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# 1 “Red Light” in Chile: 2 Parents Participating as Consumers 3 of Education Under Global Neoliberal Policies

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5 Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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## 7 1. Introduction

8 International research has provided evidence of a connection between the construction of  
9 collaborative alliances between parents and schools and the improvement of educational  
10 quality. In Chile, parent participation has been included as one of several aspects of  
11 community participation in the educational reforms of the last two decades. In this chapter,  
12 we analyze several Chilean educational policies that promote parent participation, based on  
13 three underlying logics or conceptions of education: the neo-liberal project of education, the  
14 civil-rights movement in education, and the emancipatory approach to education (Reca &  
15 López, 2001). These different logics promoted by educational policies for parental  
16 participation in education have been mixed, in the sense that one policy may contain two of  
17 these logics. In this chapter, we provide evidence based on empirical studies about parent  
18 participation, providing an account of the tensions produced between orientations  
19 stemming from educational policies and the educational actors that provide meaning to,  
20 transform – and in some cases reproduce – the proposed logic.

21 Following Apple (2004, 2010) and Gordon and Nocon (2008), we hold that globalization  
22 policies have predominantly installed the logic of neoliberalism. Neoliberal policies and  
23 practices are characterized as those strongly promoting private property rights, promoting  
24 free trade and free markets. Research on the effect of globalized neoliberal policy in education  
25 has depicted a higher segregation and stratification in neoliberal-practicing societies. We  
26 argue that neoliberal global policies subjectivize parents as consumers of education, and  
27 promote individual forms of parent participation through one dominant mode: school choice.

28 But, in Chile, parents have been subjectivized as consumers of education since the military  
29 dictatorship in the early 1980s, before globalization policies became increasingly dominant.

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1 Parent school choice was a policy installed in Chile by the military dictatorship which  
2 radically changed the educational system following a neoliberal, market-driven approach. In  
3 this chapter, we argue that globalization policies have helped to strengthen a type of parent  
4 participation in education, which focuses on their role as consumers. This means that one  
5 type of logic has prevailed over others.

6 In Chile the “neoliberal experiment” created during the military dictatorship and was  
7 preserved after the return to democracy, installed a neoliberal logic underlying economic,  
8 social, and educational policies (Fischer, González, & Serra, 2006). The structural elements  
9 that characterize a Chilean educational system are market driven, so principles such as  
10 deregulation, competition, and stratification were expected to be applied by public schools  
11 (Barlett et al, 2002). In Chile, this translated into the expansion of private schools by making  
12 them eligible for public funding, the introduction of market instruments to promote  
13 competitive behavior between the publicly funded schools; the use of vouchers; the  
14 collection of tuition fees; and the deployment of an extended range of opportunities for  
15 families to choose a school for their children (Bellei, 2007). Hence, it assumes parental school  
16 choice is an instrument consistent with the Freedom to Choose logic (Friedman, 1962).

17 The first major policy installed by the military dictatorship was the privatization of public  
18 schools through joint “public+private ventures”, known as public-subsidized schools  
19 (“colegios particulares subvencionados”). These schools are administered by the private  
20 sector and funded partly by the State and partly by the student’s family. The second policy  
21 was the creation, in 1981, of a large-scale voucher system, where the State finances public-  
22 municipal and public-subsidized schools through a funding policy based on student  
23 attendance records. Vouchers are not given to the student or his/her family but to schools, so  
24 that schools need to “compete” for student enrollment. A third policy was the introduction  
25 of a standards-based, high-stakes national assessment of educational achievement, the  
26 SIMCE test. These policies have installed a scheme where parental choice is understood as  
27 THE motor that can “rationally” improve education in a free-market scenario, where parents  
28 are assumed to be in a position to choose what they perceive to be the best school for their  
29 children. This context defines the role of parents mainly as decision targets, that is, as  
30 customers, who are able to choose the educational institution that best suits their needs based  
31 on information that is publicly available. As Montecinos, Sisto and Ahumada (2010) pose,  
32 “from a demand perspective, increased privatisation purports to promote and affirm parents’  
33 rights and individual responsibility in choosing a school. Theoretically, giving choice to  
34 parents will increase quality because they will choose a school that shows good academic  
35 results and schools will make an effort to retain the fidelity of the parents” (p. 489).

36 The “Concertación”, the center-and-left wing political coalition which governed the country  
37 from 1990 up to the year 2010, proposed a hybrid, mixed approach of neoliberal and human  
38 rights-based approach, combining both political community and market-driven models in  
39 their approach (Ministerio de Educación, 2002; Ministerio de Educación/CIDE/UNICEF,  
40 2005). During the decade of 1990s and beginning of the XXI century, parents were invited to  
41 participate in the school system as organized citizens through local and regional Parent  
42 Associations (Bellei, Gubbins, & López, 2002) but also as consumers of education through

1 school choice policy that was maintained during this decade from the military dictatorship  
2 (Martinic, 2002).

3 In this chapter, we take a close look at different forms of parent participation in the Chilean  
4 school system during the last decade, organizing these different forms based on the logic  
5 underlying them: Are parents invited to participate as consumers of education,  
6 citizens, agents of social transformations? Are they invited to participate in all of these  
7 forms? Which one of them is most dominant? We establish a relationship between different  
8 programs and actions oriented towards different types of parent participation, based on  
9 these three underlying conceptions.

## 10 **2. Parent involvement: Global views, local views**

11 The international literature shows that educational policymakers and teachers across the  
12 world agree that parents’ involvement supports students’ academic success in school  
13 (Epstein, 2001; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Latin-American research has  
14 provided evidence of a positive relation between the construction of collaborative alliances  
15 between parents and schools, and the improvement of educational quality (Dabas, 2000;  
16 Martinic, 2006; Reca & Avila, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2012). Flexibility and fluidness in  
17 the relationship between the members of the community and schools have been shown to  
18 constitute a factor of success in educational reforms (Reimers & McGinn, 2000).

19 Alas, although parental involvement has reached the status of general consensus, research  
20 has shown that *more involvement is not always better*. In fact, Pomerantz & Cols (2007)  
21 evidence that *how* parents become involved largely determines the success of their  
22 involvement. They also argue that parent’s involvement may matter more for some children  
23 than for others. The study of Fan & Chen (2001), for instance, confirms that there is a  
24 moderate, and practically meaningful, relationship between parental involvement and  
25 academic achievement. Parental aspiration/expectation for children’s education achievement  
26 has the strongest relationship, whereas parental home supervision has the weakest  
27 relationship, with students’ academic achievement. Likewise, the Abrahams and Gibss’s  
28 (2002) study shows, parent involvement and practices of inclusion and exclusion should be  
29 related, since parents who are familiar with the language and style of educational discourse  
30 are more inclined to participate in their children’s schooling. This can create a feeling of  
31 “inauthentic” or at least, non-authentic participation in terms of democracy (Anderson,  
32 2001), since if middle-class, educated parents are usually the ones who take active part in  
33 organized forms of participation, they may do it in order to maintain or strengthen  
34 privileges for the middle-class students, perpetuating social stratification and segregation.

35 In this context, parental participation, in many other countries, is promoted as one of many  
36 forms of school improvement and has been included in many educational reforms in the  
37 United States, in Europe, and in Latin America (Anderson, 2001), specially due to  
38 decentralization efforts (Fernández-Soria, 1996). In Chile, parental participation has not only  
39 been included in the educational policy of co-existence, “Política Nacional de Convivencia”  
40 (MINEDUC, 2005), but it is currently also part of the national school quality assessment  
41 system (i.e. SNED, Sistema Nacional de Evaluación de Desempeño). Schools that obtain high

1 scores on this measure receive benefits in terms of material and human resources. Besides,  
2 in 2002, a specific policy called “Política de Participación de Padres, Madres y Apoderados  
3 en el Sistema Educativo” was created by the Ministry of Education. Today, parent  
4 participation is also mandatory for schools willing to apply for the Preferential School  
5 Subsidy Law (Ley SEP), which boosts government subsidy for students identified as  
6 “vulnerable” (i.e. coming from lower SES backgrounds) (MINEDUC, 2008).

7 However, even though in Chile the post-dictatorial educational policies have recognized  
8 parental participation as an important aspect of school improvement, emphasis has been placed  
9 on different bearings of parent participation. According to Martinic (2002), although  
10 educational reforms require the participation of all actors in the interactions, communications,  
11 and responsibilities, in Chile there is a culture of non-participation –deepened by the  
12 consequences of divergent social thinking during the military dictatorship- that affects  
13 participation in school matters:

14 *“In spite of the importance granted in the discourses and policies, social participation is very*  
15 *difficult to achieve. In effect, people do not feel compelled to intervene in the public debate, nor*  
16 *are there formulas and techniques that guarantee a wide and permanent participation. The*  
17 *[Chilean] State’s track record and the representations that the population have about its role are*  
18 *part of a culture that favors “delegation” over “shared responsibility” when facing services such*  
19 *as education. On the other side, school cultures, the ways that many teachers think, plus the lack*  
20 *of flexible and participatory methods to work together with families and communities, affect the*  
21 *generation of active spaces of cooperation and decision-making” (Martinic, 2002, p. 2)*  
22 *(translation and brackets are our own).*

23 As we can see, parent participation in the school system is viewed as a difficult “task”, that  
24 provokes resistance due to the Chilean authoritarian culture, as well as to a non-  
25 participatory, authoritarian school culture. Developing stronger ties between parents and  
26 schools is a complex task, since these relationships mirror the contexts and inequitable  
27 power arrangements of the larger society. Nonetheless, reasons for promoting parent  
28 participation are value-laden and have to do with underlying educational views, which in  
29 turn delineate different conceptions of education and educational policies. Within each of  
30 these views, parent participation is promoted for different reasons and motives.

