

THE NEOLIBERAL EPISTEME AND EMANCIPATORY STUDENT REPOLITIZATION IN BRAZIL AND CHILE

La episteme neoliberal y la repolitización estudiantil emancipatoria en Brasil y Chile

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Abstract

The present academic work is developed with the objective of a critical analysis linked to the relationship between the ideological foundations generated on the basis of an episteme of neoliberal positioning, the profound consequences of the increasing privatization of formal education that has taken place in the last decades in Latin America, and the multitudinous student emancipatory mobilizations that have recently taken place in countries like Chile and Brazil. From an exhaustive recapitulation of the specialized literature, an argument is built to demonstrate the privatization experienced in the field of education as an growing trend, the cause of the precarization of relational conditions and learning from the perspective of internal functioning of the school, and in turn seeks to depoliticize the student subject, turning it into a player in the neoliberal, disarticulated and individualistic system. However, at the same time that the student experiences situations of depoliticization, the mobilizations seeking emancipation from an inherited system re-politicize the student question, to claim the idea that education is and must be understood with a social look, as a fundamental human right and as an important space for the construction of citizenship in connection with different democratic projects. It concludes by problematizing this process, whose development presents limitations of a socio-political nature related to the difficulty of achieving the articulation of projects that are alternative to neoliberalism.

Keywords

Formal education, neoliberalism, student movement, epistemology, citizenship, democracy.

Resumen

El presente trabajo se desarrolla bajo el objetivo de un análisis crítico vinculado a la relación entre los fundamentos ideológicos que se generan a la base de una episteme de posicionamiento neoliberal, las profundas consecuencias que ha tenido la creciente privatización de la educación formal acontecida en las últimas décadas en Latinoamérica y las multitudinarias movilizaciones emancipatorias estudiantiles, ocurridas recientemente en países como Chile y Brasil. A partir de una exhaustiva recapitulación de la literatura especializada, se genera el sentido que demuestra en una creciente e instalada tendencia a la privatización vivenciada en el ámbito de la educación, la causal de la precarización de las condiciones relacionales y del aprendizaje desde la perspectiva de funcionamiento interno de la escuela, y a su vez busca despolitizar al sujeto estudiantil, volviéndolo un reproductor del sistema neoliberal, desarticulado e individualista. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo en que el estudiante vivencia situaciones de despolitización, las movilizaciones emancipatorias a un sistema heredado repolitizan la cuestión estudiantil, al reivindicar la idea de que la educación es y debe ser comprendida socialmente como un derecho humano fundamental y como un importante espacio de construcción de ciudadanía en vinculación con diferentes proyectos democráticos. Se concluye problematizando este proceso que desde su desenvolvimiento va presentando limitaciones desde la índole socio-políticas por toda aquella dificultad de conseguir la articulación de proyectos que sean alternativos al neoliberalismo.

Palabras clave

Educación formal, neoliberalismo, movimiento estudiantil, epistemología, ciudadanía, democracia.

Introduction

Today, according to Katz & Mutz (2017) and Elboj (2010), the idea that formal education systems are in crisis has intensified. A crisis that is, according to Nieves and Gerardo (2017), both the horizon of meaning and

political significance of the process of training for social life, as well as the institutional condition for the development of quality of public education and of the knowledge that allows its operation. Formal education is a space for reflection on society in movement, given that it is in the educational system that society reproduces itself as a culture. Hence, we opt for a type of socialization where knowledge, ideologies and their uses presuppose paths for the reproduction of life and its “supposed” improvement.

Philosophy of Education, for Cervantes & Fernández (2011), Iza-zaga (2011) and Maris (2012), understood as a reflective-comprehensive activity regarding the articulating budgets of the education system, plays a central role in critical debate. It is in the interstice of the spaces of conflict and normalization that criticism fits in as a mobilizing, systematic and provocative activity around educational development. The educational fact is, above all, a social space that condenses diverse and divergent relationships between social and institutional subjects. It is a space in tension that updates a totality, which for Osorio (2012) is a multiple, contradictory and complex unit, which evidences the visions of the world that have been historically constructed and that present continuities and ruptures. This is so because social transformations become conflicts of interest, which put into play forms of economic, social, political, and cultural organization of society, for which knowledge systems that justify such forms of organization are built.

Seen in this way, the discussion around the relation “subject-object of knowledge” in educational systems requires an analysis of the mediations that configure the set of tensions between the conceptions and uses of modern science and ideology; and the structuring of constituted power and constituent power in the development of contemporary capitalist society. The epistemological positioning accounts for the critical examination of existing ideological limits and tensions in the statutory knowledge regimes, which legitimize a certain type of social and institutional order, where the problems and their supposed solutions are constructed, in view of the reproduction and restructuring of such order.

In the perspective of Wallerstein (2001), and Brenner, Peck & Theodore (2010) we live a historical tendency to the galloping commodification of all spheres of life. This tendency, agreeing with Croso & Magalhães (2016), Vergara (2015), Coutinho (2011), is also expressed in education, which has intensified with the neoliberal episteme. Therefore, it is urgent to resituate the epistemological debate to examine the foundations of recent transformations in education. In this sense, the objective of this paper is to problematize the conflictive relationship between the episteme

of the contemporary neoliberal educational system and the epistemes or critical-emancipatory responses of the student movements of Brazil and Chile, from an analysis of the historical-conceptual recapitulation of the specialized literature. The aim is to defend the thesis that strategies to consolidate the neoliberal episteme and its implications for restructuring the role of the State and the educational system have generated processes of depoliticization and fragmentation of political citizenship. At the same time, this conflictive process has created the conditions for the re-politicization of the student question, which is oriented towards the democratization of society and the revaluation of education as a human right, but which has limitations given the difficulty of articulating the construction of alternative socio-political projects to neoliberalism.

