido a ella.

Palabras clave: centro-izquierda; democracia social; neoliberalismo en la educación; mercados escolares; Chile

Indo para a esquerda ou para a direita? Um estudo da lógica política da coalizão chilena de centro-esquerda Concertación em educação

Resumo: O que significa entregar políticas de esquerda na Educação hoje em dia? Durante a maior parte do século 20, os partidos políticos de centro-esquerda tradicionalmente lutaram por um estado de bem-estar e uma educação pública abrangente. No entanto, em uma era de capitalismo avançado, esses mesmos partidos tenderam a defender e, até mesmo aprofundar, as reformas neoliberais e de nova gestão pública. No Chile, a coalizão de centro-esquerda “Concertación” governou por 20 anos (1990-2010), herdando um sistema educacional voltado para o mercado estabelecido durante a ditadura de Augusto Pinochet. Este artigo, com base na análise de discursos públicos oficiais e documentos (no total 62), examina a lógica e o projeto político da Concertación na educação escolar. O objetivo da coalizão era passar de um “mercado livre” para um “mercado regulado”, por meio de uma fórmula equilibrada que - enquanto preservava a estrutura do mercado - agregava maior investimento estatal, programas compensatórios e medidas de responsabilização por desempenho. Circularam no país hipóteses de que a Concertación não trouxe transformações adicionais devido a restrições legais, à pressão internacional e à “fobia de conflito”. Certamente, houve limitações históricas e disputas internas, mas a pesquisa fornece evidências de que o programa educacional do governo, em grande parte, era fiel ao seu próprio sistema de pensamento. Assim, a coalizão de centro-esquerda não manteve o modelo de mercado apesar de sua racionalidade governamental, mas por causa dela.

Palavras-chave: centro-esquerda; democracia social; neoliberalismo na educação; mercados escolares; Chile

Introduction

On November 13, 2007, the President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, a member of the country's Socialist Party, joined hands and sang the national anthem with the heads of the parties in the right-wing coalition, Alliance for Change, along with those of the center-left coalition, the Coalition of Parties for Democracy (hereafter known as the Concertación). The *holding hands image*, part of the political spectacle, appeared on the front pages of the country's major newspapers and represented what was called the "Agreement for the Quality of Education". Moreover, it became an iconic moment, symbolizing the "consensus democracy" between the left and right in the post-dictatorship era of the Concertación (1990-2010).

The agreement emerged as a result of the 2006 student movement that criticized the market-based education system established in the early 1980s under the civilian-military regime of Pinochet, which was later maintained during the Concertación governments. The students questioned the logic of this system, including the lack of state control over the private sector, the existence of subsidized for-profit schools, the cost of school education to families, the inequality of the system, and the dictatorial origins of the model (Alarcón-Leiva et al., 2014; Santa Cruz, 2016; Villalobos, 2016). The slogans on the protest banners, "Education is not for sale", "No more market education", "Public, free, and quality education for all", echoed the opinion of the general public.

In response to this crisis, the government replaced the Organic Constitutional Law on Education—LOCE by the Spanish language acronym—, which was passed on the last day of the military regime (March 10, 1990), with the General Education Law—LGE, acronym in Spanish—(National Congress of Chile, 2009). This gave rise to the creation of the Quality Assurance Education System—SACE, acronym in Spanish—(National Congress of Chile, 2011), which created a radical accountability system for evaluating, inspecting, and rating schools, while maintaining the overall market-oriented schema.

These legal reforms consolidated a *performative school market* that gradually emerged in the country in the 1980s (Falabella, 2015, 2020; Corvalán et al., 2016). This kind of model implies the combination of parental free choice, per-student school financing, and high-stakes testing and performance accountability measures through an *evaluative or hyper-surveillance state*, governing "at a distance" (Ball, 2008; Maroy, 2009).

The *holding hands act* embodied the political symbiosis between the right and center-left coalitions and the lack of the Concertación governments' distinctiveness in the educational arena. This agreement triggers research questions, such as: What was the Concertación's political project in education? How did it maintain and/or transform the market-based model it inherited? How did its educational policies and policymaking rationales differ from those of the right-wing parties?

This line of questioning is not exclusive to Chile, but is rather part of global reflection on education policy. Around the world the left and right policy divisions have been moved, transformed, and blurred, as the political scientist Norberto Bobbio (1996) points out. The political identity and *meaning* of the left has been in crisis since the Eastern socialist bloc came to an end, within a context of intensifying worldwide economic competition and the expansion of neoliberal policies.

In spite of this, the so-called "left-wing", "laborism", "Third Way" or "social democracy", has been successful in gaining power in various countries. With important variations between regions, in general terms, governments with this approach have tended to move towards a more market-friendly state approach, leaving aside policies such as universal state services, regulatory protectionism, full employment, centralized trade unions, and redistribution of wealth. Policy emphasis is instead placed on "equal opportunities", social investment in human capital, public-

private partnerships, and inclusive labor markets, with a general effort to balance entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, and social security (Hall et al., 2004; Thompson, 2000). In this renewed format, the crucial policy dilemma, as Thompson (2000) points out, “lies in the ability to achieve a more equitable society within capitalism and liberal democracy, without impinging upon consumer choice or entrepreneurial initiative” (p. 4).

According to Bobbio (1996), egalitarianism would be the key difference between the left and right, as this stance accepts social and economic differences in favor of individual freedom and merit. Authors such as Callinicos (2001) have argued against the so-called renewal of the left, accusing it of “egalitarianism betrayed”. In a similar vein, Hall (2005) argues that *social democracy renewal* has two tiers with different natures, a state welfare tier and a neoliberal tier. Therefore, it is possible to identify distinctions between right and left, yet neoliberalism is dominant in this renewed mixture, while social democracy is in a subordinate position, resulting in a refinement of neoliberal policies. Using Ong’s (2007) expression, neoliberalism is an extraordinarily “malleable governance technology”, in this case, molded to social democratic thinking.

In this policy science debate, center-left transformations in the educational field have been under-researched (Burton, 2011). During the greater part of the 20th century, political parties of the center-left traditionally promoted universal and comprehensive public education (which granted them legitimacy and popular support). However, from the 1980s and 1990s, center-left parties in diverse geopolitical spaces deepened *new public management reforms*, including competing-fund systems, parental free choice, school privatization, and accountability policies. Some examples are the Labor Party in Australia (Lavelle, 2005) and England (Ball, 2008), the Social Democratic Party in Denmark and Sweden (Wiborg, 2013), the Spanish Socialist Labor Party (Verger & Curran, 2014) the Democratic Party in the United States (Lipman, 2015), and the Social Democracy Party and Workers Party in Brazil (Kauko et al., 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this discussion, examining the Chilean center-left coalition, the Concertación, from a Foucauldian discourse analysis, addressing its governments’ political project and policy rationale in education since its foundations during the late 1980s until the end of the coalition’s last government in 2010.

