

An autonomous teacher subject as a force of pedagogical renewal: two historical moments of activation of the teacher's movement in Chile

Felipe Acuña

email: felipe.acuna@uoh.cl

Universidad de O'Higgins. Chile

Abstract: Based on Hugo Zemelman's notion of the autonomous subject as the ability to react to circumstances, this article offers a theoretical reading of two historical moments of the Chilean teachers' movement where processes of pedagogical renewal are unfolded through the activation of a teacher subject. The first moment takes place in the first half of the 20th century with the emergence of pedagogical experimentation and its ability to renew pedagogical «normalism» The second takes place at the end of the 20th century with the emergence of a Pedagogical Movement and its ability to renew a teaching policy configured by the economic parameters of neoliberal precariousness. Methodologically, I turn to secondary sources to analyse both historical moments. Rather than obeying a historiographic work, the analysis consists of a theoretical reading of both historical moments, and it illustrates that an autonomous teacher subject, capable of thinking critically about its circumstances, is key to unfolding processes of pedagogical renewal. By way of conclusion, I argue that both teachers' movements share a process of activation and pedagogical renewal of the educational thinking of teachers. I also briefly refer to the political, theoretical, and practical challenge emerging from the analysis: how to keep autonomy flowing.

Keywords: Teachers; Social Movements; Chile; Subjectivity; Pedagogical Renewal; Autonomous Subject.

Received: 27/12/2020

Accepted: 13/12/2021

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, as the Chilean national educational system was in constant expansion, becoming a teacher was one of the best ways for a working-class individual to obtain a secure job opportunity. By the beginning of the twentieth-century, only two out of 10 children from five to 15-year-old attended school; by 1970, 10 out of 10 were attending primary school and almost four out of 10 secondary

education (Serrano et al., 2012b). Therefore, as Lomnitz and Melnick (1991) put it, «teachers provided one of the services most solicited by the population» (1991, p. 33) becoming *the* emblematic example of a middle class produced under the forces of the state. As civil servants, teachers had «a series of rights» such as «job stability; health care; rights to severance pay (*deshaucio*), a retirement pension, and a pension fund for widows and orphans; and the right to the free exercise of citizenship and to express opinion on political matters' (1991, p. 34).

According to Nuñez (1990), during the nineteenth-century, the central figure of the teacher was one of an unskilled labourer. However, thanks to the Normal Schools and the Pedagogic Institute, by the end of the century the first process of professionalisation of teachers took place. On one side, the Normal Schools were in charge of the formation of primary teachers who were called *normalists* teachers (*profesores normalistas*). On the other side, the Pedagogic Institute, was in charge of the formation of secondary teachers who were called state teachers (*profesores de estado*). Nuñez (1990) states that four leading figures composed teachers' identities during the twentieth-century: the worker, the civil servant, the professional and the technician.

Through the notion of autonomous subject, which I elaborate from the work of Hugo Zemelman¹, in this article I offer a reading on two historical moments where it is possible to infer that an autonomous teacher subject has activated a teaching movement with a renovating political-pedagogical project. The first moment takes place in the first half of the 20th century with the emergence of pedagogical experimentation and its ability to renew pedagogical «normalism». The experimental teacher subject can be understood as a dispute within the field of experience of teaching and learning between two different teachers' identities: a professional versus a technical one. The second moment takes place at the end of the 20th century with the emergence of the *Pedagogical Movement* and its ability to renew a teaching policy organised under the parameters of neoliberal precariousness and technification. The political-pedagogical teacher subject can be understood as a dispute between a technical teacher's identity and an attempt to re-professionalise teaching. Methodologically, I work with secondary sources. In this sense, the analysis, rather than obeying a historiographic work, consists of a theoretical reading of two historical moments based on the notion of an autonomous subject where pedagogical renewal processes unfold.

The article is organized in four parts: in the first section, I develop the notion of autonomous subjectivity; then I discuss the emergence of the experimental teaching subject and address the emergence of the political-pedagogical teaching subject. The article ends with a brief reflection on some analytical-theoretical challenges raised by the exercise proposed in this work.

¹ Hugo Zemelman (1931 - 2013), Chilean sociologist exiled in Mexico since 1973. As Retamozo (2011) points out, Zemelman is an author of disparate knowledge in our continent (p. 36) whose work, however, can be considered one of the most original and powerful that emerged from Latin American thought in the last four decades (p. 35).

2. Autonomous subjectivity as a category of analysis

In this section, I would like to address two central lessons of the Zemelmanian reflection on the subject that can be extended to the reflection on the teachers' movements and the processes of pedagogical renewal: i) the importance of not overdetermining subaltern subjectivities able to activate social and political forces; and ii) the importance of a subject who thinks autonomously about their circumstances to break this logic of overdetermination. These lessons, in the words of Zemelman (2005), enable us to reflect on the dialectic between being determined by circumstances and creating our own circumstances. I will briefly refer to both lessons as a way of defining the notion of autonomous subjectivity with which I work in this article.

Our relationship with, and our way of thinking about the present can be circumscribed and thus limit our capacity to situate ourselves historically. For Zemelman (1997), subjectivity, as a category of thought, cannot be limited to situations already established and controlled. On the contrary, the author argues that because it is part of the process of historical elaboration of the social, it cannot be a function of any time-space scale insofar its role lies in the elaboration of its own time and space coordinates (Zemelman, 1997, p. 24). In this sense, the historical subject is a contextual mode of relating with the present.

By relating subjectivity and history, for Zemelman (2005), the notion of history is one that is not closed, but rather the expression of a process, i.e., of the movement of history as results of the relations between multiple subjects and their respective practices. He adds that this opening of the subject based on its position on the historical present involves the need to distinguish a form of thinking circumscribed by the use of closed semantic universes from the subject efforts to position itself historically. In this second case, by breaking these limits, it becomes possible to address realities not contained within theories, which suppose the need for open thinking to the resignification of the concepts with which we are constructing knowledge (Zemelman, 2005, p. 10). The first lesson to address is precisely to avoid closing the semantic universe of the subject.