For the development of this central argument, first, we place the epistemological problematic within the framework of the development of the modern sciences and the tension that this has with the ideological aspects, to generate a framework of reflection on the politicization of education. It is about characterizing this debate and adopting an epistemic-analytical position. Secondly, a recapitulation of the central premises that have influenced the foundation of a neoliberal episteme of society in general and of the educational system in particular in Latin America, linking the notions of citizenship and the tendency to the commodification of the educational system. In third place, we reflect on the process of precarization of education as a public and political sphere, situating ourselves in the realities thought from critical aspects in Brazil and Chile, alluding to the concept of democracy and the situation of depoliticization of the student subject. Fourth, the new epistemes that emerged from the recent student mobilizations in Brazil and Chile are related and distinguished, which critically resignify the structuring of the educational system based on profit, which leads to the need for re-politicization. Finally, we establish a reflexive synthesis of the analysis, its implications, limitations and potential hypotheses or investigative paths in the field of epistemology and the philosophy of education.

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Epistemology: tensions between science and ideology

What is known and how? What is it known for? What knowledge systems are assumed to be most credible and useful? What interests and fundamentals define institutionalized knowledge? What should be known for what type of society? And what type of subject is constructed through

the educational process? These are some of the most relevant questions for Maris (2012) and Rodríguez (2009), who have founded a large part of the debates on education, society and subjectivity. Answering these questions cannot be reduced to a specific field of knowledge that fragments the social totality. On the contrary, they are questions that, in line with the thought of Collado (2017) and Nieves and Gerardo (2017), require an effort of integration, abstraction and critical understanding, including a paradigmatic transformation of education in dialogue with ecology of knowledge, and searches for alternative meanings to the dominant epistemology according to Guerrero (2010); since there is a constant dispute over the theoretical appropriation of social reality and a tension, in the key of Gramsci (1995), between the hegemony of reason, scientific knowledge and the ideologies that configure hegemony.¹

Today there are two types of mystifications that have been installed from the hegemonic social sciences, and that have impacted the different ways of producing knowledge. On the one hand, the postmodernist relativism that devalues the construction of theories about the totality of the social system, where the explanatory capacity of social reality vanishes; and on the other hand, the almost absolute predominance of what is called a concrete reality promoted by a naive empiricism, by the power of data and so-called “direct” information. According to Osorio (2012), it is about elaborating knowledge that integrates the visible and the hidden, the surface and the structure, that allows to integrate what organizes the diverse and the particular.

Dominant modern science has installed itself in common sense as the knowledge that produces the most truth in society and that is most useful for its development and progress. This process, according to Mignolo (2000), Dussel (1994), and Quijano & Wallerstein (1992), has been an important part of the consolidation of the historical project of westernized European-colonial European society, and, according to Wallerstein (2001), and Arrighi (1999), in the expansion of the global capitalist system. The central premise refers to the fact that the contradictions and problems generated by the capitalist system, raises the need to create areas of “scientific” knowledge to address such problems, and thus ensure not only their reproduction, but also the international transfer of policies, values, norms and behaviors, which assume a global character.

This vision, based on the specific current of thought of positivism at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, according to Löwy (1994), has placed at the center of the debate the need to build an “objective” and universal thought. The ruling that

society is commanded by universal and immutable natural laws, which are independent of the human will, objective, and free of prejudices and ideologies that affect the scientific status of knowledge is well known. The critical response came on the side of historicism first as a conservative response to the enlightenment philosophy and then as a critique of social institutions and ways of thinking as historically relative.

The historicist philosophy of science seems to be the most appropriate for the problem posed, since it is situated in criteria of external rationality, that is to say subjected to social conditioning, which connects with the question of ideology. It is in this line that, in the words of Pérez (1998): “The field of epistemology is a favorable place for the critique of the foundations and logic that animate the world, as well as the forms of knowledge that have the power of scientific reason.” (p. 7)

The task of epistemology consists, according to Castells (1971) in determining the demarcation between theory and ideology, and between different types of ideologies, which are present in all types of research, either explicitly or implicitly. The production of knowledge, that is, theoretical practice, has a relative autonomy with respect to the social structure. There is no purely theoretical object. The theoretical practice is socially determined in its use and in its scientific content with social ideologies. There would be, therefore, an impossibility both of a total independence of the theory with respect to the articulation with society, and of the existence of theoretical objectives equivalent to all social classes. The ideological aspect, for Castells (1978), acts as a system that organizes the relational space from a network of symbols charged with meaning, which will have a social effect of legitimation. When it is communicated, it leads to a process of rationalization of certain interests that are presented as an expression of a general interest and as communication under certain codes that will condition the interpretation processes. These systems permeate social relations and accompany the cycles of capital accumulation.