The paper is divided into four sections. First, it briefly describes the theoretical tools and design of the research. Second, it looks at the general historical context of the Concertación’s governments. Third, it exposes the research findings that refer to: the coalition’s *balanced formula* “system of thinking”; the *elastic* and seductive language used by the coalition during the drafting of the LGE and SACE legal reforms; and the disputes and consensus of the last governmental period, since major debates were deployed during this period. The paper concludes with some final considerations about the Concertación’s *dual love affair* in education and notes its contradictions and internal traps.

Theoretical & Methodological Tools

Foucault’s (2006, 2008) work on *governmentality* serves as the basis for the research analysis. Policy from this perspective is not limited to a set of policy measures or a list of dogmas. It implies a “method of rationalization” about the practice of governing individuals’ freedom and wills, through both empowering and constraining tools (Foucault, 2006, p. 77). This governing system produces desires, truths, and discourses, which circulate in different spheres in order to assure the functioning of the political project.

Policies are a productive discourse of the world. Policy discourses have a distinctive narrative formula. They produce dramatic crises, dangerous scenarios, urgent needs, and indispensable solutions. These are reiterative ideas or concepts that are built slowly and accumulate over time. They contain persuasive meanings, metaphors, and policy clichés that work as “topoi” (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004), for instance, the notions of “quality”, “leadership”, “inclusion”, appearing as authorless universal consensuses. Bacchi (2000, 2012), following Foucault, suggests analyzing “policies as a problem”. This approach involves examining how objects *come* to exist and the historical conditions of their emergence.

A policy discourse approach implies a close examination of “the limits and forms of the sayable” (Foucault, 1991, p. 59) of the discursive rules and formations. Although, as Ball (2015) argues, policy discourses are messy, they contain gaps and contradictions, and usually conjugate different rationalities. This episteme discursive analysis “is not a sort of grand underlying theory, it is a space of dispersion, it is an open and doubtless indefinitely describable field of relationships (...) a though that ‘emphasizes discontinuity’” (Foucault, 1991, p. 55).

This problematizing method suggests that what is produced as the policy reality is contingent and therefore available for constant change. The analytical approach allows the researcher to develop a deconstructive examination that unsettles, displaces, and reassembles hegemonic meanings. It “makes it possible to think otherwise” and is therefore open for change, intervention, and movement (Bacchi, 2012, p. 7).

In consistency with this perspective for examining policy discourses, a document analysis results a powerful method. Documents are not merely containers of content, but are “active agents” in the world, as Priori argues (2003, p. 822). Hence, policy texts, that is, laws, regulations, and official documents, imply a government activity. These policy artifacts are discursive assemblages that attempt to shape behaviors by working through peoples’ subjectivities.

The initial starting point for the study was to obtain a comprehensive view of the policy discourses in education throughout the alliance’s four governments, based on the collection of the Presidents’ annual state-of-the-nation speeches and the Education Ministers’ annual speeches at the beginning of every school year. These documents allowed the research to capture the discursive continuities, fluctuations and turning points, year by year.

Secondly, all laws of the time that include modifying the school market performing model were examined. The involved laws (presented by their names and Spanish language acronym) are the: National System of Performance Evaluation Law (SNED); Preferential School Subsidy Law (SEP); General Education Law (LGE); and Education Quality Assurance System Law (SACE). Additionally, the document analysis included the President and Education Ministers’ speeches to Congress when the aforementioned laws were submitted or approved, as well as the Congressional records of the debates on the LGE and SACE.

Thirdly, official ministerial documents of the period related to school management and accountability policies were reviewed. Fourthly, texts that refer to the Concertation’s educational school policies, authored by policymakers who worked during the coalition’s governments. (Texts referring to teachers and teaching strategies were excluded, as well as all documents that refer to initial or higher education.) As a result of this process, a total of 62 documents were finally identified, which aligned to the four types of policy texts outlined above.

All of the material was coded in broad analytical axes: i) the role of the state and of the market; ii) public education and privatization; iii) school autonomy, de/centralization, and community participation; iv) curriculum and teachers; v) school assessment and accountability; vi) equality and inclusion; and vii) parents’ choice, ‘voice’, and school involvement. Within each axis the codification analysis was refined into subcategories and was organized within presidential periods, allowing a detailed examination of the data. This systematic analysis identified the predominant

discourse patterns and key turning points, as well as the discursive discontinuities, nuances and disputes. Additionally, a timeline was constructed, with the primary educational policies delivered during each government, as well as public policy disputes.

The research was designed with four distinct subsections, one of which was the analysis of the policy rationale of the Concertación coalition¹. In the study, the idea of a ‘policy balance’ and its benefits became persistent, emerging among the coded outcomes of the analytical axes mentioned previously. The paper will deepen in this policy thinking *of the balance*.

Throughout the paper, transcribed quotes are used to illustrate these main policy rationales. It is important to clear out that the paper does not describe in detail the policies designed during the twenty years of the coalition’s government, since this is not the focus of the study (this has been well exposed in other manuscripts, see for example: Bellei & Vanni, 2015; Cox, 2003; Picazo, 2013).

Historical Context of the Concertación

The Concertación coalition was preceded by a civilian-military dictatorship (1973-1990) that radically transformed the country’s economic and political system, along with reforming social services, such as education, health, and pensions, inspired by the neoliberal doctrine of Milton Friedman (Madero, 2018), coupled with conservative nationalist ideology. The coalition was founded in 1988² and was united against the regime, aiming to depose it. The main political parties that comprised the coalition were the Christian Democratic Party, the Social Democrat Radical Party, the Party for Democracy, and the Socialist Party. This was not an easy alliance. During the dictatorship, there were significant internal factions and ideological differences between members and political parties, but there was more that united these factions than separated them³.

