

## Between Decolonization and Human Capital. Reflections Toward the Expected Role of the Teacher in the Chile Post Transition

### Entre la decolonización y el capital humano. reflexiones en torno al rol esperado del docente en el Chile post transición

**Patricia E. Troncoso-Pérez\*** 

Universidad del Bío-Bío, Chillán, Chile  
Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chillan, Chile  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6926-6427>

**Juan Luis Nass Álvarez** 

Universidad Católica de Temuco, Chile  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8644-1672>

**Ada Gallegos** 

Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Perú  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8264-711X>

**Miguel A. Alvarez** 

Universidad de las Américas, Chile  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3893-2204>

**Received** 01-02-20 **Revised** 02-15-20 **Accepted** 03-30-20 **On line** 04-07-20

#### \*Correspondence

Email: [kaikaivilu@gmail.com](mailto:kaikaivilu@gmail.com)

#### Cite as:

Troncoso-Pérez, P., Nass, J., Gallegos, A., & Alvarez, M. A. (2020). Between Decolonization and Human Capital. Reflections Toward the Expected Role of the Teacher in the Chile Post Transition. *Propósitos y Representaciones*, 8(SPE1), e498. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20511/pyr2020.v8nSPE1.498>

## Summary

The relationship between socioeconomic mobility and school levels has been thematized since the generalization of modern institutionalized education systems. The demand for Chilean quality education is associated with exitism and the formation of Human Capital, crashing with mismatches between public policies, the crisis of legitimization of public education, and the Latin American epistemic advance that influences the pedagogical exercise through critical pedagogy or decolonization as a new way of organizing / re-creating knowledge. Thus, the teacher is required from two dichotomous currents, which makes him a vortex with unusual edges. This article of reflection seeks to expose some aspects of these contradictions, addressing the theory of Human Capital in education and the decolonization of pedagogy, in relation to the expected role of teachers in Chile.

**Keywords:** Expected Teaching Role; Human Capital; Decolonization.

## Resumen

La relación entre movilidad socioeconómica y niveles escolares se ha tematizado desde la generalización de los sistemas institucionalizados modernos de educación. La exigencia de educación de calidad chilena está asociada al exitismo y a la formación de Capital Humano, estrellándose con desajustes entre políticas públicas, la crisis de legitimación de la educación pública, y el avance epistémico latinoamericano que influye el ejercicio pedagógico a través de la pedagogía crítica o la descolonización como nueva forma de organizar/re-crear conocimiento. Es así que el docente es requerido desde dos corrientes dicotómicas, lo que le convierte en un vórtice con inusitadas aristas. El presente artículo de reflexión busca exponer algunos aspectos de dichas contradicciones, abordando la teoría de Capital Humano en educación y de la decolonización de la pedagogía, en relación al rol esperado del profesorado en Chile.

**Palabras clave:** Rol docente esperado; Capital humano; Decolonización.

## Introducción

Chile is a country of disagreements differentiated by its social policies and its neoliberal economic model of market that turns it one of the representatives of the deformations of modernity (Larraín, 2005), of the post modernity or in its defect (Beck, 2002; Beck et al, 1997; MacLaren, 1997), of the macabre that can be the instrumental rationality as J. Habermas indicates (1989).

According to data from the World Bank, it is a country with constant growth rates that have slowed in recent years from 6.1% (2011) to 1.5% (2017); even so, it was one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America, affecting the reduction of poverty (DSP, 2017). This success is associated -among other variables- with the addition of years of formal schooling and specialized training for work (Brunner and Elacqua, 2003), which have led to a sustained increase in demand for access to formal technical/higher education (Ottone and Hopenhayn, 2000; Brunner et. al, 2005) and a race for grades and work spaces.

These latter characteristics emanate from societies at risk (Beck et al, 1997), producing a phenomenon contrary to the expected Durkheimian moral schooling: the deficit of socialization (Tedesco, 1995), which involves the objectification of teachers, the loss of transcendence of the family in the transfer of values, a widespread feeling of anomie, and the constant perception of threatened social and national identities (Giddens, 1995; Bauman et al, 1996).

In this scenario, the role of the teacher is impacted by contextual vicissitudes (Tedesco, 1995, Palermo, 2014). Professional performance is not only determined by the characteristics of the teacher. Various authors such as Bryk, Harding and Greenberg, 2012; Darling-Hammond,

2012; indicate that the quality of teaching and the results of the educational process are strongly influenced by the context of instruction (Santelices et al, 2015).