### 31 **3. Logics of education underlying different forms of parent involvement**

32 Ten years ago we identified at least three of these educational approaches of parent  
33 involvement (Reca & López, 2001): a) the neo-liberal project of education; b) the civil-rights  
34 movement in education; and c) the emancipatory approach to education.

35 Since the three logics were constructed following a weberian typology-scheme (Reca & López,  
36 2001), these “ideal types” are helpful in that they allow us to better understand the theoretical  
37 and epistemic nature of the discourses underlying parent participation. But, in real life, the  
38 different logics are intertwined, since the different forms and modes of parent participation  
39 cannot be lineally linked to one and only on logic. In other words, one mode of participation, for  
40 example school councils, can be traced back both to a civil-rights as well as to a transformational

1 logic of education, depending on *what type* of school council we are talking about. In  
2 consequence, some of the logics of education delineated in this chapter may appear combined  
3 in the concrete day-to-day experiences of parents participating in education. This is particularly  
4 true for the civil-rights and transformational logics. In this section, we describe and provide  
5 updates for each of these approaches as they have evolved in Chile, and discuss how parent  
6 participation is visualized within each of these educational perspectives (see Figure 1).

### 7 **3.1. The neo-liberal project of education**

8 The neo-liberal approach poses parents as consumers and clients. Within this view, education  
9 is seen as a cost-effective enterprise, where schools compete with each other in order to obtain  
10 better educational results. The neo-liberal approach places responsibility on the schools,  
11 which in turn deposit responsibility in teachers, parents, and students, thereby transforming  
12 political and collective responsibility in individual entrepreneurship (Sisto, 2011). Neo-  
13 liberal reforms favor private endeavors, since schools are seen as able to compete against each  
14 other in a market-driven economy. Within this scenario, parents are constructed as clients,  
15 since they are responsible for consuming educational services. As consumers, they should be  
16 properly informed – hence the stress is on standardized testing - and are perceived as capable  
17 of choosing the best educational options for their children, regardless of any other (economic,  
18 cultural) considerations. Parents are “free” to choose the best schools for their children, and  
19 this in turn feeds forward school improvement, since the “best schools” will prevail, and the  
20 “worst schools” will eventually be shut down (Elacqua, 2004; Torche, 2005).

21 The neo-liberal approach characterizes parents as *consumers of products –in this case, of*  
22 *educational services* - that the market offers, and of which they have the right and freedom to  
23 choose, based quality and preference criteria (selection based on school performance and on  
24 their own value-orientations). Parental participation in school administration and  
25 management is also promoted, since this is another form of expressing needs and  
26 approval/disapproval of the educational service being offered. Hence, parent participation  
27 in *accountability* is viewed as positive (Reca & López, 2001).

28 In Chile, in the early 1980s, under the Pinochet regime, the provision of educational services  
29 using a market-driven model began to be implemented. The model began by designing  
30 three types of schools: municipal, administered by the country’s 341 municipal governments  
31 and are totally financed by public funds through a per-pupil voucher system based on  
32 student attendance; subsidized private, financed through the same public voucher system  
33 but administered by the private sector, but where parents are usually charged an additional  
34 tuition; and private non-subsidized, administered by the private sector and fully funded by  
35 parents. These three types of schools cater to different socio-economic groups (García-  
36 Huidobro, 2007), creating a tightly segregated school system, where municipal schools  
37 almost exclusively serve the low socioeconomic groups and private non-subsidized schools  
38 almost exclusively serve high socioeconomic families, to the point that the OECD (2004)  
39 Report defined the Chilean school system as being consciously segregated.

40 The market-driven model designed under the Pinochet regime has not only increased  
41 educational segregation, but it has also weakened the total enrollment of students in municipal

1 schools. Whereas in 2001 municipal schools represented 58% of total enrollment, in 2006 the  
2 percentage dropped to 46.6% of total enrollment, and in 2011, to 40.7%. On the other hand,  
3 subsidized private schools grew from 45% in 2006 to 50.7% in 2011. Research shows that the  
4 market-driven model has had an effect on the growth of private providers, and on the  
5 decrease of municipal school enrollment (Cox, 2004; Taut, Cortes, Sebastian, & Preiss, 2009).

### 6 **3.2. The civil-rights movement in education**

7 Within a human rights perspective, the civil approach grants parents their civil right to school  
8 participation: within this view, education is seen as a formidable means of producing  
9 democracy (needless to say, when it doesn't work, of reproducing social differences). The  
10 rationale is that, since students spend most of their time in school, the school scenario is daily  
11 instantiation of civil rights. Dewey's (1927) conceptions of democratic communities, and his  
12 Progressive Education movement, where schools are seen as real-life contexts of democracy  
13 learning through every-day democratic practices, would closely align with this approach.  
14 According to Anderson (2001), the civil-rights and human-rights movements closely align to  
15 the conceptions of participatory democracy, as opposed to formal representative democracy.  
16 Based on Dewey's (1927) notion of democratic communities, supporters of participatory  
17 democracies sustain that the future of democracy in global, pluralistic societies depends on  
18 the existence of local social spaces that allow actors to learn and develop the ability to dialog,  
19 discuss and confront ideas and positions, in order to develop authentic citizenry.

20 The United Nations' appeal for participatory school communities also views parental  
21 participation as another form of exercising civil rights (Bellei, Gubbins & López, 2001). Within  
22 the civil-rights view of education, *parent participation in the school system is yet but another way*  
23 *of constructing citizenship*. Within the framework of a democratic government that values  
24 collective organization and participation as a means of strengthening democracy and  
25 guaranteeing its continuity, mothers, fathers, and caregivers play a decisive role in school  
26 management. If parents are informed and get actively involved, give their opinion and take  
27 part in the decisions of the school, more participatory school communities will be constructed.

28 For several decades, researchers have promoted community participation in school-based  
29 decisions as a means to democratize schools and to build more compromised societies.  
30 Within this approach, parent participation is viewed as a privileged means of empowering  
31 community actors and strengthening their competences to participate in issues concerning  
32 the due respect of cultural, religious, and other differences (Barber, 1984, 1992; Kahne, 1994).

33 Under this logic, parents are subjectivized as *citizens*, and parent participation is conceived not  
34 only as a mechanism that improves the management and quality of education, but and more  
35 important, as a way of exercising citizenry rights, particularly the rights of children and youth  
36 to education. Parent participation is oriented towards the consecution of greater equity in this  
37 domain, and towards the strengthening of civil society. Organized forms of parent  
38 participation within the schools emerge as a privileged scenario for civil empowerment and for  
39 the construction of citizenry, an exemplary method of exercising rights and values, respect and  
40 tolerance to cultural differences, etc. In sum, within this perspective, parent participation is  
41 viewed as a privileged space for the construction of participatory democracy (Anderson, 2001).

### 1     **3.3. The emancipatory stance in education**

2     A different approach towards education is the transformative or emancipatory stance. The  
3     origins of this approach can be traced back to Marxist analysis and to social-historical  
4     analyses, which influenced critical pedagogical views such as Bourdieu and Passeron’s  
5     (1970) theory of social reproduction proposal in Europe; and Paulo Freire’s (1963) pedagogy  
6     of liberation in Latin America. The emancipatory approach views community actors as  
7     victims of oppression and schools as authoritative experts, and members of the dominant  
8     social class, who exert their power over students (and their parents) in order to preserve an  
9     ignorant labor force, ignorant of their transformational power (McLaren, 2000; McLaren &  
10    Lankshear, 1994; Mayo, 2004; Morrow & Torres, 2002).

11    The transformative approach views parents as agents of change. If parents participate not  
12    only in the school system, but also in the pedagogical processes of their children’s learning,  
13    then they can bring to schools their culture and values, and transform the top-down  
14    curricula to make it more meaningful. Through their participation, they also become  
15    empowered. Parent participation is, therefore, a means of emancipation (Reca y López, 2001;  
16    Lareau, 2003).

17    This approach is oriented towards the transformation of the entire school culture, so that the  
18    school may understand that *parents are active, empowered agents of change*. It promotes deep,  
19    profound forms of parent participation, especially in pedagogical issues that have  
20    historically been construed as within the field of the “teacher-expert”. Ideally, parents  
21    participate in the design of the curricula, in the design and implementation of learning  
22    activities, not only as an assistant to the teacher, but also as an expert in specific processes of  
23    their childrens’ learning processes. Parents’ role is not only to care and provide for, but also  
24    to educate and teach. Hence, this conception seeks to make the relationships between  
25    teachers/school principals and parents more horizontal, by redefining the relations of  
26    knowledge-power traditionally established in the school systems, through the establishment  
27    of a scenario of shared power among the different members of the school community (Reca  
28    & López, 2001).