With the return to democracy, the Concertación assumed power for a period of 20 years (1990-2010), which covered four presidential terms led by Patricio Aylwin, Eduardo Frei, Ricardo Lagos, and Michelle Bachelet. Once the coalition came to power, the government generally continued with the subsidiary state and neoliberal policies inherited from the dictatorship, but added to new policies in an attempt to improve social welfare services and reduce poverty, although these were mostly measures that were complementary to the overall schema established previously (Garretón, 2012; Huneeus, 2014; Moulián, 1997).

Times had changed. During the 1980s, there was the “Reagan and Thatcher era” and structural adjustment policies were expanded in Latin America, promoted by international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Harvey, 2006). The history of the Concertación is part of the aforementioned “new left” ambiguity and its reconstruction in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The coalition’s generation had experienced the previous failure and violent end of the socialist project of the “Populist Unity”—*Unidad Popular*—led by Salvador Allende (1970-73). Many of them were committed to Marxism and socialist ideals during the 1960s, but they felt deception during the 1970s and 1980s about the “real socialist” undemocratic regimes, and a significant faction

¹ The other studies refer to: a general view of market policies and new public management measures since Pinochet’s dictatorship; the evolution of testing and accountability policies; and a discourse analysis of governments’ speeches refereeing to public and private education.

² Preceded mainly by the “Democratic Alliance” (1983-87).

³ The Christian Democratic Party, for instance, enhanced the military coup (although not the following dictatorship), the Socialist Party was divided between two factions (known “PS-Almeyda” and “PS-Núñez”), and later on there were important disagreements among the coalition in regard to the political conditions for negotiating the return to democracy.

that participated in the coalition's governments felt attracted or less opposed to neoliberal understandings and solutions (Caviedes-Hamuy, 2018; Moulián, 1997).

In addition, the post-dictatorship political scenario involved particular complexities. The return to democracy in Chile implied a “semi-sovereign democracy”, as Huneeus (2014) claims. In 1988, the dictatorship opened up the possibility of re-establishing a democratic system, but only on the condition that the 1980 Constitution would be preserved, along with a set of other “binding laws”—*leyes de amarre*—such as the LOCE in education. This condition resulted in a “negotiated transition” to democracy. Any legal change to these core laws required the approval of two thirds of Congress, which meant an agreement between the government and the right would be required. Importantly, enshrined in the Constitution was an electoral formula called the “binominal system”, which made it highly likely that there would be a parliamentary tie according to the number of seats of each coalition (this law was only revoked in 2015). Moreover, the dictatorship left nine life senators in parliament, assuring a right-wing political majority in the upper house of Congress (this was only revoked in 2006).

These were part of the “authoritarian enclaves” (Garretón, 2012) that continued in the democracy and with which the Concertación had to navigate. In practice, the Concertación’s democratic majority could not effectively rule in Congress in order to change key national laws. As if this were not enough, the former dictator Pinochet, in democracy, continued to wield power as Commander in Chief of the Army during eight years, with the political and symbolic weight that this title implied, later becoming a Senator for life (although shortly after his position was interrupted as he was arrested in England for human rights violations).

Beyond these legal restrictions, the coalition governed by means of a “policy of consensus” or, in Leiva’s (2016) words, by an “irrational phobia of social conflict” (p. 41). President Aylwin declared in his first annual presidential account “Democracy supposes, as an indispensable foundation, the general consensus on the fundamental rules of collective coexistence (...) the democratic regime will be more solid and stable the greater the degree of consent it arouses” (Aylwin, 1990, p. 4). The preservation of the structural transformations carried out under the dictatorship and the conciliatory spirit with the right-wing coalition was understood as a way to preserve the “fragile democratic stability” and avoid any institutional breakdown. This was not, however, just a tactic of the early years of the post-dictatorship transition, it was a cardinal rule of the coalition's mode of governance throughout the twenty years it was in power. It meant a characteristic style of the mode of governing of the conglomeration, which in fact honors its own name *Concertación*.

In spite of the above, this hyper-consensual governing style was not smoothly accepted within the policy assemblage. The coalition entailed inner tensions and nuanced differences especially towards the end of the 90s and later on during President Bachelet’s first government. Critical factions, popularly known as the “self-flagellant” (versus the “self-complacent”), coming from the different coalition’s political parties, argued against the stillness of the inherited neoliberal model, the excessive concessions delivered in favor of the right wing, and the government’s debts with equity and the reduction of wealth accumulation. Hence, paradoxically, in various times it was easier for the Concertación governments to reach political agreements with the right wing than within their own alliance.

Research Findings

The Concertación Era in education: Searching for the Balanced Formula

The coalition inherited a school market-oriented schema from the dictatorship with almost zero regulations. The prevailing policy principles that guided this restructure were the end of the welfare state and the supremacy of the private sector in defense of individual freedom and free entrepreneurship (Corvalán et al., 2016; Ruiz, 2010). The model included a school subsidy for both public and private institutions based on student attendance, school parental choice (pre-existing the reform), the decentralization of management of state schools from the central state to municipalities (that have varied and unequal conditions), and a growing private sector that could select pupils and make profits. The government also developed a standardized test, the “System for the Measurement of the Quality of Education” (known as SIMCE), which was designed to provide information about the school market and thus guide the decisions of parents, as well as to improve and oversee school provision.

During the 1980s, intellectuals close to the coalition came together in academic centers opposed to the dictatorship. For instance, Cristián Cox and Juan Eduardo García-Huidobro were at the Center for Development in Research and Education (CIDE, acronym in Spanish), Juan Eugenio Beca, Iván Núñez, and Adriana del Piano at the Inter-disciplinary Program for Research in Education (PIIE, acronym in Spanish), Ernesto Schiefelbein worked at both CIDE and PIIE, and José Joaquín Brunner, as well as Cristián Cox, were at the Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences (FLACSO, acronym in Spanish)⁴.

It was in these spheres, in large part, more than in the political parties, where the Concertación’s educational policies were planned. The theoretical references were authors, such as, Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, and Antonio Gramsci. At that time, these centers were financed with international funds⁵ with the specific requirement to prepare the political guidelines on the subject for the re-establishment of a future democratic government. The foundation of this “center-left intelligentsia”, shrewdly described by Picazo (2013), was more pragmatic than the result of critical thinking.

After a highly politically polarized period and in line with the Concertación’s overall consensus approach, this policy planning process was accompanied by strategic efforts, before assuming power, to build a common language and political agreement with people at different ends of the political spectrum. An example of this tactic was a key meeting carried out in CIDE in 1984 called “Towards the Elaboration of a Policy Education Consensus”, including the participation of those that had taken part in the dictatorship, such as the ex-Minister of Education, Gonzalo Vial, and the former head of the Superintendence of Education, María Teresa Infante (Cox, 1985).