We can illustrate this problem with a very concrete historical example. In 1990, the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) published a compilation of articles called *El juicio al sujeto. Un análisis global de los movimientos sociales (The trial of the subject: a global analysis of social movements)* (Guido et al., 1990). The writings gathered here -by Immanuel Wallerstein, André Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes, and Samir Amin, among other authors- are based on a shared diagnosis: «today we are witnessing a global disbelief about, or at least a frontal criticism of, the former positive subjectivities of realization of history» (Guido et al., 1990, p.7). Although these authors present different evaluations regarding the current state of social movements, they all make a frontal criticism of the «old left», pointing out the emergence of a «new left». Besides marking the beginning of this new left, the social movements that took place in 1968 in different parts of the world can be read as a critique towards a form of left-thinking that uses categories, such as «class», in a narrow sense, imposing a mechanical theory of history on the subject. The narrow

category of «class» was limited to economic parameters, reducing and circumscribing history to the result of a mechanical struggle between economic subjects.

For Zemelman (2011), this specific problem lies in the dominant forms of thought of the old left, which produced a mechanical vision of history that did not allow the incorporation of the complexity of the subject into their political discourses and practices. In the 1950s and 1960s, he points out, there was a certain dogma on the Latin American left regarding the crisis of capitalism in the region: «by law of history, capitalism was in crisis, and then, by law of history we ought to have a utopian vision. Therefore, having a utopian vision does not mean any effort, neither a creative nor a disruptive one» (2011, p. 14). Part of his generation, he adds, did not give importance to the person and their subjectivity «since we started from the basis that historical processes were structured from a kind of legality that ended up being very mechanical» (p. 66). After the failure of the Popular Unity (1970-1973) in Chile, Zemelman's work was precisely an intellectual endeavour of highlighting the role that subjectivity has in the construction of historical projects. The problem with a mechanical way of thinking history is that it implies, as Zemelman puts it, a predetermination of the spaces of possibilities for the subject; in other words, that we are confronting a knowledge constructed in such a way that it authorises the presence of a single type of subject and, consequently, a limitation in the possibilities of intervention on the reality that surrounds them. Does dominant knowledge, indeed, offer spaces of possibilities to all subjects? (Zemelman, 2005, p. 85).

The thesis of *the trial of the subject*, in Zemelman's terms, is that, in the heat of the historical processes of the 20th century, a subjectivity was created and overdetermined that did not offer spaces for unfolding other possibilities of intervention on reality. A closed form of thought was conceived and developed that authorised the presence of a single type of subject capable of making changes, which was hegemonic during the first half of the 20th century. This was a classist, worker, masculine, and productive subject that is challenged in the second half of the same century by other subaltern subjectivities in struggle, such as, indigenous, sexual diversity, as well as feminist and environmental movements (Wallerstein, 1990). This is not merely a theoretical problem, since subjectivity, for Zemelman (1997), is not only a problem of different theorizations, but also constitutes a particular angle from which we can think about social reality and about the very thinking that we organize about that reality (p. 21). From this perspective, the old left was constituted by a dominant subject that implied a particular way of thinking about social reality and about the organized thinking shaping that reality.

The second lesson that I want to attend to refers to a particular view of social reality where the will and autonomy of the subject play a central role. For Zemelman (2005), a historical moment is a grid of possible articulations which can be activated from nodes of organised relationships in order to produce tangible realities (p. 86). Here lays the importance of the projects of sense (or «proyectos de sentido») that guide the subject. In other words: a historical moment connects a broad set of possible projects of sense making; some of them are more likely to become embodied and, therefore, tangible realities. From this point of view, reality, when viewed from the subjects, becomes a set of spaces of construction (Zemelman, 2005, p.86). The challenge then, is to incorporate the angle of the subject in our way of thinking about

social reality in order to recognise the multiplicity of options or projects of sense that every historical moment potentially embodies.

The importance placed on the subject is because the subject, as Zemelman (2007) points out, is the living part of history; it exists from a given history but also for the history to be given (p. 248). The subject is the organic matter of history, fluctuating between circumstances that both determine it and its creative autonomy of circumstance. Autonomy emerges, the author points out, when a subject manages to activate their will to construct their own projects of sense and thus stand up to face their circumstances. These, as Retamozo (2006) reminds us, are reflections nourished by the Gramscian concept of «collective will» (p. 212). I would add that, along with the notion of collective will is Gramsci's (1971) idea of «critical self-consciousness» (p. 334), as the way in which a subject distinguishes itself and becomes «independent in its own right» (p. 334).

Critical self-consciousness is a movement by which a subaltern subjectivity «becomes directive and responsible» (p. 336) through a process consisting in, as Gramsci puts it, to

work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one's own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality (p. 323-324).

This process entails thinking reality «with the labours of one's own brain», a process that Zemelman (2005) articulates in an epistemic way. That means being able to elaborate one's own thought, which is understood as a position that each person is capable of constructing from herself in the face of what she wants to know (Zemelman, 2005, p. 86). From this notion of thinking, it is possible to understand Zemelman's idea that the subject's subjectivity place the relationship between determination and will in a privileged position; that is, the problem of the autonomy of the subject in her effort to think and know (Zemelman, 2005, p. 88).

The autonomous thought of a subject is, therefore, that position that one is capable of constructing in the face of what one wants to know, refusing to accept passively and supinely the moulding of one's personality from outside. That is why Zemelman argues that the ability to react to circumstances defines the central feature of the subject's autonomy (2007, p. 249). The heart of an intellectual project aimed at restoring history and its dynamism as a contingent articulation of possible projects of sense is defined by this capacity to react to circumstances.

In what follows, and using the category of autonomous thought, I will analyse two historical moments in which a form of teacher subjectivity reacts to its circumstances, activating a capacity of mobilisation that triggers processes of pedagogical renewal.

3. An experimental teacher subject disrupting a normalist pedagogy

In order to understand the emergence of an experimental teacher subject, I will first briefly analyse the specific circumstances that gave rise to what, in Chile, has been called *profesorado normalista* or normalist teachers.