For Löwy (1994), it is Goldmann who represents the most important attempt, when formulating a Marxist-historicist solution to the problem of social-scientific objectivity, and to construct a differential sociology of knowledge. The central thesis is that the categorial structure of the consciousness of the researcher is a social fact that is related to the aspirations and interests of different social groups. In this sense, the visions of the social world, the ideologies and the utopias of the social classes decisively make up (directly or indirectly, implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously) the process of knowledge of society. Thought is conditioned not only by its class position, but also by other

non-class and relatively autonomous social belongings with respect to social classes: religion, generations, nationality, culture, sex. The social vision of the world is deviated, in turn, by its connection to certain social categories (student, bureaucracy, intellectuals, etc.), or to certain organizations (parties, churches, sects, circles). There is, therefore, a relative autonomy and not total independence in the knowledge process, to the extent that the role of the visibility horizon is decisive for the constitution of the cognitive field itself.

Now, to assume these premises has important implications for the historical-social and political-intellectual analysis on the relationship between society, subjectivity and education. The tensions between the knowledge of science and ideology, make possible the understanding of the confrontations between worldviews and the functional aspect of the formal educational system to the hegemonic social order that contains and promotes it. In this line, a synthesis is presented below on the fundamentals of the neoliberal episteme and its relationship with citizens, in view of understanding the tendency towards the commodification of education.

The neoliberal episteme and citizenship: commodification

The neoliberal episteme is defined as the assumptions that are at the base of the foundation of the neoliberalization processes² of social institutions. They are the main restructuring processes around the relationship between the State, the market and society, which emphasize specific notions of the subject, education and society, and which characterize contemporary changes in Latin America in general and Chile in particular.

Part of the presuppositions of the neoliberal episteme refer to old liberalism. For Skinner (2004), Hobbes is one of the most important ideologues of liberalism: “He maintained that the condition of human nature is one in which we live completely ‘dissociated’ from the rest of men, subsisting as a mere crowd in a state of solitude, in which ‘each man is an enemy of others’” (p. 122).

If there is to be a political pact, it can only take the form of an agreement between each and every one of the individual members of the “crowd,” and not as members of a community.

This current of thought, for Coutinho (2011) and Lázaro (2001), assumes that the common good only exists as the sum of individual benefits, when in a context of generalized increase in wealth everyone gains, without exception, even if unequally: what is called the good or interest

of all. This idea will later be assimilated to the idea of progress between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, and later to the concept of development in its economic sense.

Liberalism strengthens developmentalist ideas in education, and its positioning regarding the State, in favor of letting individuals do their economic activities, subordinating education to the market, assuming that the individual interest of all is to become a competitive economic agent in a hierarchical labor market. In this way, Ruiz (2010), asserts that: “From 1870 it is the liberal position that will define the global framework of the educational system” (p. 44).

Smith (2015) affirmed that the maximum level of social welfare is generated when each individual, in a selfish way, pursues his individual welfare, and nothing more than that; in this way, selfishness is unintended “altruism,” not based on compassion or another type of feeling towards the other, but as a consequence of the primacy of economic efficiency, of instrumental rationality, which contributes to the generation of riches. In this way, the inequality of wealth between individuals is taken for granted and justified by the different capacities that they would have to increase it.

The doctrinal differences between liberalism and neoliberalism are not very large. Although their fundamental ideas are practically the same, they do not stop having their particularities. Among these, it is worth highlighting the rejection of neoliberalism to the recognition of equality as a natural feature of humanity or a positive value, if this means something different from the commercial or political reciprocity relations characteristic of the conclusion of a contract, which is voluntary and pursues self-interest, but does not necessarily produce equivalent benefits to all parties. Another specificity of neoliberalism is the denial of life as a right that society must guarantee. Beyond the protection against murder by another individual or the State, the latter should not act, but rather leave those who are not able to successfully insert themselves in the labor market to their fate, even if that means not being able to subsist.

Putting the example of Chile as an experiment in neoliberalism, the most influential neoliberal ideologist in the construction of discourse that until now structures public policies in the field of Chilean education, was, and is, Milton Friedman. Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman (1980), are explicit in saying that: “In education, parents and children are consumers, and the school administrator and teachers, producers” (p. 220). For Friedman and his Chilean disciples, the ‘Chicago Boys,’ education is an economic service of valorization of the “human capital” of students, which develops in them both the values of a “free market society”



and the skills that allow them to compete and perform successfully in markets, especially in the labor market, attributing a moral character to the technical criteria of efficacy and economic efficiency.

Thus, education should be determined by: a) the search for the maximum possible economic benefit in the production, sale or purchase of education. Individuals tend by nature and must be able to sell or buy the best goods at the lowest possible price. The principle of instrumental rationality on costs and benefits that extends to the ethical level (ascetic or philanthropic) includes, among its consequences, an increase of the quality of the teaching and the lessons learned; b) competition as a law or principle of interaction that confronts individuals as economic agents interested in appropriating and/or privately accumulating wealth, including a good education. Competition among the holders of the schools to maintain and/or increase their enrollment and financial income; or between the teachers, to avoid punishment or receive salary incentives; or between students, and between families, to access the selective offer of enrollment by more or less exclusive schools, or other benefits or privileges, including new educational opportunities. Competition that is only possible with, c) the segmentation of the educational offer, establishing alternatives attuned to the plurality of preferences and academic and purchasing capacities of each family or individual; alternatives validated in their acquisition or extinct due to lack of demand.

Vergara (2015) points out that both Hayek and Friedman consider that the only obligation of the State is to provide a basic subsidy to cover the cost of basic training in private schools, ensuring an average level for said schools. If parents want their children to have access to a better education, they will have to “pay for the additional expense,” since it is a precious asset that, the more it grows, by attending, for example, higher education, it will produce higher future income for children, since private investment in education has higher levels of return than that made in other forms of capital.