### 29    **4. Forms and modes of parent participation in Chile**

30    In Chile, as elsewhere in the world, parental participation takes one of two forms: individual  
31    or collectively organized participation. Individual participation is mainly viewed as  
32    pedagogical assistance outside school - “parents helping their children with their homework  
33    at home”- attending parent meetings, and complying with school rules and regulations.  
34    Parent participation in more direct modes of participation – for example, as assisting  
35    teachers in classwork - is infrequent (Raczynski, Bellei & Muñoz, 2004).

36    Organized forms of parent participation have been present since the second half of the  
37    twentieth century (Reca & López, 2001), but were, as all other forms of collective community  
38    organization, bluntly downplayed during the military dictatorship. After the return of the  
39    democracy, the Ministry of Education collaborated several years with UNICEF in a project

1 aimed at promoting organized forms of parent participation in Chile (Bellei, Gubbins, &  
2 López, 2002), mainly, Parent Associations and District and Regional-level Unions of Parent  
3 Associations. This project no longer exists.

4 The most traditional form of organized participation in Chile are the “Centros de Padres”  
5 (Parent and Tutor Centers). Unlike other forms of parental participations, these are  
6 organizations formed exclusively by parents and care-givers. Research performed on  
7 organized parent participation in the school system in Chile within the framework of the  
8 UNICEF project mentioned above showed that the ‘Centros de Padres y Apoderados’ (CPA)  
9 faced a lot of difficulties during the 1990s and the first years of the turn of the century (Guzmán,  
10 Hojman & López, 2001; Flamey, Gubbins & Morales, 1999; Martinic, 2002), mainly due to a)  
11 their lack of representation, since during the military dictatorship their representatives were  
12 designated by the school principals, with no balloting taking place whatsoever in those days,  
13 even though elections did take place, many parents still believed that CPA representatives  
14 were colluded with the School Principal, in the sense that they or their children received  
15 certain benefits in return for going along with the Principal’s actions and rethoric (Martinic,  
16 2006); b) their focus on fund-raising initiatives aimed at improving the School’s deteriorated  
17 infrastructure, which distracted their attention from the “central issues” of the schools.

18 A wider, commune-based form of organization, the ‘Uniones Comunales de Padres y  
19 Apoderados’ (Communal Union of Parent and Guardian Centers), a relatively new form of  
20 participation that geographically groups the former school-based Parent and Guardian  
21 Centers into district organizations, showed at the beginning of this century the potential of  
22 promoting the civil-rights and transformative approach through self-organized parent  
23 training (Reca & López, 2002; Guzmán, Hojman, & López, 2002). In 2001, Guzmán et al.  
24 (2002) were able to obtain information from 35 of these Commune Unions of Parents  
25 (representing 10% of all the communes of Chile). Through a qualitative study with focus  
26 groups and interviews, they described how those organizations were almost in all cases  
27 initially formed by the initiative of the Municipal Directorate for Education (DAEM), and  
28 therefore, were also hurt by a perceived lack of representation by parents. However, for the  
29 members of these Unions, being part of a collective form of participation translated into  
30 hopes of positioning parents as relevant actors in education: they wanted to

31 *“Change a little the vision that has always been present. We have always thought that we just*  
32 *have to unite to fix things or to ask for help. The idea [behind forming a Communal Union of*  
33 *Parents] that I have is that we can give our time and our ideas, and also receive the orientation*  
34 *from professionals and be able to work together” (Guzmán, Hojmann & López, 2001, translation*  
35 *is ours).*

36 Notice how in this quote parents still assume educators are experts, and they themselves  
37 need education. In fact, much of the work done by UNICEF at the time was to provide  
38 training to representatives of Unions and Communal Unions in topics such as laws and  
39 regulations, communication skills, etc. (see Flamey et al, 2002).

40 The relationship between parents and schools was consciously described as vertical in some  
41 of the Communal Union representative’s discourse: “There is an authoritarian relationship

1 of school principals with sustainers, teachers, parents and sometimes even with students,  
2 but in isolation, we don't work like a system....we don't interact as a community, we are  
3 kept apart in stationary compartments” (Guzmán et al., 2001).

4 Current research is need as to the whereabouts of these Unions and Communal Unions. Our  
5 informal experience with the former leaders tells us that the high hopes of social  
6 transformation, of “changing the vision”, are still present but have been very hard to  
7 achieve, due to difficulties in relating to school principals and school management teams, as  
8 well as with the media; but that the human-rights facet is very much a focal point in their  
9 work. For example, one President of a Communal Union of Parents in the north of Chile  
10 described to the first two authors, at a Regional Conference on Education organized by  
11 another Communal Union of Parents, his work in supporting parents whose children were  
12 “invited to attend another school” – a frequent form of subvert school expulsion-, or those  
13 parents whose children were not being accepted in a public municipal school, by  
14 accompanying them to the District Department of Education (in Chile, the Departamento  
15 Provincial de Educación) to talk with the authorities and, if needed, to present legal  
16 demands.

17 At the beginning of this century, the Ministry of Education promoted a new form of parental  
18 organization: School Councils, whose level of functioning is included within the SNED  
19 national school achievement assessment system. Internationally, school councils have been  
20 conceived as a collegiate form of school participation, where representatives of different  
21 actors would get together to discuss and make decisions about issues concerning the school.  
22 In some countries, such as England, school councils not only receive information and are  
23 asked for their opinion, but they also vote and decide on administrative and pedagogical  
24 issues, such as the continuity of educators. Therefore, they have, at least in writing, the  
25 possibilities of exersing power in order to transform the school.

26 In Chile, the Bill that created School Councils was passed in 2004, together with the  
27 extension of the school day (Jornada Escolar Completa. JEC). Their purpose, as stated in the  
28 official documents, was to provide a means of collegiate democratic participation across  
29 actors. The law establishes that every public (municipal and subsidized) school must have a  
30 School Council, “which will be of an informative, consultative and propositional nature,  
31 *except if the school provider decides to grant it a resolucional (o.e. decision-making) nature*” (Law  
32 19.979, Article 8). The School Council is integrated by the school provider or his/her  
33 representative; a teacher elected by his/her peers; the president of the CPA; and the  
34 president of the Student Union only when the school has secondary education. Article 8  
35 mandates that “the School Council shall be informed, at least, of the following matters: a)  
36 student learning achievement records; b) reports of visits by the Ministry of Education  
37 inspectors concerning the application of legal mandates; c) in municipal schools, the  
38 outcomes of selection processes of teachers, teaching assistants, staff, and school officials, d)  
39 yearly budget; d) quarterly income and expense statements. The same article also mandates  
40 that, “the School Council will be consulted, at least, on: The Institution’s Educational Project,  
41 normal and extracurricular program for the current exercise, goals and improvement  
42 projects, , a written account” by the School Principal of the school’s annual educational

1 management, before presenting it to the community, plus a review of the school's rules and  
2 regulations. However, Article 8 of this Law also specifies that the School Principal may  
3 revoke the resolucional nature of the School Council at the beginning of each school year:

4 *"Article 8º.- The School Council will have an informative, consultative, and propositional*  
5 *nature, except if the school provider decides to grant it a resolucional nature. In any case, the*  
6 *resolucional nature of the School Council can be revoked by the school provider at the beginning*  
7 *of each year".*

8 This was due to fervent lobbying at the policy-making level, mainly from right-wing, but  
9 also center-wing politicians actively involved as shareholders in private-subsidized schools,  
10 and who seemed to have received pressure from these schools. For many of those involved  
11 in this law, this last phrase sentenced the "natural death" of the School Councils, or at least,  
12 stifled its transformational power.

13 Eight years after its implementation, only one study has evaluated their progress and  
14 outcomes (De la Fuente & Raczynski, 2010). This study found that most schools had  
15 formally constituted a School Council, but that most schools had not appropriated it as an  
16 instrument of democratic representation, leaving most schools councils to "accomplish a  
17 mere formal role, with no gravitation in the lives of the institutions" (p. 66). Although this  
18 was the portrait of most schools, there were cases where school councils were having a slight  
19 impact, and very few cases where their impact was being significant. The authors conclude  
20 that the impact of the school councils was closely linked to the conditions and contexts of  
21 the schools:

22 *"The characteristics of the schools where the school council "lands" defines the form that these*  
23 *spaces assume. In this manner, it is unlikely to find a "good school council" in an elementary or*  
24 *high school that does not present adequate conditions, such as educational leadership willing to*  
25 *allow the participation of all school actors, or understanding and trust between the different*  
26 *actors of the school community" (De la Fuente & Raczynski, 2010, p. 66).*

27 The above paragraphs outline different forms and modes of participation, that can be linked  
28 to the different underlying logics or conceptions of education described in the previous  
29 section (see Figure). While the logic of neoliberalism clearly mandates parents to participate  
30 as consumers, it also suggests certain forms of parental participation, mainly individual, and  
31 expresses a certain mode of participation as dominant: parent school choice. Likewise, the  
32 logic of civil rights, based on the human rights approach, subjectives parents predominantly  
33 as civilians, and proposes collective and organized forms of parental participation as the  
34 most sought-after forms. In Chile, the dominant collective and organized form of parent  
35 participation has been, traditionally and even today, through Parent Organizations, and  
36 during the last decade, through Unions of Parent Organizations. Finally, the emancipatory  
37 or transformational logic of education calls for parents to act as agents of social and  
38 educational change, through different forms of participant, individually but mainly  
39 organized and collectively. In this logic, parents are invited to transform the school and  
40 students' learning processes through active involvement, individually through their  
41 pedagogical involvement, both at home and in the classroom, redefining the relations of

1 knowledge-power from within and establishing relationships based on shared power  
 2 between the members of the school community; in an organized mode, through school  
 3 councils (to give an example; there may be others); and collectively, through social acts of  
 4 transformation su as public demonstrations.  
 5

Logic of Education	Subjectification of Parents	Forms of Parent Participation	Dominant Modes of Parent Participation in Chile
Neo-liberal	Parents as consumers	Individual	School choice
Civil-rights	Parents as civilians	Collective and organized	Parental Associations
Emancipatory	Parents as agents of change	Individual, collective, and organized	Pedagogical involvement School councils Public demonstrations

6 **Figure 1.** Forms and modes of parent participation in Chile, their relation to different types of parent  
 7 subjectification, and to different underlying logics of education.