Normalist teachers to civilise the population

In the mid-nineteenth century, the training and presence of the primary teacher was an important way of shaping the national state after the formation of the Republic of Chile in 1810. The construction of a network of primary schools was established in this period, having literacy as its central focus. As Serrano, Ponce de León and Rengifo (2012a) indicate, from 1853 to 1895 primary schools increased from 561 to 1,659 and students from 26,262 to 139,991 (p. 22). They add that the primary school was the first positive right established as such in the history of Chile (p. 91) and established the territorial institutionalisation of the national state (p. 338). The primary school and the primary teacher were in many places the first regular presence of the state in the territory of Chile. The primary school linked, as none other institution, wide segments of the population through a shared symbolic experience. In this sense, it was the backbone of the formation of a modern nation (p. 22). The importance of the role played by education can be summarised in the name given to the state in this period and during the twentieth-century: *Estado Docente* or Teaching State (Serrano et al., 2012a; M. Zemelman & Jara, 2006).

This process can be understood as the formation of a new subjectivity: the normalist teachers. The formation of this new subject not only involved the elaboration of a network of primary schools to train students but above all the formation of *preceptors* or *normalists*, the two names given to the primary teachers trained in the Normalist School [*Escuela Normalista*]. By adding a couple of years of training, a student in this specific type of primary school could become a preceptor and teach in the primary school system. As Serrano et al. (2012a) argue the school was the first and only social policy of the liberal state in the nineteenth-century (p. 19). From 1865 to 1899, the preceptors increased by 241%, from 693 to 2,365 (p. 257). This increment was mainly related to female incorporation (p. 257). Their presence was promoted by the authorities who considered teaching as an extension of their maternal role and mainly because they had a lower salary (p. 258). I translate Serrano's et al. (2012a) vivid argument:

Schools created new actors and new relationships in Chilean society. The first, without doubt, was the figure of the preceptor, their formation, social profile, increasing feminisation. They were the first professionals certified in a symbolic knowledge who came from working-class segments. They were the heart of the school. (...). In this period, the primary school was the teacher, and it began to acquire a new residence, which is the classroom, precarious but different from home. New objects appeared sent by the central government: desks, papers,

quills, ink, chalkboards, world maps and, above all, school texts, which were the first prints that circulated massively in Chilean society (p. 21, my translation).

Chile, as a civil society organising its own state power, produced a new social subject, the primary teacher, as a normalising force able to create a space in different parts of the national territory that was «different from home» called «the classroom». The classroom enabled a teacher to teach different *precepts* using a new set of objects and artefacts that helped to shape a new «shared symbolic experience». Along with the emergence of a new relationship between a «teacher» and «students», this new shared symbolic experience, as Serrano et al. (2012a) put it, activated the need to figure out the degree of literacy of the population (p. 121). This need gave rise to the importance of measurement and to know the territory and the population, the statistics were called the «science of governing» (p. 18). A whole new set of statistical data started to be available for the Chilean society in order to regulate the population.

The formation of teachers contributed to producing important distinctions and differences within the population. The clearest one was between primary and secondary education. The first was directed to working class people and the second to the elites. By the end of the century, fewer than 5,000 students attended secondary education, while a little more than 100,000 students were enrolled in primary school (Serrano et al., 2012a). The field of experience of teaching and learning reached mostly the urban cities, where the middle and upper classes of Chilean civil society were settled. The educative force of teachers, in this sense, produced a new educated or «civilised» segment within the social body that was primarily urban, Chilean and from a middle-upper class. This «civilised» segment could be differentiated from an uneducated or uncivilised rural, native and working-class fragment of the population (Serrano et al., 2012a).

Therefore, during the late nineteenth-century and the early twenty-century, a teacher subject began to emerge in Chile. The person placed in the time-space of the classroom with their different object for teaching and learning formed a field of experience that produced an original and regular social bond that subjected both the teacher and the student. This process can be analysed from the point of view of a recently independent civil society that aimed to normalise their own population. Here I am interested in analysing this process from the point of view of the formation of a new teacher subject and illustrating one of the first moments in which this subject, as Gramsci (1971) puts it, started to «work out consciously and critically» their own conception of the world by «refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality» (p. 323-324).

The emergence of an experimental teacher subject

The emergence of an experimental teacher subject has its first roots in the struggle for the Compulsory Primary Education Law (1889 - 1920). One of the main resolutions of the First National Congress of Pedagogy held in 1889 was the struggle for a law for compulsory primary education. Finally promulgated in 1920, the first political policy promoted by teachers took them 30 years of struggle. As Zemelman

and Jara (2006) explain, the importance of this very concrete demand is that it is linked to the creation of the first organisations of teachers in the country such as the Association of National Education (1904) or the Federation of Teachers of Primary Education (1915). Even though the expectations placed in the law were to a great extent unfulfilled because in many places the Law of Primary Education was dead letter (p. 53), it remained in the collective imaginary as one of the first social laws coherent with the principles of greater participation, justice and social equality of the XX century (p. 52). This law, which sought to make primary education compulsory, was the first political struggle of teachers in Chile for participation in the way education was organised and thought. Therefore, was a struggle for expanding the possibilities of teachers to participate with their own projects in the field of experience of teaching and learning.

The formation of teachers' organisations was a crucial step towards the important role teachers played in the 1920 - 1940 period where it is possible to place the, according to Perez (2020), first wave (1927-1931) of pedagogical experimentation. These two decades are a period where primary teachers not only had a leading role in the formation of educational policies at a national level but they also elaborated an original and critical pedagogical discourse regarding their own field of experience as teachers by adapting the progressive educational ideas of the *New School* movement. As Zemelman and Jara (2006) state, the revolutionary years between 1917 and 1918 contributed to legitimise the reformist demands, among them was the «New School» progressive movement (p. 56). A professional conception of teachers' work, as Nuñez (1990) explains, emerged in this period. The most emblematic example was the Integral Public Education Reform of 1927-1928, based on a progressive pedagogical approach and led by primary teachers organised in the General Association of Chilean Teachers (GAT) formed in 1922. As Zemelman and Jara (2006) argue, they demanded a total reform of the education (p. 56), adding that even though the 1927-28 education reform was aborted almost the same day it was launched, due to the way it developed and its main content, it was one of the most significant reforms of the twentieth-century. It was the product of a decade of discussion during the 1920s at the centre of the teaching profession (p. 56).