Let us add that thanks to the crisis of westernizing modernity (Mignolo et al, 2014; Giddens, 1995; Bauman et al, 1996), in the last twenty years we have witnessed the intensification of the need to generate relevant epistemic alternatives for territories with histories of subjugation or some kind of ideological constraint. Latin America will wake up to the visualization of its original populations and its heritage, to the valuation of these and the possibility of summarizing a cumulus of own knowledge capable of facing the epistemic wave imposed as the only truth (Robles, 2012; CLACSO, 2005). Once again, pedagogy and teaching will not be exempt (Palermo, 2014); the role of the teacher, similar to critical pedagogy (McLaren, 1997), will be demanded beyond that of a cultural animator or a stimulator of political reflection (Freire, 2005), but as an individual who must also be capable of rethinking what he knows, re-articulating it in landscapes of oppression or decolonization of conceptual structures and being-making participants in learning from that experience (Santorello, 2016).

Finally, the transformations that have taken place in the last fifty years in the political arena and in the global economy (Giddens, 1997; CLACSO, 2005) have had an impact on the planning of school systems (Bonal, 1998), generating that the school acts as a kind of transmitter in which we can witness the evolution of these spheres of everyday life. One of the crises suffered by these spheres made the school commune with the theory of human capital - and with a pragmatic vision of education through educational psychology - threw the school systems (starting with the American), to the constant of educating for work and socio-economic mobility, gradually displacing the initial aspiration of the generation of citizenship (Puigross, 1999; Blanco, et al, 2013).

### **Elements to put us in context**

The cultural transformations that occurred during the last decades of the 20th century led to a new vision of the subject (Tedesco, 1995; Giddens, 1995); the product of growing economic development in formerly poor populations (between the years 2000 and 2015, the proportion of the population considered poor in Chile: US\$ 4 per day, decreased from 26 to 7.9 %; DSP, 2017) which woke up to the possibilities of consumption (UNDP, 2017); added to the hegemonic need of any government, made the school instruction in the symbolic apparatus of inclusion, distributor of roles and social positions; it was and is an essential symbolic good (Ottone and Hopenhayn, 2000). In turn, the decline in growth rates in recent years (3% growth in output, similar to the so-called lost decade of the 1980s; Brunner, 2003), coupled with the fact that workers survive the precariousness of their work, and a little less so in situations of poverty, with the worst distribution of income among the regions of the world (CLACSO, 2005), Chile and its education system are facing the challenges of the technological revolution and globalization.

Despite the efforts of recent decades and increased public spending, education remains behind at the regional level (Brunner, 2011). Insufficient coverage and significant levels of exclusion and retention on the one hand, and low capacity to compensate for deficits in cultural capital of children from poorer households, and low learning achievement, on the other, are trumped by inefficient spending (UNESCO, 1998).

Even so, the population's perceptions of the state of the school system, as Bellei (2015) comments, project a complex picture with convergent and divergent elements of diagnosis and expectations (Manzi and Garcia, 2016; Redón, 2011).

### **Some conceptual axes**

There are three central notions to be addressed, which in a way we have already introduced before. These are the concept of the expected role of the teacher, some elements of human capital in

education, and the contributions of decolonial pedagogy. Obviously, in the face of two largely opposing positions, the articulator of both fields of ideas is the role of the teacher.

Thus, the role consists of the function exercised in social systems, assigned by historical and territorial particularities, and imposed in a coercive or tacit manner on subjects (Giddens, 2010). It complies with ensuring social cohesion (Durkheim, 2002) and the economic reproduction proper to modern societies (Tedesco, 1995; Bourdieu et al, 2008). There are ideal roles, which are those to which the population aspires, or that are ideally expected to be fulfilled; and roles played, which is the effective execution of the role, with all the external elements that inevitably affect it (Giddens, 2010).

As noted, the characteristics of the roles are assigned by the population through various culturally legitimated devices: Family, School, Media, etc. (Puigross; 1999; Bonal, 1998 ); in all cases, the role depends on the aspirations projected on the function, from which emerges an "image" of the expected (Bourdieu et al, 2008, Bourdieu, 2002). This reflection or idea turns out to be an effective means of construction of collective conscience (Durkheim, 2002; Tedesco, 1995). F. Saussure, Charles S. Peirce, R. Barthes, H. Eco, and J. Greimas, among others, exemplify it in their studies of linguistics, philosophy and semiology, the way between the object and the mind (Zecchetto, 2013). At the other extreme, for A. Gramsci (1976), it is a form of hegemonization imposed not only by eternal or material domination, but also cultural, which generates subordination.