Profit, competition and segmentation are logically subsidized by the State of Chile through policies of official recognition and tax financing, standardized evaluation and accountability to students, teachers, as well as supporters, results of lessons learned, and dis-accountability of the State.

Under these conceptions, liberal in principle and neoliberal later, the question of citizenship becomes a central issue. The development of the discourse of modern citizenship is linked to the emergence of modernity and the State, as a form of political organization. Although, as Sandoval (2008) states:

The discourse of citizenship finds some of its roots in the experience of the Athenian polis or Roman law, the concept of citizen that we share nowadays did not begin to be forged until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thanks to the stabilization and concentration of political power in a territorially defined unit, called the State (p. 159).

The State, as an invention, is the institution that concentrates power, control and legitimate coercion. Its actions refer to the regulation of social and political life in societies, at the same time that it builds institutions and links between them in order to configure types of social relations and material conditions of existence.

The neoliberal approach, instead, has focused its ideology on the market, the individual and the State, the latter being its scenario of (de) regulation, so that society must be understood from the individual and its relationship with consumerism. The production of social reality is seen, then, from the individual that is either integrated or not to the social order instituted by expert knowledge (Escobar, 2002). The functionalization of the individual to this model includes a limited normativity, which in the end, what it does, is to maintain discourses and regulatory institutional practices of the subjectivities that perpetuate the non-distributive and inequitable structural imbalance.

In contrast, there is a model of socialist republican citizenship, in which all groups and social classes are turned to subalterns by relations of a capitalist, patriarchal, colonialist type or associated with other forms of domination; they build a popular emancipatory national political project. This tends to the dignification of life (human and nature), the construction of communities that enable the broadest deployment of human capabilities to freely and creatively build their world, transforming nature and humanity itself into a process of construction of hegemony where the State identifies itself with, or dissolves in, civil society through the exercise of citizenship (eliminating its coercive nature). The popular national emancipatory political project is one that manages to build an identity, a we, based on the recognition and struggle to overcome relations of domination, which are plural and concrete, impacting the construction of modern identities and communities, and thus, the social whole.

Liberalism and neoliberalism reject the relationship between (public) education and politics, as a particular case of their rejection of any state interventionism beyond the protection of the law, and consequently, deny that education should play a role in training for citizenship, considering it an alternative associated with an ideal of the particular common good before which the State must remain neutral.

It is clear that the relationship between the neoliberal episteme, citizenship and the construction of a “citizen” subject, from the process of formation in the formal educational system, is far from being coherent with each other. On the one hand, the neoliberal episteme reproduces a market subject, that is, a citizen client and consumer, entrepreneur and directly responsible for their own development process. On the other hand, the notion of citizenship implies the involvement in the questions of the political and the public, in the construction of a society that appeals to an ethics-policy that is based on the equitable improvement of the material, relational and spiritual conditions of society.

In this order of ideas, commodification is at the core of the problem. That is to say, if the education system has the objective of training for social life, and the neoliberalization of the educational system leads to the formation of the notion of the individual governed by the market, then we are facing a process of “commodification” of formal education. Commodification refers, according to Jessop (2007), to the process of transformation of those public goods and services that are not full goods, that is to say, that do not derive directly from the work process. Mercantile education means that the education of the population is assumed as a tradable service and operates under the laws of the market, which leads, therefore, to profit.

Gundel (2009) argues that “there is no citizenship if there is no State and there is no politics if there is no citizenship; therefore, citizen action must focus on the strengthening of the State and politics” (p. 39). This idea will have implications for placing an analysis of the quality of the democratic system that is currently promoted in education systems, since it is in the political arena that the versions of society projects come into play, and that is currently dominated by the precepts of the neoliberal episteme. Next, we analyze the relationship between education and democracy, which will be necessary to critically observe the processes of depoliticization in the student system, a direct consequence of the reproduction and deepening of the neoliberal model.

Education and democracy: depoliticization

Undoubtedly one of the most important consequences of the neoliberal system that dominates the actions of the State has to do with the implications in the structure and functioning of formal education and of the Public School in particular. From this perspective, the educational space



is constructed as a reproducer of neoliberalism's own configurations, and understands as "good citizens" those students who will maintain the model learned and reproduced from school.

The citizen of the School of neoliberalism is constituted from a particular idea of democracy, promoted from the State and normalized socially, where education is limited to mercantilist logics, which tend to privatization to the detriment of public education. De Sousa & Avritzer (2003) identify this situation as a hegemonic conception of democracy, which is liberal democracy. The concept of democracy is reconfigured, understood in terms of García (2009), as the social and political order for the realization of human dignity and freedom, in reference to human rights, as a set of necessary conditions to live a dignified and full life for the neoliberal development paradigm. This means an elitist option that excludes any other subject and mechanism of political participation different from electoral representation. This democratic individualism, for Rancière (2014), explains the naturalization of an idea of democracy accepted by modern society that fulfills the role of establishing an individualist and unfair relational system to restrict equal rights. Indeed, individualism is imposed on the community, highlighting the interpersonal distancing and superficial cooperation of human relations, and ensuring the depoliticization and disarmament of the community in school. In other words, the social, political and emancipatory space that the school itself constitutes is broken internally.

Thus, neoliberal policies, according to Barbosa (2011), reduce the role of the State in the realization of rights by attributing to public institutions a subsidiary role, or the strengthening of public goods only when a response from the private initiative cannot be obtained regarding needs and social demands, including the goods recognized as fundamental rights such as education.