At the centre of the teaching profession took place a process of critical analysis of teachers conception of the world, unfolding an autonomous process of thinking about their own sphere of activity. Moreover, its radicalism was based on its attempt to produce a deep change in the pedagogical methods (M. Zemelman & Jara, 2006, p. 64). The reform elaborated a substantive critique to the disciplinary pedagogical method of Chilean education. An example of this critique can be seen in the writings published on the leading journal of the GAT, *New Paths*. Here I translate a piece of writing published in 1925:

The current school organisation can be characterised in one word: coercion. The school confines students physically, intellectually and morally to direct their faculties in a specific direction.... Teachers have only one idea and will: to accustom children to obey according to a ruling social dogma. Because of this, teaching cannot be different as it is. It is not concerned about supporting the

spontaneous development of children abilities or enabling them to search freely the satisfaction of their physical, intellectual and moral needs. It is all about imposing already made ideas.... It is all about creating an individual who will be a cog in the machine, subjected and adapted to the social mechanism (Nuevos Rumbos, 1925, cited in M. Zemelman & Jara, 2006, p. 65, my translation).

The GAT, as a social subjectivity, elaborates a pedagogical critique towards a uniform and homogenous way of organising teaching that characterizes normalist pedagogy. This type of pedagogical practice can be understood, following Zemelman (2005), as producing only one type of teacher subject: a coercive and uniform one. The GAT here is defending an opposite idea of a pedagogy, which not only involves the idea of pedagogy as an activity aiming to teach students to think critically and freely about their own needs, but most importantly, aiming to teach students that they were materializing and bringing to life their own ideas and projects. By thinking of their reality critically, they were opening new ways of making sense of what they were doing as teachers.

This is one of the first times teachers struggled against the way pedagogy was organised and defended their need to conduct pedagogical research and experimentation (Acuña, 2018). Among the vigorous exponents of what was called an experimental pedagogical approach was the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, a primary teacher for more than 20 years (1900-1925) and Nobel Prize in Literature (1945). In the decade of the 1920s, the *New Path* journal published several conferences given by Mistral on the subject. In 1925, the following words, that I translate, appeared as comments to one of Mistral's conferences:

We must kill the pedagogical dogma, but we must be aware of not creating new ones. The theoretical discussion must walk along with practical experimentation. Then, we will remember the saying: it is easier said than done [*otra cosa es con guitarra*]. There is no reform possible if it is only done in the assembly, we must go to the field of experimentation; we must transform the idea into action (Nuevos Rumbos, 2 de junio de 1925, in M. Zemelman & Jara, 2006, p. 66, my translation).

Leonora Reyes (2014) has analysed in detail GAT's reformist ideas. She explains that, even though it was never hegemonic among teachers, their pedagogical ideas were an essential thread in the educational debate of the period. Their view of education not only struggled against the conservatives who did not want to expand education but also with the liberals and economic nationalists that thought that education needed to be centrally ruled from the state. As Reyes states, the GAT project dismissed the state monopoly of public education, proposing a school project governed by the community, based on a local and original version of the New School trend (p. 27). Even though the reform of 1927/28 was defeated, and a period of conservative counter-reform came after the crisis of 1929, the experimental ideas of the GAT were disseminated more widely. For example, a few secondary schools, as Mistral recommended, became experimental ones during the 1930s and 1940s (M. Zemelman & Jara, 2006).

It is in this sense that Nuñez (1990) argues that the failure of the professional ideas of the primary teachers had a significant effect on teachers' identity. In the 1930s, he explains, two proposals for a reorganisation of teachers' work competed: a professional versus a technical one (p. 207). The primary teachers led the first one with the educational reform of 1927-28. He states, on top of the frustration for the defeat of that professional project, since 1929 and framed under an authoritarian counter-reform, a «technical» proposal of teachers' work was developed (p. 208). Thus, teachers' work was normed, hierarchically organised and the «professional» identity was cut off of its development with the defeat of the GAT and with the frustration of the 1928 reform (p. 212).

The final demise of pedagogical experimentation took place during the second and last wave of pedagogical experimentation, which, according to Perez (2020), occurred during the radical governments (1938-1952). One of the last emblematic projects, described by Rubio, Osandón and Quinteros (2019), was the San Carlos Experimental Plan of Rural Education (1944-1947), which involved the construction of seven educational institutions (a rural school, a normal school, a health school, a farming school, among others) in an area considered an «experimental zone». The experimental project, directed towards peasants, produced an interesting effect of participation and autonomy (p. 96) among them. However, this experimental plan ended quickly due to considerable resistance by landowners and significant mismanagement problems, which brought up national debate among progressive and conservatives parties regarding the limits of experimental education policies.

The experimental teacher subject embraced a way of thinking, this is, a way of relating with the present (H. Zemelman, 2005) which fostered an active link between the teacher and the community (Rubio et al., 2019, p. 99). This subject involved, as Nuñez (1990) argues, an idea of teacher professionalism and decentralisation that was resisted not only by the oligarchic order of the rural territory, but also by a «centralist tradition» that was more interested in the teaching of a technical and administrative teacher subject. For the experimental pedagogical project, the failure of the San Carlos Plan meant to be confined and reduced to technical guidelines. As Nuñez (1990) argues, the professional ideals of the New School progressive movement were, at the end, confined in a group of distinguished pedagogues of the professional elite with the task of translating the modern pedagogy (p. 211) into pedagogical practices. This «elite of specialist» produced a technical teacher's work centred on methodological recipes, which were in fact the result of the vertical transference of the new pedagogical knowledge to the schools (p. 212).