As for the role of the teacher, historically he has been soaked in the environment and inevitably used as a device of power that articulates the masses (Foucault, 1991; Puigross, 1999) and for his struggle for autonomy (Freire, 2005; Palermo, 2014), not without its contradictions (Reyes, et al., 2012). The transformation of its functions has been extensive (Bedoya, 2005; Blanco et al, 2013), but the one that concerns us is the one produced in the so-called third educational revolution (Esteve, 2003): Inclusive schooling, cultural deficits, and 100% school coverage, which translate into teachers making visible and tackling social, multicultural and moral problems, among others, in a school space in which episodes of delinquency, abuse, and emotional deficiencies must be integrated (in the classroom), in a socio-historical moment in which humanity is blurred, reified by the market (Bauman, 2007).

On the other hand, the Chilean education system has three examples of schools: municipal (public), private schools and private schools (MINEDUC, 2017). By 2008 there were approximately 11,907 schools in Chile, 49% of which were municipal, 44% subsidized and 6% private; with 176,500 teachers in the classroom, of which 55% were in municipal schools (Santelices, et. al. 2015; MINEDUC, 2017). Their salaries are related to the minimum salary indicated by the State, seniority, bonuses for training, geographic seat and administrative responsibilities, and bonuses that depend on the accreditation of excellence (National System for the Evaluation of the Performance of Subsidized Educational Establishments, SNED), and a certification of performance excellence (Pedagogical Excellence Assignment, AEP) (MINEDUC, 2017).

The Framework for Good Teaching establishes what all Chilean teachers should know, know how to do, and weigh in order to determine how well they perform their work. However, and as was previously stated, beyond the formal implications of teacher performance is the cultural imprint, determined by the situation, on which and how the teaching role should be deployed.

In general terms, teaching is established as work that involves a social and political commitment in the search for greater social justice (Sisto, 2012; Torrealba, 2006). However, the low social value of the profession, low salaries, excessive administrative work, an overdimensioned curriculum, insufficient initial training, and teaching careers that are not very selective, indicate that little is expected of teachers (Brunner, 2005a), and that the results of

students are terribly determined more by their social and economic level than by the quality of their education (Tedesco, 1995).

Addressing the second conceptual axis we have the theory of Human Capital. In order to approach its contents we must explain the instances in which it reaches school systems. For this purpose we should recall the schooling crisis suffered in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, which meant the breakdown of the Citizenship-State Pact (schooling through socio-economic mobility), the fall of technocratic functional school models (with the consequent detachment of responsibilities from modern States, at least at higher levels of education, the distribution of work and status), and the need for a new conceptual background to protect the school system that was also in line with the market economy that was successfully unfolding in those years (Bonal, 1998).

The theory of Human Capital comes from the spheres of economy and business administration. Its central idea is that it thematizes the human being as an inexhaustible source of resources and that human capital was the hidden factor that had not been taken into account in the function of production to date. Politically, it is demonstrative (it legitimizes technical reason over traditional reason); ideologically, it opposes growth to development (in favor of the former), therefore, the quantitative over the qualitative. Psychologically, it provides rational values and the inculcation of motivation for performance. It is not surprising that for this theoretical matrix, formal education is considered a capital good (Bonal, 1998; Brunner, 2003).

Among its representatives is Theodore W. Schultz (1983), an American economist who proposed the efficient use of human resources and equal opportunities for the benefit of the market. Another representative is Gary Stanley Becker, also an American economist; he proposed that education and higher training are forms of investment made by rational individuals who seek to increase their productive efficiency and income. The economic agent (individual), when deciding whether to invest or not (to continue studying or not), arbitrates between the benefits and costs of investment. He will continue to study whether the net present value of the costs and benefits is positive; he will invest for himself and that investment will be made on the basis of a risk calculation. Man becomes his own enterprise; and about general training, acquired in the education system he will say that it increases average and marginal productivity in the economy. The cost is passed on to individuals or some public body (Brunner; 2003; Bonal, 1998).

The Human Capital Theory proposes that education can be determined like any other form of physical capital, and that it is an investment that provides a limited rate of return; that there is a positive relationship between economic development and schooling rates at all productive levels, and therefore a positive relationship between years of study and income, which would be a reflection of the effects of education on productivity (use the Mincer Model, 1974 to justify); that individuals can know the performance to be obtained according to their educational investment and that social inequality is explained as a logical result of individual use of opportunities or as an expression of different preference systems; and finally that more education, greater is the technological / productive advance, and greater is the economic growth; Its implementation predicted better interpersonal relationships, low crime rates and redistributive effects as it is a high investment in public spending.