The concrete action results in a planned and systematic dismantling of the public school that, in Latin America, has not been only a task of the dictatorships experienced mainly in the 70s and 80s. On the contrary, once the dictatorships were over, the right to education continues to be violated, in a privatizing, precarious and depoliticizing zeal. According to UNICEF (2006), this has negative repercussions in relation to the provision of effective conditions for participation in the school environment, and for several generations, since children have the right not only to access school, but also to participate within it. The public school is the best place where the right to participation can be developed, given that it is a space of diversity where everyone could have the right to be recog-

nized as protagonists in the construction of the individual in community, without distinction of class, religion, sex or nationality.

Then, from the focus of law in education, following Pizarro (2003), it is possible to understand real democracy in the school as citizen participation and social justice, in the sense indicated by Coutinho (1979), of conquest of different instances that guarantee true participation with freedom and equality; and as Rancière (2014) and Coutinho (2006) point out, where institutions are not at the service of the preservation of capitalism in which there are many who are segregated and excluded, nor the State at the service of private interests, protected by free elections disguised as democracy.

For Atria (2010), in many cases in Latin America private property is above people, who, in turn, are defined by their purchasing power in the market and not by equality in the exercise of their rights. In this sense, and in the face of the privatization of education, as the axis of its precarization, it is more important for the business class and the political elites to develop devices that, according to Bourdieu (2013) allow to care for and increase profits from this property, at the expense of the rights of the people. In many cases, for the National Forum for Quality Education for All (2012), there is a constitution that attributes excessive weight to economic rights.

The school in its state of precarization and depoliticization, therefore, naturalizes undemocratic practices, because it is constituted as a private space, foregoing the meaning of the public school. This is so, following the ideas of Cerda *et al.* (2004), because curricular reforms, focused on content and methodologies, make it possible to reach a consensus on how the student who attends school should be: a subject capable of inserting himself into globalization and productivity. Hence, because of the actions of dictatorships in association with subsequent government coalitions defending neoliberalism, a strong segmentation of the education system is generated that affects both the quality of learning, especially for students from sectors most affected in their basic rights, as well as the internal practices of educational establishments. When the school ceases to be a public good and becomes a private good, with an internal logic more linked to a company than to education, solutions and interests are individual, and this is how collective identities are lost, and subsequently the sense of participation. This is why internal practices for the school population are constituted as those that do not adhere to concepts of participation and representation, as they do not represent the interests of the private world gestated in societies with a dictatorial constitutionalism.



Beyond the segregating, privatizing and depoliticizing character that this school construction presents, it is interesting to visualize which are the concrete practices that make the school a non-democratic space. These practices are present, for example, in the teacher-student interaction within the classroom and cover both the specific interaction in relation to content, and other sets of dynamics, in reference to certain specific skills for the teacher and the student. This is the case for Cerda *et al.* (2004) as within the classroom there is a tension between the spaces of participation and the need for productivity, leaving teachers and students trapped in the logic of the shortage of time to generate reflexive processes, with these remaining outside the curriculum. This situation is aggravated by the large number of students that form the courses, especially in the schools that cover the poorest sectors. Participation is not a learning objective and rather becomes an element of disciplinary control. In this way, the reflection is generated in the relation of extracurricular elements in a rather emancipatory sense of control of the classroom.

The schools become closed spaces that forget the communities that contextualize the territoriality of the students. Even more so when the school is located in spaces of poverty, because there is a low expectation about their learning. The “stigma of poverty” generates a homogenization where the student is described as having difficulties, adding to the devaluation of their knowledge and the knowledge of their parents and families, because they are classified as vulnerable. For Batallán & Varas (2002), these attributions are described in behaviors supposedly typical of “a poor man” developed in terms of homogenizing conceptualizations. This treatment, which in turn is disqualifying, deviates from the focus of law and blurs the student as a subject of law.

On the other hand, Batallán (2003) argues that the teacher also finds his work precarized and depoliticized, experiencing the imposition of power from the higher configurations of school organization, with a set of meanings associated with symbolic violence in relation to mastery, discipline and coercion, what seems like an agreement but is done between non-symmetrical parts. Consequently, the school of neoliberalism is precarious and depoliticized in the intention to reproduce the individualism, productivity, authoritarianism and lack of participation that the model requires to survive.

So, in neoliberal societies constituted from neoliberal democracies, it is fundamental, according to Betancourt (2011), to rescue the school as a space of diversity and participatory democracy, with a potential emancipatory element which stresses the established order just by the fact of

existing in the confrontation against the social segregation that tries to be reproduced from the school. It is in this space that we can install the clarity that we are all different, but we have the same rights, which in itself constitutes a democratic society based on pluralism. Emancipation stems from the recognition of diversity and democracy.

It is not that the school is going to change the world, but it is necessary to attempt a rescue from the use given to it by capitalist society, organized as a reproductive agent of capital, with clear economic interests, naturalizing authoritarian practices and built from inequality. This rescue does not mean deconstruction of the school, but rather of the whole society for the construction of a real democracy. However, the school in its massive and obligatory nature has the task of generating democratic cultures that, through their educational action, install in everyday life the real sense of participatory democracy. As Redondo (2005) points out, school cannot do everything, but as the only “obligatory” social space, we can ask no less from it if we are really interested in the right to education, access with equity for all, fighting inequalities and promoting democracy from school systems.