4. A political-pedagogical teacher subject to disrupt a neoliberal pedagogy

In order to understand the emergence of a political-pedagogical teacher subject, I will briefly analyse the specific circumstances that gave birth to a neoliberal teacher subject.

Effective teachers to produce a competitive population

After Augusto Pinochet's coup in 1973, a different way of regulating the teacher was enacted in Chile based on market and competition principles. The 17 years of dictatorship, from 1973 to 1990, entailed not only brutal repression but the possibility of rebuilding the institutions of the country based on the principles of a group of economists called «the Chicago boys», who were trained in the University of Chicago by Milton Friedman (Harvey, 2005). The neoliberal revolution of the civil-military alliance enabled what Ruiz and Boccardo (2015) called the most re-foundational dictatorship experience of the region (p. 11).

The modernisation of education was part of a more significant set of market and privatisation reforms that took place in Chile (Garretón, 2012; Ruiz Encina & Boccardo, 2015). The book *The educational modernisation* of Alfredo Prieto (1983), Minister of Education under Pinochet between 1979 and 1982, explains the rationale behind the changes introduced in the new educational system. In education, the main interest of the family is to educate their children, having the right to choose the school they consider the best for them. For this reason, the family's right to choose schools becomes a constitutional right in the 1980 Constitution. The problem is that for freedom to choose to be enacted, the system must provide alternatives. The forces of the state were directed to the elaboration of an educational market that provides alternatives of choice. Four primary policy devices were used to fabricate the market system in Chile: the voucher system, which activates competition by monetising student enrolment; the encouragement of private subsidised schools; the measurement of the quality of education by means of a standardised System of Measurement of the Quality of Education (SIMCE); and the municipalisation of schools. All of them had as a common feature, which was the need to generate, as Prieto (1983) argues, a self-regulated educational system with less state regulation and fabricate the means to increase the degree of competition of the system as a whole (p. 93).

The municipalisation of the schools implied the most explicit transformation in teachers' working conditions. As Prieto (1983) explains, freedom of education was impossible within the rigidities of the public system (p. 88). The municipality, as an intermediate group, was thought of as the institution where community participation can unfold better (p. 78). In 1980, the public sector employed 80% of the teachers' workforce (Cox & Jara, 1989). The municipalisation policy implied the loss of teachers' historic civil servant status and rights, which meant they now worked in the same conditions than any private worker in the country. As Bellei and Vanni (2015) state, the «free-market approach was argued as a solution to the inefficiency of bureaucratic models and a system captured by interest groups, in particular teachers» (p. 196). Teachers, as Nuñez (2007) claimed, were literally thrown into the generic status of «workers», made subject to the standard labour law (p. 157) or as Lomnitz and Melnick (1991) put it, they were «thrown onto the labour market, with a considerable loss of prerogatives – job stability, salary increases, social security, and so on' (p. 68).

Additionally, the process of municipalisation meant that teachers' payment was deregulated. As Prieto (1983) argues, this deregulation was done in order to

increase the remunerations of the best teachers in a school. The aim was to lead to a sort of competition among teachers, which forced them to further training and to a better performance of their functions, in order to qualify for better remunerations or employments (p. 84). The idea was to retain and keep the good teachers and marginalise those whose work is inefficient, inadequate and harmful to the community (p. 85). Gerardo Jofré (1988), advisor of the Minister of Treasury from 1985 to 1989, describes neatly the image of teachers from this new neoliberal approach. I translate here his words:

If, as it usually happens in the private sector, the teacher perceives that his salary depends on the quality of his services, even at an individual level, and also believes that he will keep his job if he performs his functions efficiently, he will have the incentives to make an effort to his optimal performance. (...). The optimal situation is that the worker – and also the teacher – feels that he can obtain [job] security with his efficiency and dedication, but that unemployment waits from him if he does not provide a quality service (Jofré, 1988, pp. 204–205, my translation).

It is not only that the juridical nature of teachers' work was transformed by being moved from the status of a civil servant to that of a private worker, but also a new type of teacher subject was enacted. A new ontology based on what Foucault (2008) calls the neoliberal *homo economicus* was imposed on teachers. The historical economic subject of exchange, teachers' need to sell their labour force for money, is reshaped under the notion of an entrepreneur. It is not simply about teachers now selling their services as private workers, because even if they manage to do this, they are now required to perform efficiently and continuously improve their performance, becoming responsible of their own (un)employment. As Zemelman (2005) puts it, the possibilities to relate with their everyday experience as teachers was framed under neoliberal parameters. Economic precariousness and insecurity, a constitutive feature of neoliberalism according to Lazzarato (2009), became the norm for teachers by the end of the 1980s. The dictatorship transformed teachers' system of needs: their main incentive is now to keep their job by becoming an efficient worker.

With the Chilean transition to democracy, which began in the 1990s and was led during 20 years by four consecutive governments of the centre-left coalition Concertación, the economic insecurities started to shift to a new set of regulatory policies. Bellei and Vanni (2015) divided the 1980-2014 period in three moments: school market (1980-1990), market and the state: the third way (1990-2005) and the evaluative state: standards-based reforms (2006 - 2014). The main characteristic of the third way period was «the intention of re-establishing the state's active role within the market system» (p. 184). Despite of the expectations of teachers, as Cox (2003) argues, the governments of the transition to democracy made the strategic decision of not reverting both the process of municipalisation and the financial model and mechanism established in 1981 (p. 16). Among the reasons for keeping things as they were was the fear of authoritarian regression. As Bellei and Vanni (2015) state, «the term «educational reform» was avoided by Chilean authorities and policymakers and only «continuous improvement [was] referred to» (p. 182). They

add that the «only feature during this period that underwent a structural change was the promulgation of a new Statute for Teachers [Estatuto Docente], which established special labour and professional regulations for them, particularly in public schools» (p. 182). One of the problems that the Teachers' Statute produced was an internal fragmentation within the teachers' workforce that still exists: only teachers working in the public municipal system were subjected to it; the teachers working in the particular subsidised system continued working under the private workers' code. However, the Teachers' Statute did contribute to set a minimum wage, which implied salary improvements for all teachers (Valenzuela et al., 2010).