8 In the next pages, we focus on parent school choice as of the current form of parent  
 9 participation in Chile. We pose that, although the other modes of parent participation are  
 10 still present in our country (Parent Associations; School Councils; individual pedagogical  
 11 involvement, and during the year 2011, public demonstrations), parental school choice is  
 12 being portrayed as THE most important form of parent participation. Underlying this mode  
 13 of participation is an individual (not collective, not organized) and narrows form of  
 14 participation. Underlying both mode and form is, of course, a neoliberal logic towards  
 15 education.

16 We draw from results reported in the literature, as well as from original data obtained  
 17 through a discourse analysis performed by the third author (Sisto) on recent information  
 18 given to parents by the central government. The discourse analysis was performed  
 19 considering as corpus, the government letter accompanying a document called “The traffic  
 20 light”, elaborated by Ministry of Education to provide “more information” to parents. Our  
 21 purpose was to analyze the types of actions promoted by this instrument for parents and  
 22 legal guardians, in order to understand how parents and legal guardians are understood by  
 23 the government policies. We took the “Traffic Light Map” as an instrument meant to mold  
 24 the actions of these actors coherently with the logic of neoliberalism.

25 In addition, we draw from two unpublished studies in two regions of Chile performed  
 26 between the years 2009 and 2010. Both studies were performed by the second author  
 27 (Madrid) while working at Programa CRECE, a University-based technical-assistance  
 28 program for public schools based at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. Study 1  
 29 was performed in a rural community of Region VI in Chile and its objective was to describe  
 30 the perception of the educational community about the public education provided by the  
 31 local Municipality (CRECE, 2009). This study had a quantitative phase and a qualitative  
 32 phase. In the first phase, a questionnaire was designed and applied to capture the

1 perception of the full student enrollment of all 25 municipal schools in the community. Out  
2 of a universe 4.200, within a 95% confidence level and a 5% error, the sample size was set at  
3 453 cases. A total of 1,957 questionnaires were completed. In the second phase, a series of  
4 focus group sessions were conducted with participants drawn from the parent pool who  
5 were asked to complement and drill on the information obtained by means of the  
6 questionnaire. Five focus groups were conducted with parents who qualified on two counts:  
7 they had to live in different locations within the community and have a different number of  
8 years of experience with the school. Candidate participants were drawn using the data  
9 contained in the questionnaires, and then 34 of them were randomly contacted by telephone.  
10 Focus groups had 5-7 participants each. These were recorded, transcribed and later analyzed  
11 through content analysis.

12 Study 2 aimed at understanding the process by which parents and tutors chose a school. The  
13 methodology chosen was qualitative and had an exploratory character (CRECE, 2010). The  
14 sample was made out of four female parents who lived within the same neighborhood and  
15 had the same socio-economic condition. The selection criteria was dichotomous: two of the  
16 participants were chosen from the pool of parents who had chosen to have their children  
17 leave the municipal school and attend a private-subsidized school; the other two had chosen  
18 that their children would remain studying in the municipal educational system. Two  
19 interviews were conducted in depth with each participant. They were recorded, transcribed  
20 and later analyzed using content analysis.

## 21 **5. Parents as consumers of education**

22 The logic of neoliberalism subjectivizes parents as consumers of education, placing the  
23 emphasis on their right to choose schools. Parents are deemed consumers of pre-existing  
24 educational products-services available in the marketplace, which he/he has the right and  
25 liberty to choose, according to criteria of quality and preference, that is, of educational  
26 results and of value-laden orientations of preference. Election is a central aspect of this logic  
27 (Reca & López, 2001).

28 In this section we look at this mode of participation in Chile, from two perspectives. First,  
29 the role of central governments during the last three decades and how this role has changed  
30 with the change of governments. Second, the ways in which parents opt to choose schools,  
31 and the reasons underlying their elections.

### 32 **5.1. The government's call for school choice**

33 As pointed out earlier, in the eighties, out of the political regime under a dictatorship, Chile  
34 underwent a radical restructure of the financial and management components of its  
35 educational system by introducing a demand-driven subsidy. This in turn meant students  
36 and their parents became economic actors, with the latter being in charge of deciding and  
37 selecting the "best" educational offer, within the logic of market forces. One of the most  
38 relevant assumptions of this perspective has been the conviction that the freedom to choose

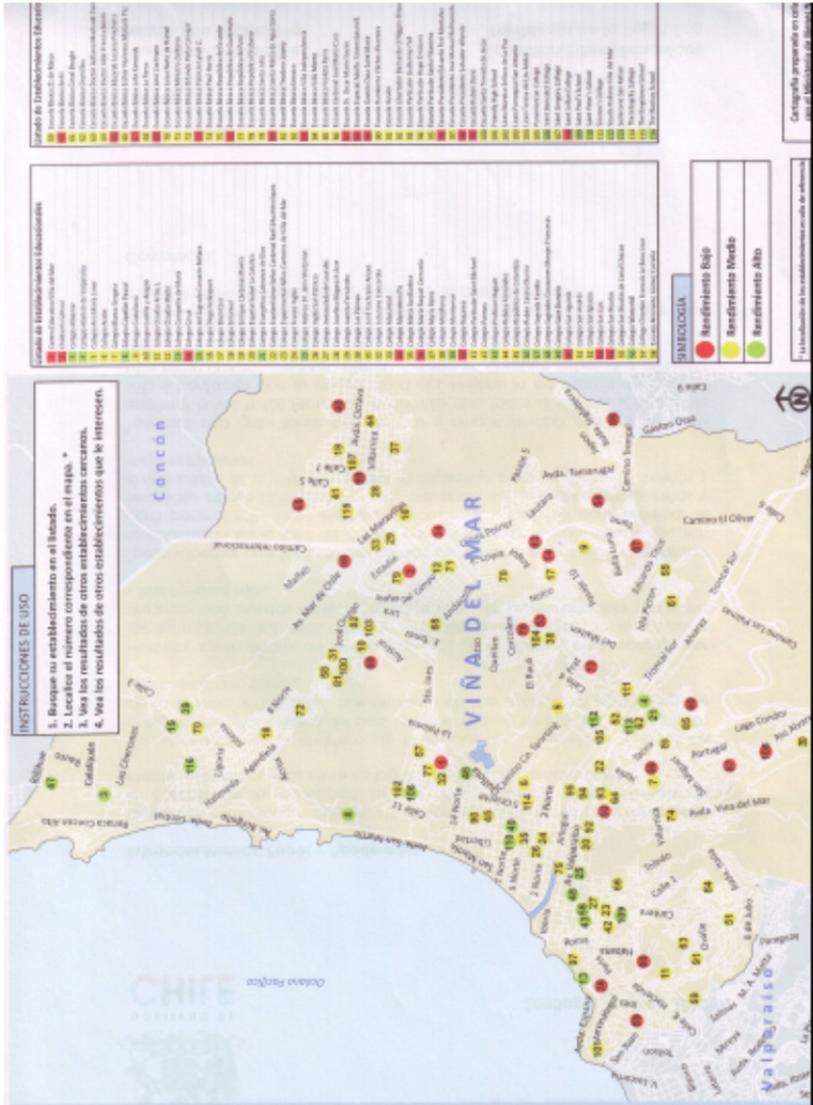
1 a school not only improve the degree of satisfaction of parents and students but also to  
2 stimulate a systemic change, and therefore to directly improve the quality of education.  
3 (Neal 2002; Hoxby, 2001, 2002; Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Plank & Sykes, 2003). This  
4 improvement of schools would be the result of competitive pressure stimulated by parents  
5 and tutors. Thus, in the aforementioned educational model, parents and particularly their  
6 ability to choose are paramount to the proper performance of the educational “market”.

7 During the 1990s and the first decade of the XXI century, the Coalition did not exercise  
8 active efforts to stimulate parent school choice. Information on school academic results was  
9 available in schools, and once the internet grew in the country, the central government put  
10 up a web page on the results of the national stakes testing system (Sistema Nacional de la  
11 Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación, SIMCE; www.simce.cl). Progress on this web  
12 page included showing results through a nested scheme, where schools were compared to  
13 the standardized mean of schools of the same dependency. Since dependency is often used  
14 in Chile as a proxy of socioeconomic status (SES), due to the high segregation and  
15 stratification of the Chilean educational system, this meant that parents were invited to  
16 interpret their school’s academic records by comparing them to schools of similar SES.  
17 However, given that the rate of internet usage among medium-low and low SES families is  
18 low, the use of this data to inform parents’school choice was rare; the web page was  
19 probably used more by researchers than by parents.