Before the Concertación came to power, the coalition’s intellectuals and future policymakers built a critical understanding of the previous educational models. The state-run education of the 1920s-1960s was viewed as centralized, uniform, and bureaucratic, and the dictatorship’s approach was condemned for leaving schools to the free will of the market and being abandoned by the state (Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación [PIIE], 1989). Nonetheless, they agreed to not undo what had been achieved during the 1980s and value the advances. The pre-government documents claimed: ‘The construction of a new education will have a starting point: the

⁴ The majority of them (Brunner, Cox, del Piano, García Huidobro), before the dictatorship, were members of the same political party, Unitary Popular Action Movement (MAPU). The political networks of this party were key for the formation of the Concertación and political appointments within the coalition.

⁵ Such as the FORD Foundations and Swedish Agency for Research Co-operation with Developing Countries.

modernizing restructuring introduced especially since 1979-80” (PIIE, 1989, p. 26; also see Cox, 1985; García-Huidobro, 1989), yet, on the other hand, the intellectuals called to combine this educational model with a “strong state government”.

When the Concertación assumed power, public officials made explicit the decision to retain the pro-market policies established under the Pinochet regime and, at the same time, fortify the state’s role. The first coalition’s Education Minister, Ricardo Lagos, announced this as:

A growing private and community contribution to education would be welcomed. An active and conducting state role was indispensable. Experience has shown us that spontaneous market forces and competition do not, by themselves, solve all our problems. The participation of parents, neighbors, entrepreneurs, workers, artists and intellectuals are required, and a more efficient and responsible state management, less bureaucratic and centralist... A constitutional and programmatic compromise with a mixed responsibility in the educational arena is needed, which must combine private and community initiative with state responsibility. In this sense, the policy has been routed to re-establish certain balance. (Lagos, 1992, p. 2, author’s emphasis)

This miscellaneous policy thinking was also illustrated, for instance, in an extract that appeared on the Ministry's website under the title “Principles of the educational reform of the 90s”;

The Reform is made possible and facilitated thanks to a new institutional framework, which combines criteria of decentralization and competition for resources, with positive discrimination and central state proactive action, through programs to improve quality and equity of education; introduces new assessment dissemination tools and evaluation instruments for programs and institutions, and promotes the opening of schools to external “support networks”, especially from universities, academic centers and companies. (MINEDUC, 2004)

The examination of the data shows, as illustrated in the above extracts, that the coalition defended and promoted principles traditionally linked to a right-wing repertoire, such as competition and the participation of the private sector. However, these policy narratives were combined with references to democracy, collaboration, social cohesion, equality, attempting to challenge the individualistic vocabulary of the right. Furthermore, the inherited dictatorial policies were *translated* through a social democratic lens: privatization was understood as “diversity”, school devolution as “community participation”, the voucher-funding system as “efficiency”, and the national SIMCE assessment as information for “school quality improvement”.

These were the foundations of the Concertación governments’ *dual thinking* in education. The coalition attempted to synergistically balance freedom and equality, rights and individual responsibilities, competition and collaboration, public and private provision, and the market and the state. The state was not considered a threat to the ‘free market’ as it was under the dictatorship. The duality of the state/market model was understood as two complementary spheres, where the former played a key role in the positive performance of the latter and of society in general. It was an eclectic discourse in tune with the emergence of the “new social democracy” and the “Third Way” (Corbalán, 2012; Giddens, 1998; Hale, Leggett, & Martell, 2004).

Leading policymakers during the 1990s and the early 2000s, such as Brunner (Brunner et al., 1995), Cox (1997, 2003), Núñez (1995), and García-Huidobro (1999), authored papers, books, and commission reports and defended the benefits of the retained model that was established in the 1980s, yet they consistently argued that “competition between schools for pupils’ enrolment is insufficient” for quality learning, human capital development, citizenship education, and equality (Cox, 2003, p. 20).

This idea that market solutions are “insufficient” is repeated among the policy documents and it is central to understand the center-left *system of thought*. Market policies are viewed as necessary, yet not enough. In this way, the policymakers emphasized that the coalition’s political project had continuities with the dictatorship model, but it also contained divergences entailing ‘a new educational paradigm’. The thesis was that the Concertación replaced the “minimalist state” with an “active state” in order to counterweigh the market and thus acquire *policy balance*. Also, it was symbolized as a state that “steers”, rather than “rows”, as Cox (2003) states, employing Osborne and Gaebler’s metaphor (also used by Blair & Schröder, 1999).

In concrete, the new policy measures involved: i) the increase of state spending⁶; ii) school support, e.g. infrastructure improvements, pedagogical and technological material, teacher training and school counsellor⁷; iii) positive discrimination programs and subsidies⁸ for schools located in disadvantaged areas; iv) the improvement of teachers’ salary and working conditions, including the law governing the teaching profession, known as the Teachers’ Statute (1991); v) the centralized design of a national curriculum, understood as a key instrument for social and cultural equality;⁹ and vi) the use of standardized assessments and performance accountability tools (which increased especially since the year 2000).

Further on, the coalition governmentality thinking followed a key principle called by policymakers “equal treatment” (*igualdad de trato*), which was at the heart of the imagined *market balance ideology*. This meant that the *strong state* delivers the same subsidies, guidance, benchmarks, and benefits to both public and private-subsidized providers, while “governing at a distance”. This governmental rationality broke with Chile’s earlier tradition of state-run education that gave preferential treatment to public schools. As then-policymakers Brunner and Cox pointed out, this policy approach ‘de-dramatizes the public/private divide’ (1995, p. 28).

These policy combinations were aligned with the logic of the *post-Washington consensus*, which promoted privatization and competition in social services and public goods, but—in its second version—emphasized the importance of the state, assumed as the “institutional context” for economic and social development. This view, with different emphases, was advocated by the World Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Burki & Perry, 1998; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [ECLAC-UNESCO], 1992; Herrera et al., 2018).

It is important to note that throughout the coalition’s four governments, although the narrative of “policy balance” was continuous, the policy combinations and emphases varied, shaping two main stages (Corvalán, 2013; Donoso, 2005; Falabella, 2015). In the coalition’s first decade, a

⁶ In fact, the overall state spending grew from 2.4% of GDP in 1990 to 4.1% in 2000 (although this was still far from the 7.1% spent in 1970, Mineduc 2001).