In the mid-90s, one of the main campaign promises of the new government was an educational reform. The social-political consensus and enthusiasm with the educational reform faded away in the first years of the twenty-first century with what Bellei and Vanni (2015) called the «impact crisis» (p. 187). As they argue:

In the middle of 2000, the SIMCE results for fourth grade primary students from 1999 were announced and that was seen to be the first national evaluation of the reform, since these students had been at school under the new curriculum and had been the beneficiaries for the greater part of the reform initiatives (p. 188).

The results showed no difference compared with the students of 1996. The «SIMCE was like the GDP of education» (p. 187); therefore, the whole rhetoric of «educational bonanza» (p. 188) was under a state of «shock, triggering a public debate that put the educational reform under «crossfire» (p. 188). The «impact crisis» had two interrelated consequences for teachers. First, teachers began to be thought of as having the principal responsibility for this educational crisis. As Assaél and Pavez (2008) argue, the unsatisfactory results of the students from the public system were attributed to the poor quality of teachers' performance (p. 43). Nuñez (2007) explains that one of the main problems with teachers was that their old civil servant culture had suffered an identity «shock» with the 1980s neoliberal reform.

The arguments around the culture of teachers provide a theoretical support to introduce accountability policies in teachers' work. In the late 1990s, teachers were seen as bureaucrats without incentives (Acuña, 2015, p. 9). Mizala and Romaguera (2002) state that the problem with the performance of teachers in Chile, unlike other professionals (p. 355), was the uniformity of their structure of salaries, which varied according to their years of service, i.e., by considerations external to their performance and independent of the quality of the teacher (p. 355). The old cultural practices of teachers were resisting the formation of an entrepreneurial teacher subject. This cultural problem was the «Achilles heel» of the reform (Bellei, 2001) and the way to solve it was by creating a set of policies of evaluation, measurement, accountability and incentives of teachers' work. For Beyer and Araneda (2009), active supporters of this way of regulating teacher's work, these policies involve linking teachers' salaries not only to their competences but also to the learning outcomes of the students. As they state, the insistence on linking payment to teachers' performance is not arbitrary. An effective teacher has a way superior impact on the learning of their students than an ineffective one (p. 412). To shape an effective teachers improving

the learning of the students was important for the competitiveness of the country, not only in an economic sense, but also in the international educational table leagues like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which are relevant measurements for the country's competitiveness in OECD and other international rankings.

Teachers' work conditions shifted from public workers who had certain job security as civil servants during the twentieth century to private workers who, in the last 35-40 years, have had to increasingly show evidence of their efficiency and productivity in order to obtain job security.

The emergence of the political-pedagogical teacher subject

During the dictatorship years (1973-1990), the Association of Teachers of Chile (AGECH), founded in 1982, was created to fight against the neoliberal policies and reorganise teachers. In 1985, the organisation decided to dissolve and participate in the first democratic elections of the *Colegio de Profesores*, which were won by Osvaldo Verdugo². In the early 1990s, as Cornejo and Reyes (2008) argue, the economic working conditions of teachers were their focus of struggle, the majority of teachers' social achievements before 1973 were abolished, so «labour conditions» demands assumed considerably more relevance than «pedagogical issues» (p. 87). The circumstances created during the dictatorship years were so detrimental for teachers' working conditions, that only one type of political teacher was available: a teacher subject struggling in favour of their economic needs. However, because Verdugo was a militant of a party of the governing coalition, as González (2015) explains, the organisation lost its autonomy, becoming a conveyor belt of the government interests (p. 42).

The appeasement and partnership of this first democratic leadership with the government, which also happened with the next two future leaders, resulted in a change in the leadership of the *Colegio de Profesores*. From 1996 to 2007, a left-wing and old union leader, Jorge Pavez, led the *Colegio de Profesores*, shifting the focus of teachers' demands from wage demands to a technical political dimension (González, 2015, p. 46) of teachers' work. Pavez was critical towards the new policymakers who consider that the only space for teachers to participate as professionals was in the school and the classroom; whereas, the definition and control of policies belonged to the technicians of the ministry and the politicians (Assaél y Pavez, 2001, p. 9-10, in Cornejo & Reyes, 2008, p. 64). The response of the *Colegio de Profesores* to this lack of participation was the creation of a *Pedagogical Movement*, the main agreement of the National Congress of Education held by teachers in 1997. One of the conclusions of that Congress, as can be seen in this translation, was:

² The *Colegio de Profesores*, the main teachers' organisation in the country created in dictatorship the year 1974, has had four presidents since 1986, the first three elected for three or four consecutive periods. The Christian democrat Osvaldo Verdugo (1986-1995); the left-wing independent Jorge Pavez (1995-2007); the communist Jaime Gajardo (2007-2016); and the dissident Mario Aguilar (2017-2020).

The strengthening of public education depends on the capacity for struggling and negotiating not only in the labour-union field (*reivindicativo laboral*) but also in the educational pedagogical field. It was concluded that educational-pedagogical thinking must be constituted to legitimise the task of teaching and position the *Colegio de Profesores* as a valid actor in the debate and implementation of education policy (Cornejo & Reyes, 2008, p. 111, my translation).

Here again we find a process of critical analysis of teachers' circumstances, unfolding an autonomous will directed to think critically about how teachers have been excluded of the political discussion over their own sphere of activity. The Pedagogical Movement was an attempt to reconnect with the experimental endeavours of teachers in the 1920s. In order to activate a pedagogical renewal, teachers needed to think «with the labours of one's own brain», as Gramsci (1971, 365) puts it, not only the labour-union field but also the educational pedagogical field. This meant, for the pedagogical movement, to go beyond the economic demands and start struggling in the pedagogical field.