20 One of the first educational actions undertaken by the first right-wing government that won  
21 a democratic election in the year 2010, was to provide “more information” to parents, so that  
22 they would better exercise their right to school choice. During the first months after their  
23 election, the Ministry of Education implemented a rating system that ranked schools  
24 exclusively based on their last SIMCE test scores. This information tried to “nurture”  
25 stakeholders’ decision-making on school enrollment. The “Traffic Light” (*semáforo*), as  
26 promoted by the Minister of Education, was a system where schools were ranked by their  
27 last SIMCE scores against nearby schools of the same commune. Parents received a “traffic-  
28 light map” in which schools were marked red if their score was below the national average;  
29 yellow if it was similar, and green if it was above the national average (see Figure 2). The  
30 rationale was that, if parents were better informed about the SIMCE results of their schools,  
31 they could make better decisions as to where to place their children. Unlike the SIMCE  
32 website available during the last decade, the “Traffic Light Map” does not reveal additional  
33 information, omitting data such as the SES background of the students.

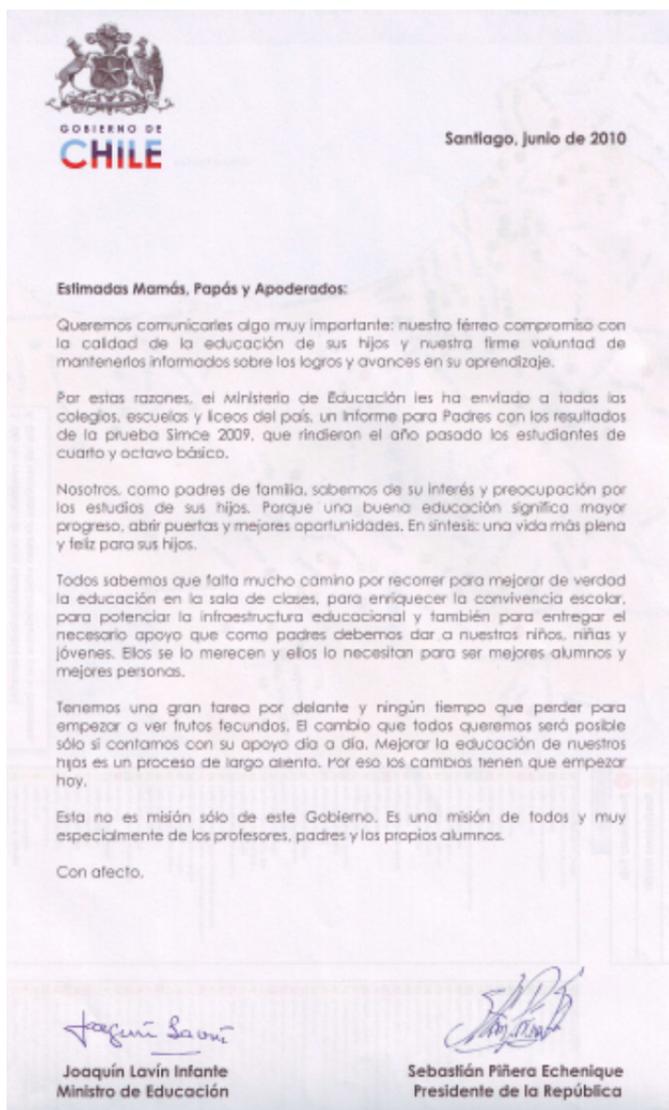
34 Figure 2 shows the “Traffic Light” given to parents in one city of the Region of Valparaíso.  
35 This is a sea-side city, with the Pacific Ocean to the west, and medium-sized hills to the east.  
36 In this city, the poorer neighborhoods are located east, that is is, in the hills. The “Traffic  
37 Light” map shows most red dots (below national average) are located in the hills, and that  
38 most green dots (above national average) are located near the bay. So, actually, this is a  
39 “map of poverty and segregation”. The concentration of green and red traffic lights follows  
40 a pattern of income level differences. The majority of the red dots correspond to public  
41 municipal schools, which, as we have described above, serve mainly children from lower

1 SES, and the majority of green dots correspond to private schools serving children from  
 2 higher SES backgrounds. Curiously, public information still exists in the SIMCE website,  
 3 whichs take into account context. Moreover, a pamphlet explaining the school’s scores was  
 4 designed and delivered to parents that year, which compares schools of similar contextual  
 5 features, but a decision was made to give more publicity to the SIMCE map in the media, as  
 6 a means to empower parents to choose a school for their children.



7  
 8 **Figure 2.** “Traffic Light Map” sent to parents by the Chilean Ministry of Education during 2010 in one  
 9 commune in the Region of Valparaíso

1 The “Traffic Light” was given to all parents accompanied by a letter signed by the recently  
2 elected President Sebastián Piñera, and by the former Minister of Education, Joaquín Lavín  
3 (see Figure 3). Both documents were given to all parents whose children were enrolled in  
4 public municipal schools. Its explicit purpose was to inform parents on the learning outcomes  
5 of different schools in the commune through a commune territorial map, with the green,  
6 yellow, and red dots indicating not only the school’s location, but also their results on the last  
7 SIMCE test, compared to the national norm (the standardized mean is set at 250 points).



8  
9 **Figure 3.** Letter sent to parents along with the “Traffic Light Map” by the Ministry of Education in 2010.

1 Following the criteria of discourse analysis, we used the criterion of *representativity*  
2 developed by Ibáñez and Iñiguez (1996), according to which texts are representative if they  
3 are habitual products in the context to be analyzed, and if they manifest the relation to be  
4 studied (Iñiguez & Antaki, 1994). Public discourses from Ministry authorities, as well as  
5 leaflets and manuals for dissemination, are rich sources for analyzing how the justifying  
6 rhetoric in which transformations are installed in the public agenda operate, by seeking  
7 social legitimacy and appealing to the identities of the social actors involved.

8 The text was analyzed following principles of Discourse Analysis as developed by the  
9 Discourse and Rhetoric group of Loughborough (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1996;  
10 Wetherell et al., 2001). This type of analysis confronts texts as forms of social action. As  
11 Ibáñez and Iñiguez (1996) propose, the task of this type of analysis is to “bring to light the  
12 power of language as a constitutive and regulatory practice” (p. 75). This is why the  
13 orientation is pragmatic and rhetoric. This analysis allows understanding *how*, through  
14 different texts, rhetorical strategies are deployed which construct certain versions of what is  
15 real, in this case certain versions of identities become convincing, thereby socavating other  
16 alternative versions. What we present is no detailed in the sense of the rhetoric and  
17 linguistic perspective of discourse analysis, and the purpose is to use this analysis as an  
18 illustration of the type of relation that, through public policies, is being attempted to build  
19 between State and parents.

20 The text begins as follows:

21 *Dear Mothers, Fathers, and Legal Guardians:*

22 *We want to communicate to you something very important: our tight commitment with the*  
23 *quality of your children’s education, and our firm will to maintain you informed about the*  
24 *achievements and advances in their learning outcomes.*

25 *For these reasons, the Ministry of Education has sent all elementary and high schools of the*  
26 *country, a Report for Parents with the results of the Simce 2009 test, that students from fourth*  
27 *and eight grade answered last year.*

28 As we can appreciate in this fragment, at the beginning of the text the speaker takes the  
29 position of he who is “tightly committed” with the quality of education of the children of the  
30 “dear mothers, parents, and legal guardians”, explaining in the context of this “commitment”  
31 declared, the “firm will to maintain them informed of the achievements and advances in their  
32 learning outcomes”. It is in the framework of these declarations that the remittance of the  
33 document is explained, which is nominated as “results of the Simce 2009 test”, omitting its  
34 comparative nature.

35 This first paragraph shows a remarkable rhetoric operation: the document is constructed as  
36 a report of results, not as a comparative report, and emerges as an expression of the  
37 commitment declared by the authorities with the quality of their childrens’ education. The  
38 responsibility of the authority is constructed as that of informing. This is articulated with  
39 the responsibilities pertaining to parents, as is indicated in the next paragraph:

1        *We, as parents of families, know of your interest and preoccupation about the studies of your*  
2        *children. Because a good education means a higher progress, opens up doors and better*  
3        *opportunities. In synthesis, a fuller and happier life your children.*

4        In this text, we can appreciate how the speakers identify with the parents, subjects addressee  
5        of this missive. The authorities describe themselves as parents. This displacement serves to  
6        account for the duties and responsibilities of the speakers, appealing directly to the  
7        addressees. A good parent must take interest and worry about the studies of their children.  
8        The reason the text offers for this interest, has to do with the fact that a “good education” is  
9        constructed as an instrument through which their sons and daughters may “progress”. The  
10       text is constructing education as responsible for social mobilization, and this in turn means  
11       that the “doors will open” and that better opportunities will arrive, “in synthesis, a fuller  
12       and happier life”. Therefore, in this paragraph responsibilities are construed, with a strong  
13       moralizing character, since if parents do not accomplish their responsibility, what is at stake  
14       is their children’s happiness.