⁷ During the 90s and beginning of the 2000, the MECE program (Program for Educational Quality and Equality) sought to improve public and private-subsidised education. Additionally, significant investment was made in school buildings, as a result of the full-day school reform of 1996.

⁸ An emblematic policy, starting with the first *Concertación* government of President Aylwin, was the P-900 School program that aimed at supporting underachieving schools in poor areas. Later on, other programs were implemented, such as, “High Schools for all” (*Liceo para todos*) and a program for “Failing schools” (*Escuelas críticas*). The Preferential School Subsidy Law (2008) is another key policy, which, while maintaining the voucher system, provides pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds a larger subsidy, conditional on meeting standardized test goals.

⁹ During the coalition’s government first decade, “pedagogical decentralisation” was promoted, with the idea that school communities would generate their own educational programs and school projects. However, few specific measures were tied to this narrative and, over time, it began to disappear, especially with the emergence of a new discourse giving priority to standardisation and the achievement of measurable goals.

compensatory state was particularly prominent, providing school support and higher public spending, since schools and teachers in the post-dictatorship context were left in extremely detrimental conditions. Since 2000, a discourse on standardization and performance took on greater significance, shifting towards an *evaluative state* within a performing-market school schema. This model was consecrated through the “Assurance of Quality Education System” (2011) that led to the creation of new institutions – the Agency for Quality Education and the Superintendent of Education - in charge of auditing, assessing, classifying and ranking schools, as well as disseminating results and sanctioning those schools with consistently poor performance.

During these years there were, certainly, factions and differences within the coalition. The most controversial point concerned the advantages of the subsidized private sector, which had the right to select students, receive donations, generate profits, and charge co-payment fees to parents, in addition to laxer labor codes than those in the public sector. In other words, the exact formula for the *perfect balance* was not a consensus. These disputes are shown in the last section of the research results.

The Elastic Policy Rationale

The attraction of the balanced formula is in its *policy elasticity*, as it includes a wide range of political principles and ethical values. The coalition strategically used this narrative to bring together and persuade diverse political sensibilities and positions on the right, and even opposing factions within the center-left coalition. In the name of ensuring the “right to quality education” together with “school freedom”, the formula served as a key tool to justify and effectively promote the consolidation of the *performative market*, i.e. a competition-based schema, added to school performance assessment and accountability measures (Maroy, 2009).

The elasticity of the dual discourse was also tactically used to promote policy changes and confront crises. This discourse emerged with stronger impetus during the mass student protests in 2006. The official narrative accepted the existence of a market-based model that could provide benefits, but—for the first time—it was said that it could also be cruel and abusive, offering low-quality services.

The state thus emerged as *the savior* of the necessary, yet failing market. The market “is not enough to assure educational quality”, “we need a bigger and better state”, declared President Bachelet in the inaugural speech of the school year in March 2008¹⁰. In other words, using Adam Smith’s popular notion, “the *invisible hand* of the market did not on its own guarantee the quality and equality of education and had to be supplemented—not replaced—by the *visible hand* of the state” (Falabella, 2020b, p. 18).

The policy solution lay on the evaluative or *hyper-surveillance state* that sets the rules and oversees the education market, as the President Bachelet declared:

[The new legal framework must] ... consecrate the right of every citizen to receive a high-quality education, which does not contradict the principle of freedom of education. The state will become *a true guarantor of the quality* of subsidized public and private education... We want education quality to be a right, which citizens can demand through legal means, if necessary. I told Congress before and I will say it again: this government is laying the foundation for a *state at the service of the people*¹¹.

¹⁰ Interestingly, in the case of Chile, the intensification of accountability policies emerged as a way to limit the “savage market”, opposite to most countries where these policies have served to introduce a market logic into the system (Verger & Normand, 2015).

¹¹ Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile. National TV network, June 1, 2006, author’s emphasis.

Despite the fact that social protests started because of students' disapproval of the market-driven approach, the resolution was not to *demarketize* the school system (Alarcón et al. 2014; Herrera et al., 2018). On the contrary, the reforms implied deeper and more sophisticated control devices, competition mechanisms, and differentiation of performance between schools. The subsidiary state still remains the central axis of the system, but now acknowledging the potential dangers of the school market, the state is converted into a *tough state*, which protects families, as consumers, from the market; as a kind of *new state paternalism*. The state as a "true guarantor of the quality", "at the service of the people", as President Bachelet said.

The elastic language of the *balanced market formula*, helped to promote, as probably no other policy has managed, an ambitious list of benefits: "quality", "equity", "diversity", "freedom", "transparency", "honor families", and "human capital development". In fact, while President Bachelet announced the SACE system under the slogan "more state", her successor, President Sebastián Piñera of the right-wing coalition (2010-2014), promoted the same law saying: "We believe that the main responsibility for the education of children lies with their parents. And, therefore, for them to be able to exercise that responsibility, they need to have accurate, timely and complete information that allows them to make informed and free decisions" (National Congress of Chile, 2011, p. 1828).

These discursive differences, once again, demonstrate the *discursive elasticity* of the policy. In fact, many have acclaimed this promising formula, including intellectuals from the right (see, for example: Beyer, 2001; Fontaine & Eyzaguirre, 2001) and members of Concertación governments (see, for example: Traverso, 2004; Montt et al., 2006; Vanni & Bravo, 2010), as well as in works edited or co-written by authors from the center-left and right (see, for example: Brunner & Peña, 2007; Larroulet & Montt, 2010; Santander, 2002).

Further on, the proposed political solution of the *balanced formula* emerged as a *policy mantra* (Falabella, 2015) in recurrent ways throughout the research material and in diverse contexts of the country, not solely among the government discourses. For example, in response to the student protests, President Bachelet formed the "Presidential Council for Quality Education" with more than 81 members representing various sectors and institutions. This Council recommended a "System for the assurance of quality in education", in which the state ensures: "The right of every child to receive a quality education and the freedom to create [private] educational institutions and the possibility for parents to choose whichever school they deem best for their children" (Consejo Asesor Presidencial para la Calidad de la Educación, 2006, p. 89). The joint parliamentary committee on the LGE referred to alike agreements and similarly the LGE establishes that the state must guarantee the "mixed nature of the education system" (i.e. public and private provision, art. 4), "parental free choice" (art. 7), and "educational quality" (art. 6). Similarly, in the joint parliamentary committee on the LGE, members of different parties agreed:

Education in Chile has historically been provided through a mixed system. The responsibility of the state is to (...) ensure the effective implementation of the freedom of education and the right to a quality education in all schools, whether public or private. (National Congress of Chile, 2009, p. 70)

It was a discourse that permeated deep into the prevailing public policy discussions on this matter. Though the used notions, such as parental free choice, assurance of educational quality and the Chilean historical mixed provision system were rhetorical and all highly debatable. For instance, in the past there was a private sector in Chile's education system, nonetheless this was limited and mainly linked to the church. In fact, Chile never "historically" had a private-subsidized school sector that received the same amount of state funds as the public sector, that could make profits and

charge co-payment fees to parents, and with levels of enrolment that reached 50.5% of all students at the end of the last Concertación government (MINEDUC, 2014).