However, after a decade of trying to foster pedagogical research, in 2007, the pedagogical movement was in «crisis» and suffered a «breakup» (Cornejo & Reyes, 2008, p. 123). One of the reasons that contributed to the breakup was that the leaders of the pedagogical movement, after the impact crisis of SIMCE (Bellei & Vanni, 2015), assumed a leading role in the discussion of the Teacher Evaluation policy. That discussion ended in «a movement from resistance to agreement» as Beatrice Avalos and Jenny Assaél (2006) put it. They were both key members in the Teachers Evaluation policy negotiations from the government and the teachers' side, respectively. They argued that there were «two opposite poles (...). One recognises accountability and incentives as a force for change and the other banks for trust in the strength of teacher professionalism. The Chilean system incorporates both perspectives in a tense form of agreement» (p. 264). This movement from resistance to an agreement not only produced a new partnership between the *Colegio de Profesores* and the government that contributed to the «breakup of the Movement» (Cornejo & Reyes, 2008, p. 123) but also resulted in a shift in the leadership of the *Colegio de Profesores*. In 2007, the communist Jaime Gajardo became the President of the institution with a discourse against the teachers' evaluation policy and demanding improvements in salaries and recognition of the historical economical debt produced by the municipalisation process in the 1980s, when teachers lose part of their retirement pension resources.

5. An open question: On how to keep autonomy flowing

The purpose of this article has been to offer a theoretical reading, using the notion of the autonomous subject, of two historical moments of the Chilean teachers' movement in which processes of pedagogical renewal have been triggered through the activation of a teacher subject. The specific contribution of the work consisted in reading these historical moments from the angle of the subject, arguing that the

processes of pedagogical renewal that unfolded in these two moments can become clearer from this point of view.

The first historical moment takes place in the first half of the 20th century, in a context where primary education had gained ground throughout the country by forging a normalist subjectivity. It is in the face of almost fifty years of normalist tradition, where the teaching task itself is described as highly coercive and uniform, that an autonomous reflection begins to be organised within certain educational organisations. This autonomous reflection materialises a social project called pedagogical experimentation that, emerging from the normalist tradition, holds a different vision of education and pedagogy, and at the same time, it aims to transgress and go beyond normalism itself.

The second historical moment takes place at the end of the 20th century, after seventeen years of civic-military dictatorship, and a forced transformation of the Chilean educational system, which brought about a considerable decrease of teachers' salaries and a deep sense of job insecurity among teachers. Faced with almost twenty years of fear, fragmentation, and job insecurity, an autonomous reflection within the *Colegio de Profesores* begins to elaborate a project of politisation of the pedagogical field that goes beyond labour conditions and wages demands. This reflection also manages to materialise a project of pedagogy that differs from the neoliberal one: the Pedagogical Movement.

What the movement for pedagogical experimentation and the Pedagogical Movement share is being responsible for the activation and pedagogical renewal of the educational thinking of teachers. Following the work of Hugo Zemelman, what I emphasize in this article, is that the aforementioned activation and renewal can be read as the unfolding of an autonomous teacher subject. What is activated and renewed is a way of thinking and critically reflecting on their own work, which develops a different relationship with their own present.

Under this new relationship, besides being forces that determine teachers' everyday practices, the circumstances—coercion, pedagogical homogeneity, and economic precariousness— are limits that subjects can transgress by means of their own creativity. The possible projects of sense that a subject elaborates, and the desire to materialise these alternative projects in reality enable the teacher subject to create their circumstances.

The pedagogical experimentation of the 1920s and the pedagogical movement of the 1990s are moments in which teachers stood up and faced their circumstances with autonomy, creating categories of thought capable of evoking, apprehending, and materialising, as Zemelman (2005) states, that surplus that is without shape, nameless (p. 90) that every present contains. The «Pedagogical Experimentation» and «Pedagogical Movement» are meaningful projects that seek to break the limits imposed by the understanding of education, school, and pedagogy held by a normalist or neoliberalism frame.

To conclude this work, I will briefly refer to the challenge posed by the idea of «how to keep autonomy flowing». One of the limits of the present work is how to better understand the reasons implied in the demise of both movements. Here I only offer one thread, within many, that can be followed: the demobilising effect that a step towards the elaboration of educational policies has on autonomous reflection and

creation. As Nuñez (1990) points out, the pedagogical experimentation movement was, at the end, confined in a group of distinguished pedagogues of the professional elite with the task of translating the modern pedagogy into pedagogical practices (p. 211). As the work by Avalos and Assaél (2006) illustrates, the discussion between the *Colegio de Profesores* and the government to create a Teacher Evaluation policy ended in a movement from resistance to agreement. It seems that, when the force of an autonomous subject undertakes government tasks, its creative and mobilising power becomes rigid and static. As Modonesi and Iglesias (2016) argue, one of the key debates within social movements in Latin America is precisely the difficult interplay between autonomism and hegemonism. On the one hand, autonomism means cultivating one's independence as a social movement, preserving and sustaining autonomous decision-making spaces and dynamics and, on the other hand, hegemonism means participating in different government tasks organised by the state to not abandon the dispute over the established power relationships that determine the every daily life circumstances where a given social movement exists. The two historical moments analysed in this article are examples of autonomism. However, it seems that when teachers organisations move from autonomism to hegemonism the «movement» stops. This opens a crucial question for teachers' movements and any other movement: how to keep autonomy flowing and, at the same time, participate in different tasks of government in their very different levels and scales.