15       It is important to pause at this point. The document, a “traffic light of education”, that is  
16       presented through this letter, is indicated simply as a report of “their children’s learning  
17       outcomes”, not as a document that compares schools. In this document, the best and worst  
18       results of the commune are supposedly presented. The parents and legal guardians to  
19       whom the document is delivered, are indicated that the information is delivered to them as  
20       part of the State’s commitment, and that they, as parents and legal guardians, must act  
21       accordingly, since if they don’t, they would be failing their responsibility, hindering their  
22       chance to achieve happiness and a full life.

23       Even though the letter does not explicitly suggest what parents should actually do, the  
24       implicature refers to their responsibility in the act of choosing a school. A school indicated  
25       with a red dot is assimilated as a school of bad quality, and with it, of incapable of  
26       providing progress, happiness, and full life for their children. The State has accomplished its  
27       responsibility of informing, now parents and legal guardings must do their own.

28       The text ends in the following way:

29       *We all know that there is a long way to go in really improving the education in the classrooms,*  
30       *in enriching school coexistence, in fostering educational infrastructure, and also in delivering*  
31       *the necessary support that as parents we must give to our children and youth. They deserve it,*  
32       *and they need it in order to become better students and better persons.*

33       *We have a big task ahead of us, and no time to waste to begin seeing fertile fruits. The change*  
34       *that we all want will be posible only if we count with your daily suuport. Improving our*  
35       *children’s Education is a long-breath process. That is why the changes need to start today.*

36       *This is not only a mission of this Government. This is a mission of everyone, and very specially,*  
37       *of teachers, parents, and of the students themselves.*

38       *With affect*

39       *Joaquín Lavín Infante*  
40       *Minister of Education*

*Sebastián Piñera Echenique*  
*President of the Republic*

1 This closure reinforces the idea that the improvement of education is responsibility of all,  
2 alluding explicitly to parents and legal guardians, reinforcing the moral load of this  
3 mandate: *"they deserve it and they need it to be better students and better persons"*. Through the  
4 use of the first person plural (us), the subject addressee of this letter is appealed to as  
5 responsible: *"We have a great task ahead of us and no time to waste"*. And, as the text goes  
6 on, *"the changes need to start today"*.

7 In this manner, the subject – mothers, fathers, and legal guardians- are appealed as  
8 responsible for the education of their children. Considering that this letter presents the  
9 document nominated as the *"Traffic Light of Education"*, the responsibility is clear: school  
10 election. Placing your child in a school marked as red is condemning his/her future. What  
11 you should do, is to place your child in a green-dotted school....this is how you can give  
12 them the opportunity to be plentiful and happy...this is parents' duty. The receipt of this  
13 letter cannot do anything else, since the moralizing force appeals directly to the subject,  
14 obliging him/her to act consequently.

## 15 **5.2. Parent's responses to school choice**

16 Beyond of the agreement of policies about school choice in Chile, How have parents reacted  
17 over time, and how are they currently reacting to the mandate of school choice as the  
18 dominant mode of parent participation?

19 In families of middle and higher income, social status seems to play a key factor. Elacqua,  
20 **Schneider, & Buckley** (2006) studied the school selection behavior of parents in a large urban  
21 area and found that the social class composition of the student body was a key factor. Their  
22 findings stressed the importance that affluent parents place in schools as a space for  
23 fostering social capital as students interact with other equally or more affluent families,  
24 thereby exacerbating stratification and segregation. As Montecinos, Sisto, and Ahumada  
25 (2010) pose, since this factor is more relevant than the school's overall performance on  
26 academic records, the idea that choice will increase quality seems unsupported in the case of  
27 Chile's highly socially stratified society.

28 Moreover, to compete, many private subsidized schools have implemented selection  
29 processes to exclude those who might have a negative impact on tests scores or  
30 "drive quality down". Given this practice, it is the school that chooses the family and not  
31 the other way around! Schools are choosing parents through stringent selection  
32 processes and the cancellation of enrollment if the student does not "adapt to the  
33 school". The "chosen few" are those with high economic, cultural, and social capital  
34 (Bellei, 2004).

35 Municipal schools, on the other hand, do not select their students. They serve all students,  
36 including those rejected by private entrepreneurs, students from low-income families. In  
37 Chile, therefore, the market has introduced competition among families (consumers) and  
38 not among schools (providers) (Montecinos, Sisto, & Ahumada, 2010).

1 Therefore, despite the benefits of freedom to choose proclaimed by Friedmans’(1955) market  
2 theory<sup>1</sup>, research in Chile has shown that the main consequences of three decades of  
3 implementation of this model in education have been the segmentation of the educational  
4 system and a modest track record of achievements in terms of learning outcomes (Elacqua &  
5 Fabrega, 2004; Bellei, 2007). Critics of this model have emphasized two important issues.  
6 First, that information provided by the outcomes of standardized tests do not qualify as a  
7 trustworthy and faithful source for parents to choose a school mainly because a)  
8 standardized, norm-referenced test outcomes are a better reflection of the socio-economic  
9 composition of students than of the educational quality across schools, b) the high volatility  
10 of those results from year to year do not allow the delivery of stable nor trustworthy  
11 information to differentiate schools (Urquiola, Mizala & Romaguera, 2007). Second, that the  
12 selection process does not operate using the expected academic-driven rationale. Several  
13 studies (Mizala & Romaguera, 2000; Elacqua 2004; Urquiola, Mizala & Romaguera, 2007)  
14 provide evidence that in general legal guardians and parents with broad educational  
15 backgrounds do not prefer quality information as understood from the SIMCE (Sistema  
16 Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de Educación, our national stakes test for elementary  
17 and high school) or PSU (Prueba de Selección Universitaria, our national university entrance  
18 test) test outcomes over other elements. Nor are legal guardians and parents of low SES  
19 choosing schools for these academic-driven reasons.

20 A quantitative study conducted by Elacqua and Fábrega (2004) found that parents of  
21 municipal schools choose the school for their children mainly based on “practical reasons”  
22 among which the outstanding ones are “that our child would go to a nearby school, that the  
23 school was the only available option, cost, security, proximity to work, schedule, our family  
24 works in the school” (Elacqua & Fábrega, 2004, p.32). On the other hand, according to these  
25 authors, “Parents from the subsidized private sector have a higher probability of choosing  
26 based on values and curriculum<sup>2</sup> (...) and are more precise about indicators of schools of  
27 their choice, as compared to parents from the municipal sector” (Elacqua & Fábrega, 2004,  
28 p.24). This study came to the conclusion that both parents from either sector:

29 *“(...) use few sources of information, have weak aducational networks, take few schools under*  
30 *consideration, end up choosing for praactical reasons and deal with very few pieces of precise*  
31 *information about the schools they choose. Besides, that the quality of the sources and networks*  
32 *and the precision of knowledge about the schools are a function of the socio-economic level, and*  
33 *do not depend as much on whether the school being chosen is a subsidized private school of a*  
34 *municipal one” (Elacqua & Fábrega, 2004, p. 38).*

35 These criteria applied to school choice are confirmed by investigations that show that in  
36 many communes, and consistently over time, public-subsidized schools do not show better  
37 results on the SIMCE test –the National Educational Assessment System, a standardized

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Milton Friedman (1955) was the first to propose the voucher system as a means to mobilize market forces to improve education.

<sup>2</sup> The value category refers to religious affiliation, discipline, tradition and prestige, which are values taught at school. The category curriculum refers to language used throughout the day, to the material being taught, personalized education, infrastructure, and to whether or not it is co-ed (Elacqua, 2004).

1 national testing system- than public-municipal schools (Bellei, 2007), but that parents still  
2 prefer them over public schools, to the point that the amount of public/municipal schools  
3 have steadily decreased in the last few years.

4 Córdova (2007) analyzed school choose process in poor neighborhoods in Santiago. Their  
5 findings point in the direction that the main reasons that mothers choose schools are:  
6 proximity between school and home, the familiarity with the school (personal experience or  
7 that of relatives who are alumni of the school), the notion that education provided by  
8 municipalities is free, and the perception that it happens to be a good school. To mothers  
9 that were interviewed, a “good school” *manages to have students learn and grow-up properly*.  
10 The main indicator that mothers use to assess schools in this count is learning how to read  
11 and write and being able to calculate the four basic operations. They also see if their children  
12 are developing several skills, such as being able to address public audiences. In line with the  
13 above, a good school is one where teachers care as much about learning outcomes of  
14 children as about their emotional or social development. It becomes particularly important  
15 that teachers provide extraordinary help to students with learning disabilities. The same  
16 applies to the way they value that the school *is in order and disciplined*, demanding the same  
17 behavior from officials, teachers and students.

18 These findings have been confirmed the second author in urban and rural contexts in Chile  
19 (CRECE, 2009, 2010). A mixed-methods research on Mid-to--low SES parents` choice of  
20 school, in a urban commune in Chile`s Region VI (Study 1) showed that parents choose  
21 public/municipal schools due to geographical proximity to their homes (40%), tradition and  
22 previous experience with the school, i.e. parents are alumni of that school (19%) and because  
23 the public/municipal school is free (10%). On the other hand, parents who choose public-  
24 subsidized schools do so based on the perception of their academic performance (14%),  
25 geographical proximity (11%), infrastructure (8%) and perceived discipline (8%) (CRECE,  
26 2009).