Epistemes in movement: repolitization

The tendency towards privatization and therefore the commodification of education is a reality in Latin America and the Caribbean. This reality directly impacts the realization of education as a fundamental human right. The data shown by the work of *Campanha Latino-Americana pelo Direito à Educação* (CLADE, 2014), and the investigation of the most relevant bibliography and legislative transformations, developed by Camila Croso and Giovanna Magalhães (2016), allow us to support the thesis that there is a generalized process of fragilization of public education systems. This process is mainly characterized by the negative impacts on the working conditions of teachers, on the democratic management and on the public financing necessary for the strengthening of public education.

The authors show that in all the National Constitutions and the general laws of education analyzed, there are laws that empower the State to transfer competences related to the supply of public education to the private sector. In addition, the incidence of the private sector has also intensified in the debate and in the definition of the public educational agenda, which is not based on a public debate that facilitates a broad participation of the actors directly involved in the educational process. This

is accompanied by the perception that private management is inherently superior to that of the public sector. With regard to practices, the activists interviewed by Croso and Magalhães (2016) express harsh criticism of result management for teachers and their relationship with their working conditions. They also question the impoverishment of education, the development of individualistic behaviors, as well as corruption and the naturalization of a competitive logic based on reward and punishment.

The deepening of this trend, economically, politically, and socially, has provoked important student and teacher responses, which demonstrate the contradictions that this process of depoliticization of citizens has been consolidating. Given that it is not possible to describe the multiplicity of experiences of occupation, and for reasons of the extension of the text, the most relevant dimensions are synthesized for the analysis of the process of repolitization evidenced by the student movements in Chile first and then Brazil.

The real importance of installing democratic culture in the Chilean school lies in the contemporary history of the country. With the perspective of that failed transition to democracy, it is interesting to look for options so that Chilean society can definitively change and achieve participatory democracy. In the search to build democratic institutions, there is a new generation of young people who found social coexistence and community in the participation and the demand to their basic rights. That is precisely what has happened in Chile in the last ten years, where a significant group of young students of secondary education have become protagonists of social processes, assuming the character of democratic social actors and repoliticizing their passage through School. Thus appears in the public space a practically forgotten citizen, often criminalized only by the fact of being young and discarded from public policy. Faced with the situation of segregation in which the State had placed them, the students organized, went out to the streets to demand the return of participation and social justice, the end of the social, political, legal and constitutional constructions maintained since the dictatorship; from the demands of their generation, including the right to education.

Although the Chilean student movement has a long history, from the early twentieth century to the eighties³ where the secondary youths were precisely a group of important resistance to the military civic dictatorship headed by Pinochet, this new version of the student movement made its appearance in 2006 with the so-called *penguin revolution*. It all began in April when secondary students of the Liceo Carlos Cousiño occupied the high school in protest of the water leaks that the authorities

of the establishment had not improved in a long time. From there, other educational establishments quickly began to be occupied by demands that until then were only internal, reaching around 100 occupied schools.

On May 21, during the traditional public accountability speech made by the presidents of Chile, President Michelle Bachelet made no reference to the demands of the secondary students, nor to the more than 100 secondary schools that were occupied at that time. The State of Chile, which refused to consider secondary students as political subjects and social actors aware of the lack of basic rights in the country, underestimated the capacity and political conviction of these actors. This triggered a true student revolution with more than 200 occupied high schools, with massive concentrations in the streets that easily gathered 600,000 students across the country. At the highest point of the movement, according to the Chilean Observatory of Educational Policies OPECH (2010), there were 1 000 000 secondary students actively participating in the process, of a universe of 1 200 000. Here is an interesting fact, because not only did public schools adhere to these mobilizations, which are undoubtedly the most affected by precarization, so did private schools, some for solidarity, others in the global demand generated from these mobilizations.

A movement that started for specific improvements of schools grew nationally and began to demand the end of the Organic Constitutional Law of Education (LOCE), a law imposed by the dictator Pinochet which, as is customary in Chile, continued to be enforced and determined the schooling of all Chilean students. This law was enacted on March 7, 1990, four days before leaving office and maintained without problems by the political pact governing after the dictatorship. The LOCE, for OPECH (2010), seriously violated the right to education, as it established a model of management and financing of education that was based on segregation and inequality, since it took the responsibility of public schools away from the State of Chile and gave it directly to the municipalities, which openly ended the concept of public school. In a country with one of the largest segregated organizations of territoriality such as Chile, this situation only increased segregation and made students from the poorest areas only have access to even more precarious schools than those who attended schools in sectors with greater purchasing power. In this sense, it can be affirmed that the LOCE brought about a strong crisis of inequity for Chilean education and a fierce crisis of social segmentation for schools, in addition to consecrating the possibility of profiting from Education. In summary, this meant that the State gave re-

sources to manage their schools to the private sector, which in turn could profit, in addition to doing so without any regulation.

The proposals of the students are an example for the country, because they manifested the need to rebuild Chilean democracy. Their demands were structural, in relation to the political and legal reality as a legacy of the dictatorship that until then the government coalition called “La Concertación” did not have the will to change, because they came to power through a pact with the dictatorship.⁴

After the mobilizations of 2006 an important part of the student youth of Chile changed their perspective in relation to their social responsibility, becoming citizen voices that demanded participation in social decisions and within their own schools. Thus, when the mobilizations of 2006 ended, an educational dialog table was created, where again the government coalition created pacts to maintain the privileges of those who profited from education, and gave the students the end of the LOCE as agreed, which meant a great triumph for the movement. However, from the uneasiness of that movement that did not achieve all the proposed changes, the malaise rose again. In 2011, the students went back out on the street. During the popular mobilizations for education of the year 2011,⁵ secondary students came to occupy up to a thousand educational establishments throughout the country during the months of June to October.