The governing rationale used by the Concertación was strongly linked to current global themes in education. The Assurance of Quality Education System established in Chile resonates with education accountability policies in other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, and the United States. The Ministry of Education closely studied these countries, among others, and authorities took part in official visits to foreign ministries and assessment agencies.

International agencies also recommended similar policies at an early stage. In a highly influential document in Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (Brunner et al., 1995; ECLAC-UNESCO, 1992)¹² recommended increasing the autonomy of public and private schools, along with so-called “responsible institutional management”¹³. This was meant to give greater autonomy to schools, in combination with creating a system of “results-based accountability”. A document by UNESCO (1990) took a similar view, as well as the post-Washington consensus report delivered in Santiago in 1996 (Burki & Perry, 1998). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for its part, published later on a report in 2004, by Martín Carnoy, which argued: “The experiment of the [Chilean] educational market has not led to the progress in learning or cost savings envisioned by its supporters” (OECD, 2004, p.192). However, it recognized that ending the competitive funding system “would fracture the fragile balance between the left and right” (OECD, 2004, p. 104). As a result, it accepted the need for a market-based scheme, but in combination with other measures, such as improved teaching training, coupled with policies of evaluation and accountability.

The World Bank, in the Chilean case, was undoubtedly the most important institution in guiding these policies and it financed a meaningful part of countries' educational policies in the 1990s (Cox & Avalos, 1999) and assessed various law reforms. In the middle of the debates regarding the school model, a report by Emiliana Vegas that was widely disseminated in 2007, argued:

In our point of view, it is unlikely that the return to a system in which financing does not ‘follow’ the student would produce the desired improvements with respect to the quality and equity of education. On the contrary, strengthening the quality assurance functions of each of the participants in the Chilean educational system would probably help to produce the improvements in quality and equity demanded by Chilean society. (World Bank, 2007, p. 18)

The Concertación's *balanced market* approach, therefore, did not happen on its own. It was instead co-created and legitimized by international agencies, schools of thought, and sectors with different political colors, weaving together a renewed center-left project in education. The policy influences examined are exposed on the understanding that they imply mutual influential networks, strategically used in interactive ways and responding to different interests. In fact, it is important to note that Chilean policymakers and experts were indeed active participants in these networks, promoting Chilean policies in the region (Campos et al., 2015). The mentioned policymakers, experts, policy texts and global organizations, form part of this *international epistemic community* (Peck & Theodore, 2010). Rather than a unidirectional regime, policies are practiced as multi-scalar regulatory configurations.

¹² Document authored by well-known intellectuals as J. J. Brunner, J. C. Tedesco, E. Ottone, and F. Fajnzylber.

¹³ Also see Brunner (1990), referring to higher education.

Right & Left Holding Hands: Disputes and Post-democracy

What exactly is the perfect policy balance in education? The answer to this question was not always a consensus, even from the predecessors of the coalition, during the dictatorship. A fascinating study by Cox (1989), based on the examination of an extensive range of non-government policy proposals in education from 1979 to 1987, shows that in this period there were significant disputes between the political parties, including on school freedom to make profits and the devolution of public schools' management from the central state to municipalities. The most critical stance included the Radical, Communist, and Christian Democratic parties, in contrast to the renewed Socialist Party faction. However, the strength of that critical perspective declined as the coalition assumed power and the education schema was accepted, in general terms.

These debates were mostly quietened during the Concertación governments, in spite of the fact that there was a faction of policymakers that showed particular concern about school segregation and discriminatory school practices. The bottom line was that the coalition's idea of "equal treatment" within a mixed public/private provision schema was in practice deceptive, since public schools mainly received pupils from underprivileged sectors and were managed by municipalities, many of which were limited in terms of budgets and professional teams. Meanwhile, private-subsidized schools had important advantages over the public sector, such as, permission to select pupils, make profit, and charge school fees.

In particular, the "co-payment policy" that permitted schools to charge fees to parents, which was accepted¹⁴, legalized, and promoted by the first government of the Concertación in 1993, produced detractors within the Ministry. From their perspective, the measure exacerbated inequalities and social exclusion, and therefore broke away from the *balance formula* (see criticisms of then-policymakers Cox, 2003; García-Huidobro, 2002)¹⁵. On the other hand, the policy was pushed by others, for instance, by the "National Commission for the Modernization of Education", commissioned by President Eduardo Frei and led by José Joaquín Brunner (Brunner et al., 1995).

Later on, the coalition's internal disputes were triggered by the post-2006 student movements and transformed into heated public debates. Emblematic Concertación politicians, particularly linked to the Christian Democratic Party and to the ownership of schools and universities (for instance, Mariana Aylwin, Walter Oliva, and Gutenberg Martínez), defended the freedoms of the private sector, in alliance with right-wing parties, factions of the Catholic Church, and private school organizations. On the other hand, during the debates on the LGE, President Bachelet enhanced ideas about the importance of public education and social inclusion, and a faction of the Concertación's legislators (such as Cristina Girardi and Carlos Montes) condemned the market-oriented model and exclusionary practices and underlined the lack of state support for public schools; and even the Christian Democratic Party, which seemed reactionary to these changes, agreed in its "Ideological and Programmatic Congress" in 2007 that there should be no profit-making in education (Santa Cruz, 2016).

This last period (2006-2010) was an embryonic phase in the coalition's attempts to move towards a *regulated market*, adding new policy threads to the *balanced formula*. The new formula was to maintain parental choice and public/private provision, yet prohibiting school profit, pupil selection and adding further state control through national assessments and accountability measures. In fact,

¹⁴ In 1988, under the dictatorship, a first version of this law was passed.