27 The findings were confirmed by research in rural sector as well. Based on a survey and  
28 group interviews to parents, a study in a rural commune in Chile`s Region VI shows that  
29 parents choose public/municipals schools based on the same factors mentioned above  
30 (CRECE, 2009). Geographical proximity is a central reason for these parents mainly due to  
31 the costs of commuting, should they decide to send their children to a distant school. This is  
32 evidenced in the following excerpt:

33 *A2: “let’s see I’m going to get to the same previous topic, meaning I was counting on sending*  
34 *them to ..., because my nephews study there, and my sister used to tell me it is a super good*  
35 *school, but because of the commuting issue I placed them here”.*

36 (Focus 2, Legal guardian, Rural School)

37 In the opinion of these parents, choosing a public/municipal school was influenced by trust  
38 in the school and in a close relationship with its teachers. Trust in the school and  
39 appreciation of the work by teachers is the product of a long-term relationship between  
40 parents and schools. Parents and relatives are generally former students of these schools.

1 Therefore, they are acquainted with the teachers, principals, and this is the reason why they  
2 have cast a judgment about the school that plays a very important role when choosing a  
3 school.

4 *A5: “(...) you (already::) knew the teachers, you become almost a friend to the teachers (.) then*  
5 *you feel closer to the teachers than at other schools, they know you so you trust.*

6 *A6: “it’s just that they already know you so you trust them that’s why I put them here”*

7 (Focus 3, Legal guardians, Rural School)

8 *A1: “Me too, my whole family studied there, they graduated from that school (.) That’s why I*  
9 *still have my daughter there, and because I like the way it is (..)”.*

10 (Focus 2, Legal guardian, Rural School).

11 Thus, the value of familiarity with the school appears to be a selection criterion placed above  
12 learning outcomes, and above measurable school performance. It is unclear if SIMCE test  
13 scores played any role as a criterion used by parents, since they did not explicitly mention  
14 this criterion in the interviews, and when asked, their answers were unclear. Parents seemed  
15 to prioritize historical and relational components when choosing schools. At the same time,  
16 those elements emphasize their beliefs about what is the purpose of education, which is  
17 mainly formation on values:

18 *A3: “I think more than anything not as much in the outcome, because SIMCE is taken by many*  
19 *children and maybe not everyone in the classroom performs the same way, but as I was saying,*  
20 *in their learning (.) in that they learn values, in that they will do well in whatever they choose to*  
21 *become (...) the fact that they further their education(.)” (Focus 4, Legal guardian, Urban*  
22 *School).*

23 Study 2 was developed in a central region of Chile (CRECE 2010). This qualitative and  
24 exploratory research focused on the experiences of four urban low SES parents about school  
25 choices, in an urban commune. The sample included four legal guardians, with two of them  
26 having just decided in favor of a private subsidized school and the other two having recently  
27 chosen to keep sending their children to a municipal/public school. Based on this difference it  
28 was possible to explore the selection a criterion was used in both cases, and to drill on the  
29 process of school choice itself. This research confirms the aforementioned practical criteria  
30 (proximity, cost) and those related to shared past experience with the school and the trust  
31 that was built on teachers and other school people as key aspects behind the choice,  
32 particularly in cases when mothers chose to stay within the municipal educational system.

33 *“PAR: Sure, because when you are already here ... whatever, my children were here the full*  
34 *eight years the eldest and after eight years it looks like we became fond of it. Ignacio was let’s see*  
35 *... eight years and Diana ... when Ignacio was in Eighth Grade Diana was in First Grade ... in*  
36 *that many years (you) get involved with the school.” (Legal guardian 1, Municipal School).*

37 *“A teacher who becomes familiar, one who you can approach with more confidence, it is your*  
38 *children that you are leaving, then you get attached more to that or at least me, I get attached to*

1        *that confidence in fact here I would tell him anything or call him by phone even he would call me*  
2        *by phone ... ma'm you know the girls fell down, so I am taking them to my home (...) you won't*  
3        *see that in another school, least in a private school I believe you won't see that" (Legal guardian*  
4        *2, Municipal School).*

5        Additional elements which had not been identified previously in the literature surveyed  
6        emerged. In the case of mothers who chose private subsidized education, a number of  
7        practices and meanings emerged that were associated with the notion of "school shopping"  
8        and thus with the notion of the legal guardian as a consumer of educational services. In  
9        these female legal guardians the idea of looking for schools other than municipal ones  
10       emerged. The main reasons put forward by participants were based on the possibility of  
11       getting access to a better disciplined environment and the perception that a better quality  
12       education does exist in those schools (measured in terms of things like the number of  
13       notebooks used, more notebooks stand for better education). Besides, it is interesting to note  
14       that the motivation for switching to a private subsidized school were based on the poor  
15       perception of municipal education. The most critical aspects along this line were the poor  
16       discipline record of municipal schools and the idea that, since municipal schools do not have  
17       student screening criteria for selection purposes (as opposed to private subsidized schools),  
18       the pace of education in municipal schools is slower, since they must adjust to the learning  
19       level of all children involved. In this sense, the two female legal guardians whose private  
20       subsidized education believed that municipal schools should focus on boys and girls with  
21       major learning shortcomings.

22       *"I don't know if it is a norm, or I don't know why it is so differentiated, but you can tell that*  
23       *municipal education is slower. I don't know if it is better or worse, but I find that for example if a*  
24       *child falls behind, obviously the municipal one is good for her because it assumes the pace of the*  
25       *child so she may get it at a slow pace, but if the child is an over-achiever, it is her that falls*  
26       *behind so darn, I miss going faster or something like that" (Legal guardian 2, Private Subsidized*  
27       *School).*

28       *"Ricardo used to read all letters and tells me, Mrs. María Inés I was surprised by Ricardo's*  
29       *reading skills, yes I told her, Ricardo already reads and tells me darn, hopefully we will not have*  
30       *any problems, why? I told her, because he can get bored, he may be bored in class he is the first to*  
31       *finish in class, he knows how to read, he knows about this other stuff ... kids go slower then I*  
32       *have to keep their pace because they are a majority then Ricardo may get bored" (Legal guardian*  
33       *2, Private Subsidized School).*

34       Even though the data presented above are part of an exploratory research agenda, they are  
35       relevant to emphasize how, in cases where parents choose private subsidized education, clear  
36       indications emerge about their addition of the selection logic, since they start by "window  
37       shopping" for schools and to look within this type of schools those that assign priority to  
38       their own values (discipline, "plus" learning outcomes). The weaknesses of municipal  
39       schools, partly due to their structural features (they do not select students), as perceived by  
40       participants, have been paramount when choosing private subsidized schools. This way, the  
41       female legal guardians in this study reflects how parents and legal guardians from the private

1 subsidized sector seem to be adding the notion of education consumers. Given current  
2 growth rates of the private subsidized sector in Chile, and the concomitant decrease of public  
3 municipal enrollment, these findings are relevant. Also worth mentioning is how criteria that  
4 justify and potentially stimulate student segregation show-up in the female legal  
5 guardians’ perception. In their narrations, municipal schools become schools geared to cater  
6 to certain groups of students, “the slow ones” versus schools that cater to “the more  
7 advanced. Which is to say, the “undesired”, as opposed to the “desired” students. This is not  
8 minor, when accounting for the effects the private subsidized sector may have in terms of  
9 student segregation in Chile. These findings pair up with Elacqua’s (2011) research which  
10 shows that the perception of interviewees is that municipal schools tend to get students with  
11 greater learning shortcomings, since these schools cannot lawfully have student screening  
12 processes, something that does exist in the private subsidized sector. “Public schools are  
13 more likely to serve disadvantaged (low socioeconomic status and indigenous) student  
14 populations than private voucher schools. I also find that disadvantaged students are less  
15 segregated in the public sector than in the private voucher sector” (Elacqua, 2011, p. 451).

16 As observed, there are reasserted elements in different studies which tell us that the choice  
17 does not seem to be driven by academic quality criteria defined by a central authority, be it a  
18 Ministry, Municipality or School, but by other criteria, sometimes of a practical nature and  
19 sometimes also prestige and social status, which say more about the cultural assets of the  
20 families of the students attending the school, than about learning outcomes of students or of  
21 the educational results of the school. In the case of low income legal guardians (Córdova,  
22 2007) and in urban and rural contexts (CRECE, 2009, 2010) there is a clear allusion to  
23 symbolic and cultural aspects associated to the notion of a good school, as well as to the  
24 affect and formative aspects that parents expect to receive at school. From the standpoint of  
25 parents, these aspects configure a process of school choice that we can label as *not rational*  
26 in relation to the current educational model. The expectations of educational policies that  
27 assume that the information about academic performance (SIMCE) is being used rationally  
28 to make decisions, seems to be flawed according to research findings. The above mentioned  
29 studies mirror that the school choice process reflects an alternative logic that does not match  
30 the logic expected and promoted the central authority.

31 Based on the evidence presented, it is difficult to conclude there is a dominant tendency  
32 about how parents construct their options when choosing a school. On the one hand,  
33 parents and legal guardians from the municipal/public sector do not seem to portray the  
34 idea that parents participate in education as consumers, because they assert other elements  
35 in the school selection process, among which values and school orientation stand out, as  
36 well as shared paths between parents and educators, the levels of trust that get built, etc. On  
37 the other hand, parents that chose private subsidized schools, even if they do not consider  
38 data and performance (SIMCE, PSU) as being central to their choice, seem to lean more  
39 towards consuming educational services, looking actively for alternative educational  
40 services, “window-shopping” schools, and bringing private subsidized schools into the  
41 family option pool, all of which tells us of a certain alignment with the logic of participation  
42 as a consumer as framed by Friedman’s (1955) market-driven theory.