These occupations were accompanied by multiple internal activities and took place in various public spaces, with the elaboration of local demands and proposals for educational reforms. In barricades, street marches and artistic-cultural acts, marathons, performances or occupations of public dependencies and headquarters of the official political parties, or during hunger strikes; the spokespersons for the students declared that their struggle was not for personal benefit, because the changes they demanded in education could no longer be used by them directly, but by the new generations of children and young people who could exercise their right to education. And while gratuity and the end to profit in education were the most striking demands that could materialize as a right, they also claimed the participation of all actors that made up the educational community in the administrative and pedagogical management of each school or lyceum, and of the entire citizenry, in the formulation of educational policies. Thus, they argued, the commodification and reigning authoritarianism in education and in Chilean society could be overcome, which, among other manifestations, was embodied in the disregard of their approaches within the schools and their exclu-



sion from political citizenship, granted to the population over 18 years of age through the right to vote.

All these mobilizations allowed for a national debate that ended up linking the school system with institutional responses to the needs and aspirations of people in other spheres of human life such as health, social welfare and political participation. The critique of the commodification of life expanded and strengthened until several social movements converged in the demand for the realization of a Constituent Assembly that put an end to a neoliberal order protected by the 1980 Constitution, imposed by Pinochet and his followers. In this way, the movement of secondary students was constituted as a relevant political actor.

On August 31, 2016, given the *impeachment* of the former president Dilma Rouseff by decision of the Federal Senate, Michael Temer, assumed the presidency of Brazil. In the midst of this political crisis and in the context of a global economic crisis, an agenda of neoliberal reforms and privatizations intensified in several strategic sectors, appealing to the need for fiscal adjustment. Two measures caused controversies and were part of the set of determinations that led to the increase of social conflict in general, and of education in particular. First, Provisional Measure number 746/2016, referring to Brazil (2016), which extends the annual workload from 800 to 1400 hours, the withdrawal of compulsory teaching in art and physical education, curricular emphasis in the areas of language, mathematics, nature sciences, human science and technical and professional training, with the possibility to emphasize only two of these areas according to the criteria of the education system; and omission of the study of sociology and philosophy. Second, the Constitutional Amendment Proposal (PEC) number 241/2016, which freezes public expenditures, with figures corrected for inflation, for the next 20 years, and which also has the potential to affect the rules of minimum wage readjustment.

In this context of reforms, in October 2016, the largest occupational movement in the history of Brazil emerged in São Paulo, which later expanded to most of the country's cities. More than a thousand schools were occupied by the students in 22 states plus the Federal District, which were organized by the Brazilian Union of Secondary Students (UBE), which is the largest student representation body. These mobilizations had as antecedent and inspiration, the occupation of 200 São Paulo schools in November 2015. At that time, Flach & Schlesener (2017) reported that the students mobilized against the process of restructuring the state educational system, which involved the closure of 94 primary and secondary



schools, and the relocation of 311 thousand students and 74 thousand teachers. Alckmin's government was forced to suspend the measure.⁶

The experience of 2016 was a generalized uprising of students against the growing process of precarization of public education and in defense of it. The movement had to resist, mainly, the strong repressions of the State and the constant criminalization of mass media. Without a doubt, the movement was not homogeneous. For example, in Goiás, both students and teachers took over schools in response to the proposal to privatize the management of schools by Marconi Perillo. In São Paulo, the flag was raised against the corruption scandal linked to the food service in the Alckim government. In Ceará, the abandonment and precarization of education by Camilo Santana triggered the mobilizations.

Ana Julia, a 16-year-old girl and representative of the student movement of the State of Paraná, in the plenary session of the Parliament in October 2016, stated:⁷

(...) Our flag is education, our only flag is education, we are an a-partisan movement, we are a student movement by students, we are a movement that cares about future generations, that cares about society, worries about the future of the country..., what future will Brazil have if we do not worry about a generation of people who will develop a critical sense, (...) We have to be against a functional illiteracy that is a big problem in Brazil today, that is why we occupy our schools. (...) we need a reform that is debated, discussed, a reform that must be made by the professionals of education..., a school without a party⁸ is a school with no critical sense, a racist, homophobic school, (...) they want to form an army of non-thinkers, an army that listens and lowers its head, and we are not that (...). We are going to continue fighting because we are in search of knowledge. The student movement brought us much greater knowledge about politics and citizenship than the entire time we were sitting in the classrooms. Despite all this ridicule (...) we still manage to have a presence of happiness, because we perceive that we stop being mere adolescents, we become committed citizens.

The proposals for democratization and politicization of the occupations in São Paulo were built from the everyday experience of the student organization. In these spaces of organization, the research of Corsino & Zan (2017) shows the articulation of a strong autonomy of the students and the tendency to build democratic dialog spaces, through open classrooms, workshops, and in the tensions generated around the oppositions to the occupation. In turn, the study by Severo & Correia San Segundo (2017) clearly shows the processes of appropriation of the capacities of

the agency of the students, and a conscious understanding of the school environment as public, which strengthened feelings of responsibility. An element to be highlighted according to the study by Groppo *et al.* (2017), is the experience of building a political formation based on the horizontality of relations and the strengthening of intergenerational dialogue.