In the case of Chile, a representative of this current is J.J. Brunner (2005) that visualizes the school as an entity to overcome poverty and re-uses the achievement model of functional systems to challenge competition among students for jobs through formal instruction (Brunner, 1993, Brunner and Elacqua, 2003; Brunner, 2011) The Chilean school system would thus form qualified human capital. Among his ideas are that the evidence of productivity is the calculation of the private returns of investments in education, which explains the differences in income according to the different levels of schooling; that the technological revolution requires armies of specialists; and that the educational system trains and selects, so it must expand (Brunner and Elacqua, 2003; Brunner et al, 2005).

As societies transform their economic base and seek to modernize themselves technologically, they also need to improve the profile of their workforce (Brunner and Elaqua, 2003). Under this conception, we would all be capitalists: having economic capital and other humans, so inequalities are an individual responsibility.

Concluding the axes, we find decolonial theory, but in the pedagogical field. We will first address some central notions of this theoretical matrix.

Among the exponents are Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who elaborates a critical review of the colonialism of knowledge in Latin America (2009), and its incidence in modern institutions (Mignolo et al, 2014); Catherine Walsh who revalues other sciences, other knowledge, knowledge that is identically important and contributing to the Western heritage, and in particular, that the source of this knowledge is not found in the formal curriculum, but in our territories, in our spheres of life and traditions of native peoples, thus proposes the communion between knowledge, a respectful and equitable complementarity (Walsh, 2007); and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2016), who proposes the Peripheral Look and Body Perception to know / be one's own territory and others in a committed way, where knowledge keeps practical sense with reality.

For Walter Mignolo (2003, 2011) coloniality is the sister of modernity for its supposed redemptionists; At the opposite extreme is what did not seek redemption, and was therefore subdued and silenced. This silencing over time accumulated unease and finally unleashed resistance: decolonization.

The implementation in practical contexts of these thoughts can be reviewed through decolonial pedagogy, which aims to dismantle the mandates of modernity and its hidden side, which is coloniality (Palermo, 2014). They encourage new forms of political action and insurgency, while building alliances, hopes and other visions of being in society, related to their territorial relevance (Sartorello, 2016). At the same time they seek another relationship with nature, and support the social, ethical, and political project of critical interculturality.

Among his basal thinkers is Frantz Fanon (2010) and his *Damned of the Earth*, where he accuses that dehumanization is a central component of colonization, so humanization requires decolonization, and its vehicle is pedagogy. Unlike Freire, he makes the place of oppression visible as a racialized place; for him, colonization ceases to revile the colonized, when the latter reveals or admits the supremacy of western values, therefore the school space becomes a stage where both worlds face each other and from which they must be evidenced. The essential elements it provides are approximations to the totality (community social reality), structure (as the axis of becoming and as a generator of opposites) and historicity, a space where the former and the conflicts emanating from the latter are embodied.

Decolonization thus comprises a form of (un) learning or detachment (Palermo, 2014): unlearning everything imposed and assumed by colonization and dehumanization in order to learn to be men and women. The teacher has the responsibility to actively help in this awakening, and therefore, political education means opening minds, awakening and allowing the birth of intelligence in relation to the world. It is to educate human beings to be actional, to act for themselves, it is to facilitate the formation of subjectivity and self-reflection for a praxis of liberation.

### **Contributions to the discussion**

Since the eighties, the Chilean government, the most conservative intelligentsia (and not so much), the media, and not a few international organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank or Unesco, have promoted education as the main agent for the development of countries (Bellei, 2015).

From the point of view of people's perception, education appears as one of the most precious social goods, if not as the most powerful means to achieve individual and collective well-being (Brunner, 2003; Redón, 2011). It is not strange to verify that the population manifests a growing belief regarding the role that education in material improvements and social mobility (DSP, 2017), an illusion that explains in the massive improvement of living conditions in the country (Blanco, et Al. 2013; UNDP, 2017).

With the military dictatorship under the curtain, the General Education Law (LEGE) was implemented in 1980, since then the country decidedly implemented a school model in accordance with the economic one, and that was gradually that of the T.C.H.; a market model for the delivery of educational services, decentralized (municipalization), incorporating private service providers (Corvalán, 2013). The plan was to generate a market for competitive schools sustained by subsidizing demand, according to the discourse, spirit, and encouragement of quality improvement, teacher professionalization, and the end of normal classroom teaching.

Since 1990, a reform has been initiated with the purpose of improving mainly structural and didactic (MECE— projects, Links, etc.), as well as curricular transformation (training based on competencies, skills and knowledge). In this context, since 2000, attention has been paid to generating exercise standards for teachers, assuming that complying with them will increase the educational quality measured through the Education Quality Measurement System (SIMCE) (MINEDUC, 2017). Through the evaluation policy and performance incentives, it is expected to model the performance of teachers.