## 1 **6. Discussion: “Red light” on the dominant neoliberal approach to parent** 2 **participation**

3 We conclude that currently the prevailing mode of parental participation in Chilean  
4 educational policies is as consumers of education, borne within a neo-liberal conception of  
5 education, within the framework of globalization.

6 The voucher system institutionalized in Chile has emphasized one particular type of  
7 practice which is the fruit of the neoliberal view of parent participation: parental choice of  
8 schools, based on informed knowledge about the quality of schools. The underlying  
9 assumptions are that school quality can be only be measured by the national SIMCE test;  
10 that schools must compete with each other under the same conditions, independent of the  
11 student’s socio-economic background; that parents are not well-informed about the quality  
12 of their School i.e. SIMCE scores, and that therefore they are not making good decisions; and  
13 that, had they been well-informed, they would have chosen rationally; and finally that the  
14 most significant role of parents is to participate as consumers of education.

15 We conclude that all of these assumptions are questionable in the Chilean context. The  
16 rationality of school choice as a rational behavior based on school performance seems not to  
17 be tenable. Parents are, indeed, choosing schools, but not based mainly on achievement  
18 outcomes. For middle and higher-income families, social status plays a key role. For  
19 medium-low and low SES families, practical reasons such as proximity play an important  
20 part, together with social-affective bonds with the school and the school staff, for deciding to  
21 stay in public municipal schools. Those parents who decide to change their children from a  
22 public municipal school to a private-subsidized school seem to be doing it out of a  
23 perception of a “slow rhythm” and detrimental school climate. These are more subjective,  
24 socially-laden perceptions of “school quality”.

25 Since parents’ decisions are not solely based on information about tests’ scores but rather  
26 other elements which together mediate the choice, as values, familiarity, social status, etc.,  
27 one of the effects of parental school choice has been the reinforcement of school segregation  
28 and stratification. This is due to several reasons. First, as we have shown, many times it is  
29 not the parents who choose the schools, but quite the other way around: private and private-  
30 subsidized schools generate stringent selection processes that select families based on family  
31 income, educational history, and cultural background, and only later, select students based  
32 on academic achievement. This leaves public municipal schools with the pool of students  
33 and families “unwanted” by the other types of schools. Second, it seems that the decision  
34 underlying school choice is strongly influenced by social status and by the “peer effect”, that  
35 is, the consequences of studying alongside peers of equal or higher SES. Parents seem not to  
36 be choosing schools based on school achievement, but rather, they are choosing classmates  
37 based on social status (Waissbluth, 2012).

38 By strengthening educational segregation, this has deepened the already existing  
39 educational gap between the three different types of school. In this scenario, parental school  
40 choice, rationally or not, has helped to validate and reinforce the logic of school segregation.

1 During the last 25 years, enrollment in private-subsidized schools has grown significantly  
2 and progressively, and enrollment in public municipal schools has declined steadily. The  
3 Chilean Observatory of Educational Policies (2006) observes that:

4 *“In practice, private-subsidized education has operated by attracting the best students from the*  
5 *municipal sector (“the cream”), and inversely, “wiping off” those students who are most*  
6 *difficult to educate, which is generally associated with poorer socio-educational conditions of the*  
7 *families. As a result, those students with greater needs and/or socio-educational problems have*  
8 *tended to concentrate in municipal schools, which paradoxically have less resources”* (OPECH,  
9 2006).

10 Even if school choice did follow a rational, academic-based scheme, which we pose it  
11 doesn't, this form of participation constrains and impoverishes parent participation in  
12 education. In this chapter, we have shown how, in Chile, the “parents are consumers”  
13 metaphor has prevailed over the “parents are citizens” or the “parents are agents of change”  
14 standpoints. Underlying the predominance of the parents-as-consumers perspective, is the  
15 logic of neoliberalism. Therefore, from the analysis of the different forms and modes of  
16 parent participation in Chile deployed during the last three decades, we conclude that the  
17 neoliberal logic is prevailing, at least in what refers to parent participation.

18 It is necessary to recognize how problematic it is to consider parents' participation mainly as  
19 consumers of education over other ways to participate and be involved in educational  
20 process. When neoliberal policies are introduced in educational system, also introduced are  
21 certain discourses of participation over which relationship and subjectivities are  
22 constructed. As Anderson (2001) points out,

23 *“It is important to understand the fundamental differences between participation as*  
24 *consumerism and participation as citizenship. While metaphors are useful in that they tell how*  
25 *something is like and unlike something else, educators too often lose sight of the metaphorical use*  
26 *of certain terms. It has become fashionable for educational administrators and teachers to refer to*  
27 *their students and communities as their customers without stipulating the ways students and*  
28 *communities are like customers, as well as the ways students and communities are not like*  
29 *customers”* (p. 584).

30 Most importantly, the logic of neoliberalism as it applies to parent participation within the  
31 voucher system, creates a social imagery that this the most important (and sole) form of  
32 parent participation, leaving out other forms of participation. Therefore, a very  
33 impoverished conception of parent participation is prevailing. As we have shown, the  
34 “Chilean way” to parent participation started out, in the early 1990s promoting different  
35 modes and forms of parent participation -re-constitution of parent associations, constitution  
36 of Unions of Parent Associations; and at the beginning of this century, school councils- that  
37 framed different underlying logics of education. In Bahktian terms, these forms were a more  
38 heteroglossic invitation to parents. However, the first democratically elected right-wing  
39 government has installed a very monologic view on parent participation. It is expected that  
40 this monology on parent participation as school choice will further affect public municipal

1 school enrollment decline, and in turn favor private-subsidized school enrollment, since the  
2 logic has long been installed that “private is better”.

3 Therefore, one venue for further research is the relation between educational policy and the  
4 types of parental participation prescribed and installed. As Anderson (2001) points out,  
5 participatory policies entail certain notions about subjects and relations, and will have  
6 pragmatic effects by promoting certain values and minimizing others. Given that in Chile  
7 context is tainted by a market-driven educational model, it is interesting to see how policies  
8 containing participation discourses aligned with this model. The “Traffic-Light Map” is a  
9 clear example of such a policy. However, it received a lot of critic, both for not offering  
10 contextual comparative data, as well as for stigmatizing red-dotted schools and certain  
11 communes where only red dots appeared, or where no green dots appeared. Parents  
12 naturally asked themselves, and later complained in the media, “What I am supposed to do,  
13 change neighborhood”? Perhaps these types of critics explain why the “Traffic-Light Map”  
14 and letter was only handed in the first year of President Piñera’s presidency. However, the  
15 map per commune is still available at <http://www.simce.cl/mapas/index.php>

16 Another venue for research are the challenges faced today by the other modes of parent  
17 participation – collective and organized vs. individual; representative vs. participatory-.  
18 Though scarce, data shows that parent associations reveal serious issues of real inclusion  
19 and participation at the institutional level, where hierarchical practices and parental  
20 participation in decision making is restricted, downgrading their value. At this level, it is  
21 rather an institutionalized way of restraining and limiting the organized participation of  
22 parents. Even though the policies of parent participation in the 1990s promoted more  
23 democratic forms of participation, the Chilean history of school participation, together with  
24 the hierchical structure of the schools in Chile, and the focus of policies for parent  
25 participation through school choice implemented in the early late 2000s, have not favored  
26 the use of these spaces for parent participation in a more democratic and fruitful manner  
27 during the last decade.

28 School councils, on the other hand, are considered in many cases stale, merely formal  
29 government organs, but in some schools, where the conditions of trust and confidence in  
30 democratic participation are already installed, they do seem to be having a positive effect in  
31 terms of the logic of citizenry. There is practically no research available as to the  
32 transformational logic of parent participations; for example, of parents participating  
33 alongside students in the Student Movement of 2011, where students marched for a “public,  
34 free, and quality education” and took over schools for months. Although, as we have  
35 shown, as much at the State level as organically and culturally, school related organizations  
36 incorporate neoliberal values and criteria of the understanding of education, yielding an  
37 extremely difficult landscape for parental participation in the Chilean educational system,  
38 nonetheless these other practices are needed and research can help make them visible.

39 The dominant neoliberal approach to parent participation that we pose in this chapter,  
40 emerges from the dynamic interaction between policies, school micropolitics and the  
41 subjective processes of parents, who themselves buy in to market-driven criteria. The

1 studies portrayed in this chapter reveal that, although the current “Ministry voice” is quite  
2 monologic supporting parents as consumers, the actions of parents are heterogeneous and  
3 heteroglossic. On one side, the logic of neoliberalism as it subjectifies parents as consumers,  
4 seems to work; parents are, indeed, choosing schools. The question is, for whom? for what  
5 reasons? serving whose purpose? On the other hand, parents are also participating as  
6 members of the Parent Associations and Unions of Parent Associations; as parent  
7 representatives in the School Councils; as supporters of the Student Movement, etc. These  
8 different patterns reveal the different discourses of parents; their actions speak louder than  
9 their words. Although they do choose schools, their actions are not limited to this domain,  
10 and they are willing and do seek other forms and modes of participation. We should take a  
11 closer look at these forms.

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31 Sage.