¹⁵ The co-payment policy was first designed under the dictatorship. Later on, with the return of the democracy, it was promoted by the right (not by the center-left) and introduced in congressional negotiations in exchange for the approval of a tax reform which was discussed at that time. The Ministers of Education of the time, Ricardo Lagos, and then Jorge Arrate, later said that they had privately expressed apprehension and disagreement with the measure.

the cases of Belgium and the Netherlands emerged several times in the policy discussions as examples of this aspiration of a gratuitous market, with diverse non-profit institutions and without student selection.

Nonetheless, after more than thirty years of market educational policies, the non-profit and no pupil selection measures were truncated, because there was no internal consensus and any legal change to the LOCE required a high level of approval in Congress. Consequently, President Bachelet strategically created a negotiating table with representatives of the government and both coalitions in order to resolve their differences.

These negotiations established the foundations of the final version of the new bill, which consecrated the *performative market model*. A high-stakes accountability model was a *seductive policy*, a terrain of consensus for both center-left and right-wing politicians held up as a path to resolve “failings” of the market and respond to students’ demands (Falabella, 2020b). In the meantime, the ban on pupil selection was approved only up to sixth grade, without any penalty for non-compliance, while the voucher system, for-profit schools, and co-payment policy remained intact, as well as the lack of any preferential role for the state in public education.

Politicians and policy advisors who participated in the negotiating table reported that they had to move significantly from their initial positions (see policymakers’ writings: Bitar (2012) and Larroulet & Montt (2010). The agreement between the right and center-left coalitions was celebrated in the *holding hands act*, mentioned in the introduction to this paper. It was an emotional moment. During the congressional debate, the Minister Secretary General to the Presidency, Jose Antonio Viera-Gallo, said:

This is how we have carried out the transition [from dictatorship to democracy] in Chile! Nobody has imposed his or her ideas on anyone! We have convinced each other! We come from a dictatorship and look how far we have advanced with the strength of our convictions. (National Congress of Chile, 2009, p. 379)

Nevertheless, a close examination shows that differences between the two coalitions in the negotiating table were minor, while they agreed to maintain the overall policy framework¹⁶. After the new version of the bill was drafted, it was submitted by President Bachelet to the Congress with “utmost urgency”, i.e. it had to be approved by Congress in the following 15 days. This generated special indignation on the part of some lawmakers in the center-left coalition who had been critical of the bill, since they were pressured to approve the law, while the time to debate the legislation and propose changes was significantly reduced.

This historical moment is an example of the *democracy of consensus* of post-dictatorship Chile. The *holding hands image* in the midst of social turbulence over the educational model, evidenced the elitist and anti-democratic practices used to produce public policy in Chile, facilitated by the authoritarian nature of the Constitution. The government’s method of solving social conflict not only exposed the political rationale of the Concertación, but also its way of doing politics in the post-dictatorship era. Despite the apparent political symbiosis and the lack of debate between the center-left and right-wing, the seeming consensus was not only ideological, but also pragmatic,

¹⁶ For instance, the representatives of the government suggested the creation of one institution that both inspected schools’ accomplishment of national norms and legislations and assessed their quality; meanwhile the right-wing representatives asked to separate these duties into two different institutions. Another example, is that the center-left representatives emphasized that the Superintendence should have the power to supervise the ways schools spend the state subsidy, while the right-wing representatives thought this was unnecessary if schools had a successful test performance (for more detail see: Larroulet & Montt (2010)).

considering the political and legal limitations of the time, in addition to disagreements within the Concertación.

In the end, a national social movement resulted in a pact by a small political group following a shortened congressional debate. As Santa Cruz (2016) argues, this was seen as a triumph for the right and a defeat for social movements, as well as for an important faction of the Concertación that wanted to establish greater limits on the private sector and provide greater state support for public education. The people had severely criticized the dictatorial origin of the LOCE, but the LGE was not built in a democratic way as expected; paradoxically during Bachelet's government, which had styled itself as “the government of the people”—*un gobierno ciudadano*.

Alarcón et al. (2014), following Rancière (1999), claim that the understanding of consensus meant the denial of policy as a public act of open debate. The post-democracy practice, where policy is led by “experts”, jurisdiction, opinion polls, and “transparency”, represents the pathology of liberal democracies (Rancière, 1999). As Durán (2006) argues, the Chilean case can be praised for its peaceful transition from dictatorship back to democracy, although it had a high cost. This cost was the negation of politics as a space for debate and deliberation on the social order, making it impossible to distinguish between diverse political projects—“The exaggerated lightness of politics”, in the words of Lechner (2002, p. 33).

Beyond the center-left coalition’s internal dissimilarities and consensus with the right, it is important to remark that the general educational project was still founded on the idea of building a *balanced formula*. In fact, the legislators in the most critical faction never proposed concrete measures to end the market-oriented model, that is, parental free choice, the school voucher, and the state’s “equal treatment” of public and private providers. And, on the other hand, various of those mentioned above, who had defended profit-making in education, later left the coalition.

Final Considerations: The Center-left’s Dual Love Affair and its Perpetual Trap

To think about the Concertación is to think about the post-dictatorship era in Chile. More generally, it also means thinking about different versions and strands of the “renewed” left’s education project in the age of late capitalism.

In the field of education, the Concertación inherited a subsidiary state that promoted fertile conditions for market competition between public and private schools. The coalition discourse claimed that the market offers benefits (freedom, diversity, efficiency) but, left to its own devices, results in “market failings” (abuses, exclusion, embezzlement). Therefore, the coalition’s *governmental rationality*, in Foucault’s terms, was not to do away with the market, but to regulate it strategically, like an alchemist, seeking the perfect combination between the state and the market, between rights and freedoms, and between public and private.

This was the *dual love affair* of the center-left coalition. Among the examined policy discourses, it appeared as the policy mantra for the perfect balance, the mixed system, the ideal equilibrium. It was a mantra repeated during the four governments of the Concertación, while there were, nonetheless, internal disputes and ideological nuances about what exactly were the measures to produce that *perfect balance*.

In spite of changes and attempts to make modifications, after 20 years of government the Concertación substantially preserved the model inherited from the neoliberal-oriented dictatorship, extended performance accountability reforms, maintained and even increased privileges for the private sector, and strongly defended the state’s equal treatment of the public and private sectors.