6. References

- Acuña, F. (2015). Incentivos al trabajo profesional docente y su relación con las políticas de evaluación e incentivo económico individual. *Estudios Pedagógicos (Valdivia)*, 41(1), 7–26. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-07052015000100001>
- Acuña, F. (2018). El surgimiento de la voluntad etnográfica en la investigación educacional chilena. In J. Assaél & A. Valdivia (Eds.), *Lo cotidiano en la escuela. 40 años de etnografía escolar en Chile* (pp. 31–58). Universitaria.
- Assaél, J., & Pavez, J. (2008). La construcción e implementación del Sistema de Evaluación del Desempeño Docente Chileno: principales tensiones y desafíos. *Revista Iberoamericana de Evaluación Educativa*, 1(2), 41–55.
- Avalos, B., & Assaél, J. (2006). Moving from resistance to agreement: The case of the Chilean teacher performance evaluation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 45(4–5), 254–266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2007.02.004>
- Bellei, C. (2001). El talón de Aquiles de la reforma. Análisis sociológico de la política de los 90 hacia los docentes en Chile. In S. Martinic & M. Pardo (Eds.), *Economía política de las reformas educativas en América Latina* (pp. 129–146). CIDE - PREAL.
- Bellei, C., & Vanni, Z. (2015). Chile: The Evolution of Educational Policy, 1980–2014. In S. Schwartzman (Ed.), *Education in South America: Education Around*

- the World* (pp. 179–200). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474243223.ch-008>
- Beyer, H., & Araneda, P. (2009). Hacia un estado más efectivo en educación: una mirada a la regulación laboral docente. In Consorcio para la Reforma del Estado (Ed.), *Un mejor Estado para Chile. Propuestas de modernización y reforma* (pp. 403–446). Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.
- Cornejo, R., & Reyes, L. (2008). *La cuestión docente. Chile: experiencias organizacionales y acción colectiva de profesores*. Foro Latinoamericano de Políticas Educativas - FLAPE.
- Cox, C. (2003). Las políticas educacionales de Chile en las últimas dos décadas del siglo XX. In C. Cox (Ed.), *Políticas Educativas en el cambio de siglo. La reforma del sistema escolar en Chile* (pp. 19–113). Universitaria.
- Cox, C., & Jara, C. (1989). *Datos básicos para la discusión de políticas en educación (1970-1988)*. CIDE - FLACSO.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Garretón, M. A. (2012). *Neoliberalismo corregido y progresismo limitado: los gobiernos de la Concertación en Chile, 1990-2010*. Editorial ARCIS y CLACSO.
- González, E. (2015). *Arriba Profes de Chile. De la precarización neoliberal a la reorganización docente*. América en Movimiento.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith (eds.)). International Publishers.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Jofré, G. (1988). El sistema de subvenciones en educación: la experiencia chilena. *Revista Estudios Públicos*, 32, 45.
- Lazzarato, M. (2009). Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(6), 109–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409350283>
- Lomnitz, L., & Melnick, A. (1991). *Chile's Middle Class. A Struggle for Survival in the Face of Neoliberalism*. Lynee Rienner Publishers.
- Mizala, A., & Romaguera, P. (2002). Evaluación del desempeño e incentivos en la educación chilena. *Cuadernos de Economía*, 39(118), 353–394. <https://doi.org/10.4067/s0717-68212002011800004>
- Núñez, I. (1990). *Reformas Educativas e Identidad de los docentes. Chile, 1960-1973*. Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigación en Educación.

- Núñez, I. (2007). La profesión docente en Chile: saberes e identidades en su historia. *Pensamiento Educativo. Revista de Investigación Educativa Latinoamericana*, 41(2), 149–164.
- Pérez, C. (2020). Iniciativas, prácticas y límites de la experimentación pedagógica en la historia de la educación chilena (1927-1953). In *Bajo la Lupa*. Subdirección de Investigación, Servicio Nacional del Patrimonio Cultural. https://www.museodelaeducacion.gob.cl/648/articles-97010_archivo_01.pdf
- Prieto, A. (1983). *La Modernización Educativa*. Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.
- Retamozo, M. (2006). Esbozos para una Epistemología de los Sujetos y Movimientos Sociales. *Cinta de Moebio. Revista de Epistemología de Ciencias Sociales*, 26, 207–218. www.moebio.uchile.cl/26/retamozo.htm
- Retamozo, M. (2011). La epistemología crítica de Hugo Zemelman: política y metodología (o una metodología política). *Estudios Políticos*, 9(36), 35–61. http://rcsdigital.homestead.com/files/Vol_XVIII_Nm_1_1969/Petras.pdf
- Reyes, L. (2014). *La escuela en nuestras manos. Las experiencias educativas de la Asociación General de Profesores y la Federación Obrera de Chile (1921-1932)*. Quimantú.
- Rubio, G., Osandón, L., & Quinteros, F. (2019). La experimentación pedagógica territorial y la democratización del sistema educativo. Lecciones del Plan Experimental de Educación Rural de San Carlos (1944–1947). *Ensaio: Avaliação e Políticas Públicas Em Educação*, 27(102), 88–107. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-40362018002701488>
- Ruiz Encina, C., & Boccardo, G. (2015). *Los chilenos bajo el neoliberalismo. Clases y conflicto social*. Nodo XXI y El Desconcierto.
- Serrano, S., Ponce de León, M., & Rengifo, F. (2012a). *Historia de la Educación en Chile (1810-2010). Tomo I. Aprender a leer y escribir (1810-1880)*. Taurus.
- Serrano, S., Ponce de León, M., & Rengifo, F. (2012b). *Historia de la Educación en Chile (1810-2010). Tomo II. La educación nacional (1880-1930)*. Taurus.
- Valenzuela, J. P., Sevilla, A., Bellei, C., & De los Ríos, D. (2010). *Remuneraciones de los docentes en Chile: Resolviendo una aparente paradoja*.
- Wallerstein, I. (1990). 1968. Revolución en el sistema-mundo. Tesis e interrogantes. In R. Guido, O. Fernández, & M. L. Torregrosa (Eds.), *El juicio al sujeto. Un análisis global de los movimientos sociales* (pp. 15–42). Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales.
- Zemelman, H. (1997). Sujetos y subjetividad en la construcción metodológica. In E. León & H. Zemelman (Eds.), *Subjetividad: umbrales del pensamiento social* (pp. 21–35). Anthropos. <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=980246>

- Zemelman, H. (2005). *Voluntad de conocer: el sujeto y su pensamiento en el paradigma crítico*. Anthropos.
- Zemelman, H. (2007). *El ángel de la historia: determinación y autonomía de la condición humana*. Anthropos.
- Zemelman, H. (2011). *Configuraciones críticas. Pensar epistémico sobre la realidad*. Siglo XXI.
- Zemelman, M., & Jara, I. (2006). *Seis Episodios de la Educación Chilena, 1920-1965*. Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, Universidad de Chile.