Larchert (2017), who examined the Occupy movement in Brazil in the midst of a process of physical and ideological violence, discovered that the movement was taking political institutional form and content through negotiation and conflict. It contributed in a *sui generis* way to critical training, which gave way to processes of awareness and problematization of social and political reality in terms of Freire (1992). Flach & Schlesener (2017) assert that the experience of the movement was generating changes in the individual, through the reflexivity that led to self-perception, in which the individual feels as an active part of the collective. This was what constituted the educational, social and political learning and training in the process undertaken by the students.

Final considerations

In the approach of emancipatory student movements to the neoliberal model in education, three fundamental critical nodes can be identified that contribute to the epistemic debate on society, education and subjectivity: a) the tendency towards the commodification of education in Latin America which, based on the universalist episteme of liberalism, denies political community, enhances individual liberties, and presupposes that education is a good for consumption and profit; b) this trend implies the advance of the dismantling and precarization of education and the public school, promoting an idea of an “obese, inefficient and ineffective” State for the tasks of improving the quality of education, and an idea of a depoliticized subject geared towards universal consumption and entrepreneurship; and c) the student mobilizations in Brazil and Chile, which claim education as a human right, show as a main feature the need to intensify the processes of politicization of education as a space for deliberation of “the public” and as a space for the construction of “the political,” democracy and citizenship.

The analysis of recapitulation of the literature has limitations due to the fact that it established more or less arbitrary decisions regarding the hypothesis that was proposed for the debate, and the adoption of a type of epistemological analysis that focused on identifying the ideologi-

cal aspects that underlie the formal education system. The hypothesis of the repolitization that is observed with the student mobilizations must be deepened in at least three aspects. In the first place, it is necessary to deepen the role of teachers and their training in the construction of political subjects. Secondly, it is important to analyze both the legal changes and the institutional restructurings that student movements achieve, as well as the strategies of fracture of the movements by the State. Thirdly, it is essential to develop ethnographic studies that are situated to understand the new forms of politicization that are experienced in these spaces of mobilization and occupation of educational establishments.

The relationship between education, subjectivity and society finds in these spaces of conflict a privileged place to deepen the debate around the transformations that the formal educational system requires for the reconstruction of a new ethics and politics, founded on human rights and participatory democracy. It should be noted that the constituted power of the neoliberal educational system is put in tension by the constituent power of the student mobilizations, above all by the denial on the part of the State of effective spaces of social participation. These mobilizations clearly go beyond the educational issue. It is a response to the tendency towards the commodification of life and the model of neoliberal democracy. The high level of conflict and the opening of negotiating agendas between states and movements is limited by the imposition of capitalist domination structures, which make it difficult to build alternative projects for society. It is the criticism of a vision based on the idea of the alternation in power and management of the neoliberal model. It is about reconstructing the social bases through processes of real democratization, of emancipation, from diversity and for social justice, calling on citizens to become political subjects of transformation. This is the most important flag that students raise from their spaces of creative, plural and autonomous mobilization.

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Notes

- 1 The concept of hegemony is understood as the ability to direct certain groups or social fractions over others. Or those groups that present themselves to others as those that represent and serve the interests and values of an entire society, obtaining voluntary consensus and spontaneous consent, thereby guaranteeing the unity of a social block that remains cohesive and articulated (Gramsci, 1995).
- 2 Neoliberalization refers to “the diverse tendencies of regulatory change that have spread throughout the global capitalist system since the seventies: it is a tendency that prioritizes responses to regulatory problems from a perspective based, oriented

- and imposed by the market; it intensifies the commodification of all areas of social life and mobilizes speculative financial instruments in order to find new niches of capital accumulation” (Brenner, Peck & Theodore, 2010, p. 23).
- 3 In order to consult this process, the documentary “Actores Secundarios” is recommended, as it reconstructs the student movement at the end of the 1980s in Chile. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Pu2pCZ>
 - 4 The agreement for democracy was a political pact that came to power when the dictatorship reached its end. This political coalition was made up of the Christian Democrats (the party that supported the 1973 coup d’état), the Socialist Party of Chile, the Party for Democracy and the Radical Party. The first president chosen in democratic elections after the end of the dictatorship belonged to that coalition. Patricio Aylwin not only supported the coup, he also summoned the military to take power in the midst of the crisis of 1973 from the Congress of the Republic.
 - 5 This process is shown in the documentary “La primavera de Chile,” available at: <https://goo.gl/8B6YL7>
 - 6 From the point of view of the legality of the fact, two positions were opposed. On the one hand, the illegality of occupations was argued on the grounds that education, being a public service, could not interrupt its operation, because the right to education guaranteed in the Federal Constitution would be affected. However, in the State of Paraná, the public ministry affirmed the legitimacy of the movement, based on article 205 of the Federal Constitution. This article refers to the fact that one of the functions of education must be training in citizenship, which means that occupations, as a form of protest, would constitute a valid action in a citizen’s practice.
 - 7 The translation of this speech was made by the and the authors. The video can be found at: <https://goo.gl/Uh1TBG>
 - 8 School without Party was founded in 2004 by Miguel Nagib. It emerged in response to the arrival of the Workers Party (PT) government. The assumption that articulates the meaning of the action of the School without Party, is the idea that the PT would be responsible of the process of spreading leftist ideologies in schools. It is, therefore, to combat this “indoctrination”, for which a first proposal of Law was presented in 2014. For consultation visit the following link: <https://goo.gl/JG3mvu>

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