The questions that arise are: Why did the center-left coalition preserve and even extend the market-based model? Was the centre-left an improved neoliberal 2.0 ideology or a leftist polo of the

right wing? Was it a group of ex-revolutionaries who, overcome by fear of conflict and burdened by the trauma of the violent military coup, betrayed their principles in a bid to demonstrate to the country (and themselves) that they were capable of governing without causing an internal rupture? Were their governments trapped by the dictatorship's Constitution and "binding laws", or were they victims of conditional loans from international agencies? Or was it simply a coalition captivated by the hegemony of neoliberalism?

The historical circumstances of the Concertación governments were undoubtedly complex. Changes were difficult after the broad and profound transformations carried out under the dictatorship. There were legal limitations, along with a generation of politicians carrying the trauma and guilt of a frustrated attempt at a democratic socialist project. Ricardo Lagos, for example, spoke in an interview about the fear he felt as Minister of Education in the early 1990s while promoting one of the main policies during his term at the ministry (Espínola & de Moura, 1999), the compensatory program focused on underperforming schools, known as the "900 Schools Program"¹⁷.

There were also persuasive narratives related to "quality assurance" in education, "data-driven management", and "information transparency" that circulated in the country among experts at think tanks, consultants at international organizations, policymakers, and in the media. This *ideological atmosphere* was key to legitimizing the adoption of these policy solutions in the country and in various places around the world, contributing to their global propagation, as Verger (2016) argues.

Hypotheses circulated in the country that the Concertación did not deliver further transformations due to legal constraints, international pressure, and "conflict phobia". There were certainly historical constraints, internal squabbles, and strategic negotiations where policies had to be sacrificed or adapted, and certain coalition factions gained power over others in the government. Also, it is important to note that some politicians of the Concertación benefited from the logic of the market-based system. For example, various members of the coalition and/or their family members owned schools or private universities, or participated in other businesses providing social services, such as healthcare or pensions.

Having said that, this paper demonstrates that the education policies that the Concertación developed were largely true to the coalition governments' ideological convictions. Hence, the center-left coalition did not maintain market policies *in spite* of its governmental rationality, but *because* of it. Its policies were not random, imposed, or censored. The results of the research show that the core principles of the governments' policy thinking were consistent with the policy measures developed throughout the 20 years of governance, as well as before it came to power and even after the coalition ended.

The Concertación subsequently became the *Nueva Mayoría* (New Majority, which was joined by the Communist Party) and governed between 2015 and 2018 (see Bellei & Vanni, 2015; Carrasco, 2018; Orellana, 2018). After two mass student movements (2006 and 2011) and a regeneration of politicians, there was more space for formerly critical voices and, in spite of the passionate debates, the coalition slowly fell in line with the idea that these regulations were strategic to assure a *fair market*, consistent with the balanced formula.

In 2015 the "Inclusion Law" was passed, which bans—albeit with exceptions—profit-making in the private sector, co-payment by parents, and student selection. Also, a new public-school governance law was devised that transfers their management from municipalities to new

¹⁷ Iván Nuñez (2003), an intellectual and policymaker of the coalition, also narrates the public pressure and atmosphere of fear lead by the influential newspaper *E/Mercurio* that during the 1990s several times linked the Concertación's educational reform with the highly controversial project of Salvador Allende 'National United School' (ENU) that contributed, at that time, to the country's political polarization ending in the military coup.

autonomous entities called “Local Educational Services”, which, unlike municipalities, are exclusively dedicated to school administration and are accountable to the Ministry of Education. In addition, a new Law on “Teacher Development” was drafted that gradually harmonizes the minimum salaries of public and private sector teachers in accordance with a national evaluation system, in addition to other regulations for teacher training programs. All of these bills were justified under the *narrative of balance*.

The latter reforms involved greater regulation of the market-based model, favoring social mixing and providing improved conditions for the management of public schools. Nevertheless, the market-oriented schema has been maintained, the voucher formula is remained intact, and the performance accountability logic has expanded transversally throughout the system.

In the meantime, free education involves a massive additional transfer of state funding to the private sector, and even though the law states that profit-making is prohibited, in practice the last bills loosened the regulations of the initial law, entailing various legal loopholes, making it almost impossible to effectively ensure there would be no profit-making. Furthermore, public schools have to compete on an equal footing with the private sector under a new system, in which public schools have lost their former unique status as gratuitous and provide education without student selection, facing the threat of an outflow of low-class students who may move to the now cost-free private-subsidized sector. Additionally, school teachers have to struggle between the policy contradictions of prohibiting student selection and having to be accountable to performance standards.

The central problem of the Concertación’s education project was not that it was constrained by external pressures as if it were a victim of specific historical circumstances. In fact, it was an active player within the international networks of policymaking. The main dilemma was within the governments’ policymaking rationale.

Contrary to the coalition’s expectations, the *balanced market rationality* did not ensure quality and equity, or allow the state to “counterbalance the market-based system”. After four Concertación governments, Chile still had one of the most segmented school systems in the world (Carrasco, 2018; Corvalán et al., 2016; Valenzuela et al., 2014), with public education accounting for only 37.5% of annual enrolment (MINEDUC, 2014) and so far, no consistent evidence has emerged with respect to the expected benefits of performance accountability policies (Falabella, 2014, 2020a).

The problem is that there has been an inherent contradiction in the political project of the Chilean center-left in education. This is the illusion of being able to combine contrasting principles such as freedom/equality, public/private, competition/collaboration, standardization/autonomy, and performance/inclusion.

Dual love affairs are dangerous. The *formula of balance* has provided an identity and a foundation for the Chilean center-left’s political project in education, but it has also been its greatest trap. Following Lazzarato (2012), the functioning of the education market requires comparative differences, symbolic hierarchies, and continuous rivalry between schools. Social justice, inclusion and participatory democracy hinder the operation of the market. This is the perpetual paradox of the imagined *balanced market*.

Currently, the Chilean left-wing remains fragmented, and there is no evidence of an imminent formation of an integrated coalition. From October, 2019, Chile has seen a major social uprising (*estallido social*). The massive protests are not only centered on reclaiming the educational system, but also protesting against the broader neoliberal model that prevails in the country. These demonstrations triggered a parliamentary agreement to deliver a national plebiscite to determine the fate of the national constitution which was designed under Pinochet’s dictatorship. The outcome of this plebiscite (conducted on October, 2020) was to overwhelmingly approve the creation of a new constitution receiving 78% support across the country. It remains to be seen, in this new scenario,

what position the center left-wing adopts and if they maintain or end their *dual love affair* in education.

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