

Special Section Introduction: Study of Perceptions and Experience of Transit from Higher Education and Results of Public Policy on Education

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This special section is the second of two that features a selection of articles based on research presented at the Third Interdisciplinary Conference on Research in Education (organized by the Center for Research on Educational Policy and Practice [CEPPE], of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, and the Center for Advanced Research in Education [CIAE], of the Universidad de Chile), and the Fourth Conference on Research in Higher Education (also co-organized by the Center for Comparative Policies in Education [CPCE] of Universidad Diego Portales) held on August 21-22, 2014 in Santiago, Chile. The theme of these conferences was defined as «The public sphere and education: Ideas, interests and new institutions», and under their auspices, 150 research studies were presented in the following areas: educational policy, school improvement and educational leadership, pedagogy and teaching, neurosciences, cognition and learning, ICT and education, history of education, and higher education.

The eight articles in this second special edition cover a wide range of topics: three of them address the interface between school education and higher education from different perspectives, bringing the «voice» of high school or first year university students regarding the school system, on the transition to higher education, and on the expectations of young people about their social trajectories.

A second group, comprised of four articles, presents assessments of outcomes or impact of different government programs in the areas of university admission, school improvement, financing of schools, and bilingual intercultural education. The special section of this PEL edition concludes with an article about the teaching of history in Chile.

Transitions from school to higher education: the experiences of students

The article by Andrea López Barraza and Catalina García Reñasco, «*Perceptions on Chilean Education from High School Graduate Students who Attended an Academic Talent Program*», explores perceptions about Chilean education of a student group graduated from secondary education in 2013 and who took part in a university program to develop academic talents while they were at school. Interest in gathering the opinions of this group lies in the expected richness of the students' perceptions and proposals as a consequence of their high analytical and critical skills, and in the fact that they experienced the 2011 student movement. Using an online survey, results were obtained that were the subject of critical discourse analysis. Among the students surveyed, in addition to other perceptions, the results showed a critical view of the neoliberal economic model in education, and «disagreement with the objectives of the education received, for neglecting the development of more complex skills than can be demonstrated on a standardized test and limiting the curriculum to mandatory content, as well as scant consideration of relational and community aspects, formation of values, and civic engagement».

The paper by Alma Figueroa Rubalcava, Laura Padilla González and Cintya Guzmán Ramírez, «*Educational Aspiration and the Initial College Experience of High School Graduate Students in Aguascalientes, Mexico*», takes us to Aguascalientes, Mexico, where, using quantitative and qualitative methods, researchers looked into the relationship between personal, family, and school variables, and the educational aspiration and transition expectations of students graduating from secondary school, while the initial entry experience to higher education of a group of young people was also examined. The authors found a significant relationship between income expectations and success in higher education and «variables such as academic performance, the importance that the family attributes to studies, the perception of support from the family, and socioeconomic status, besides tutoring that the school provides to young people».

Finally, the article by Jorge Ulloa Garrido, Jorge Gajardo Aguayo and Maritza Díaz Chinchilla, «*Perceptions about Socio-Academic Trajectory of Students Enrolled in the Universidad de Concepción Propaedeutic Program*», reveals the tensions between trajectories and expectations, both for the student and their family, and between these tensions and structural elements of the system, such as the University Selection Test. Nevertheless, as the authors emphasize, these tensions are not necessarily negative, as some of them lead to the reinforcement of objectives and goals through family and social support.

Assessments of the effects of educational policies

As argued by Alvaro González, Micaela González and Sergio Galdames in their contribution to this edition, «*The Local Administrator as a Change Agent: The Role of Technical Coordinators in Supporting Chilean Municipal Schools*», the function of educational administrators in improving the effectiveness of schools has been little studied in Chile. To contribute to this line of research, the authors examine the case of technical coordinators designated by a Chilean municipal corporation to support change in schools dependent from that municipality. By studying the tasks and activities of the coordinators, the authors gain an understanding of the administrator role as an agent of change that promotes school improvement.

The article «*Towards a More Equitable Distribution of Educational Opportunities: What is the Impact of the Preferential Subsidy Policy on the Achievement Level of the Most Vulnerable Students in Chile?*», which follows in this second group of papers, seeks to clarify the impact of the Preferential Subsidy policy, which has been in force since 2008, on the academic performance of the most vulnerable students in Chile, in mathematics and language, using compared interrupted time series. The results presented here by Rafael Carrasco, María Pérez and Diego Núñez, which, with another methodology, confirm findings from previous studies, reveal statistically significant increases in performance in mathematics and language for 4th grade students after four years of the program, compared with control schools.

In another area of public policies in Chilean education, Cristián Lagos, in his article «*The Intercultural Bilingual Education Program and its Results: Perpetuating Discrimination?*», critically reviews the experience and results of the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program (PEIB). Through interviews and participant observation, the researcher collected data that he subsequently analyzed following the guidelines of language ideologies, from which he concludes that the PEIB does not fulfill its aspiration to be a tool for the revitalization of indigenous languages, nor is it intercultural, «as there is no symmetrical dialogue between the two cultures in contact».

The final article in this group, «*The Effect of Including High School Grade Rankings in the Admission Process for Chilean Universities*», has a connection with the last article in the previous group. In fact, both the use of ranking of grades and propaedeutic programs, coverage of which has been multiplying and expanding in Chile, firstly on the initiative of universities and, more recently, as government policy, are examples of programs aimed at reducing the socioeconomic exclusion that affects our university selection system.

Tomás Larroucau, Ignacio Ríos and Alejandra Mizala seek to elucidate the characteristics of student groups benefited and harmed by the incorporation of grade ranking in the selection of students for higher education in Chile. Using simulations with different weightings for selection factors, the authors found that the ranking score tends to favor female applicants and graduates from institutions with a higher vulnerability index.

Teaching of history in secondary education

In a broad time range, from the origins of the national education system to the eighties, Carmen Gloria Zúñiga, in her article «*How Has History Been Taught in Chile? An Analysis of Programmes of Study for Secondary School History*», she goes through the curriculum for teaching history at the secondary level in Chile. Following the itinerary of the great curriculum reforms since 1843, the author reveals that, despite changes in the objectives and contents for teaching history, as well as changes in the pedagogical concepts in vogue in each era, there has been a predominant focus on the «great tradition» in the teaching of history, with pedagogical practices centered on the teacher and political events organized chronologically and which must be memorized. The focus of the new history, with activities centered on the students and development of the historical research method, has also been present, but for less time.

With its variety of research problems, methodological approaches, temporal and territorial areas, and disciplines that frame the discussion, this special section of PEL takes into account the breadth and vitality of educational research that has once again characterized the Interdisciplinary Conference on Research in Education.