Consequently, a direct relationship is established between success in standardized tests and increase in professional salary, which on the friendly side can be seen as a reward for professional effort, but in the human aspect as the objectification of pedagogical performance. Although such dehumanization occurs from outside the classroom (Blanco, et. Al., 2013), it is clearly promoted through spaces such as the educational system (Bourdieu, 2002).

The role required of the teacher from the national culture, therefore, is subscribed to a player in a space that produces scores, rather than a person who trains young people. This aspect is reflected in the needs that the population manifests in national mobilizations, in schools and in the universities themselves. The struggle of what is expected of the teacher, and who seeks to train, is at the crossroads of a free market society, mostly very comfortable in its low power of consumption (UNDP, 2017), which demands successful and proactive students, more beyond people who can contribute community. Imposed role that not all teachers accept so openly (Reyes et AL., 2012).

Among the variables of impact on learning, teachers have a special role (Reyes et Al, 2012; Manzi and Garcia, 2016). Determinants are initial training and performance in the classroom, the type of communication they establish with students, the learning climate they generate, etc. They also face work overload and excessive hours of planning, including the precariousness of resources (material, human, financial) that shows the inconsistency between the ideal (from state, ministerial, and municipal policy) and the real conditions for the exercise of teaching practice (Reyes et Al, 2012; UNESCO, 2013).

It is not surprising again, that as Tedesco (1995) points out, the socialization deficit occurs, that lack of hegemony, not subordinate, but communal, produced by the ineffectiveness of the central normative institutions: family and school, produced by the maelstrom of capitalist life, with the evident deterioration of the appreciation of the teacher.

On the other hand, the positive relationship between education and labor productivity is largely denied through studies carried out since the 1970s, but its effectiveness in countries like Chile is insisted on. Wages have not been determined on the basis of productivity, and therefore do not depend entirely on the qualification of the worker. In turn, the distribution of educational

positions, occupational status and income are not directly related either, acting as tradition, contacts or even the same fate in school and work success. Therefore, it does not affect social mobility: family social origin has a greater incidence (Bourdieu, 2002; UNDP, 2017).

At this crossroads, where teachers are stimulated by the same school system to which they belong, demanded by the families of their pupils, and endorsed by a broad academic-scientific conceptual base that supports it- this completely opposite conception emerges, decolonial pedagogy, endorsed by another spectrum of the academy, but at the same time by the same identities denied by years of epistemic imposition, by the stories of themselves. What could result from all that?

However, and despite the opportunities offered by decolonial pedagogy to re-articulate the Latin American school from another point of view, political independence must be based on solid economic foundations, and still the breaking of dependency ties, as important. That is, it is only one of the stages of decolonization.

On the other hand, and recognizing the ways that the capitalist economy has to transform and readapt, it is even possible that the same notion of decoloniality is partially absorbed and instrumentalized by those same fields of pragmatic teaching. As L. Althusser pointed out, teachers are heroes seeking to improve their disciplinary spaces, but the only thing they do within the framework of this economic model is to make the ideological apparatuses of oppression more efficient.

### **Final thoughts**

Chilean society, contractualized, atomized, without much common ground, compared to the ethnic groups present in the territory, finds it difficult to unite; she conceives of herself in a multi-dimensional, momentary and self-referential world. This poses an additional challenge for the school, in a social context whose traditional foundations have weakened. The questions that this opens are pressing, like the role of the teacher. Education in its economic function, receives the developmental theories of education (training, selection and classification of labor) on the one hand, and applauds the epistemic novelties incorporated into the classroom through the validation of the other as pertinent knowledge. The dangers of falling into folklorization are imminent.

Although education does not ensure upward social mobility or the reduction of social inequalities, there is no opportunity without education. It is necessary to redirect schooling to a more particularistic and critical field, which ensures reflective learning, relevant to the territory rather than the market.

On the other hand, some teachers have adopted their own forms of resistance against school institutions, positioning themselves as actors and victims of this and of political silence from the institutional imposition of teacher professionalization. Build on new / old foundations, hitherto oriented according to the needs or benefits of the colonizer. The consolidation of a personal identity, as a foundation in the way of relating (otherness) to build the common and the value sense of common good as the political, require a teacher capable of inspiring in this great challenge of social-personal transformation.

Finally, the school system reflects the transformation that the cultural context in which it is immersed undergoes; without knowing what will prevail, it is more humane to expect the contextualization of the meanings that allow it to be what we know, students, teachers, family and community: School and the “good living” prevail.



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