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The conservative response to the 2011 Chilean student movement: neoliberal education and media

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This paper focuses on the relationship between the media and educational policies in the context of the ‘neoliberal newspeak’, which has characterized the current circulation of ideas in cultural production. Using framing theory, this article presents a critical discourse analysis on the editorials published about the 2011 student movement by *El Mercurio*, the most influential newspaper in Chile. *El Mercurio* is more than a newspaper. It is an institution; an institution that supports conservative ideas. *El Mercurio* framed the public discussion about educational policies and defended neoliberal education based on three discourses: the neoliberal system is absolute, public education is valued less than private and education is a technical issue, not political. By invoking this rhetoric strategy, these discourses attempted to maintain the neoliberal education system in Chile, which in turn rejected the social struggles of the student movement.

Keywords: Chilean student movement; critical discourse analysis; neoliberal education; framing; media

Introduction

During 2011, Chile experienced a powerful student movement that transformed into a social phenomenon. Criticism towards the educational system has moved towards a rejection of the neoliberal system, which was implemented during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in the 1980s. This phenomenon was the first citizen awakening against inherited economic and political policies of the military regime. These policies continued to be employed without major changes in the 1990s, when democracy was restored. Students expressed widespread discontent towards a political system that has been unable to reduce social gaps. The protagonists of this social upheaval took to the streets and, over more than seven months of mobilization, showed that it is possible to think of an alternative system to free market fundamentalism in education.

Proponents of neoliberalism in Chile reacted fiercely and at first tried to discredit the student movement. However, as the movement continued, neoliberal supporters were forced to acknowledge the huge impact that the students were having on society. The media, especially those known for their conservative views, published articles focusing on vandalism and other negative aspects of the student movement. This illustrates what Di Cicco (2010) called the Nuisance Paradigm, which is the tendency of the media to present social protests as ‘troublesome, unpatriotic and ineffective’ (p. 135). Di Cicco, in a content analysis of coverage of political protests in the USA, concluded that in 40 years

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(from 1967 to 2007), American newspapers represented the same negative images of social protests, especially among the most progressive groups. That is, conservative media have reacted to prevent the spread of social movements by misrepresenting their purposes.

In Chile, newspapers have followed the same trend, be it environmental conflicts or the struggles of indigenous people, emphasizing concern for social order and representing movements as permanent conflicts for the nation-state (Del Valle, 2005). *El Mercurio*, Chile's leading newspaper and one of the most prestigious in Latin America, has been associated with the most conservative sectors in the country since its establishment. Many of the newspapers articles promoted the 1973 coup against the socialist government of Salvador Allende, justified and distorted human rights violations of the Pinochet dictatorship, and legitimized the neoliberal and the political authority of the dictatorship (Vetö & Garretón, 2010). This newspaper is an institution in Chile, which sets political guidelines and supports the most conservative ideas. *El Mercurio* was also a major player in the political discussion during the 2011 student movement.

In order to precisely analyse the discourses about education and the 2011 student movement, a critical discourse analysis – based on Fairclough's approach – was conducted on editorials that were published between May and November 2011, when the student movement was at its most intense moment. This critical discourse analysis adopted aspects of framing theory, which highlights how the media deploy interpretations of important political events. Media coverage of educational policies is a recent topic of interest in the academic discussion that has gained strength in the context of the global architecture of education (Cohen, 2010; Robert, 2012; Santa Cruz Grau & Olmedo, 2012). The education field is in permanent interaction with the journalistic field, affecting 'both policy processes and texts' (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004, p. 361). Policies are now mediatized by the mass media, impacting their design, scope, text, context and discourse (Rawolle & Lingard, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Therefore, this article proposes a contribution to the study of media discourses about educational policies.

Neoliberal Chilean education¹

David Harvey (2007) has argued that neoliberalism is a systematic political and economic project of restoration of ruling class power, where inequalities between social groups are intensified, promoting the accumulation of capital and exploitation on new and global scales. Neoliberalism 'is reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality' (Ong, 2006, p. 3). This process is not a natural order; it is a political and economic construction to debilitate the role of the state in society, increasing the presence of the private sector and damaging social justice (McCarthy, 2011). This project began to be executed in the 1980s when neoliberalism was promoted by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations supporting the guidelines established by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Harvey, 2007). Education has also been impacted by the neoliberal programme.

The financial 'adjustments' dictated by the IMF and the World Bank often include the privatization of education to the detriment of public education. Budget cuts for public schools and universities have been a constant during each financial crisis, even though education plays a major role in a country's development and in the success or failure of political projects. This expresses a contemporary phenomenon where institutions are morphing into new identities (McCarthy, Greenhalgh-Spencer, & Mejia, 2011). In the

case of education, neoliberalism has brought about a paradigm shift worldwide and most countries have undertaken reform to address this.

With the pretext of the expansion of schooling coverage, the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) implemented a reform that meant the incorporation of the free market in education. As Contreras, Hojman, Hunneus, and Landerretche (2011) have indicated, ‘In 1979, there were 1846 primary schools and in 1982 – only years after the reform – there were 2285 schools, the majority of them were for-profit’ (p. 5). This trend has continued during the last three decades with the same pattern: private education is growing while public education is decreasing. Fostering competitiveness, the dictatorship created the conditions for the proliferation of for-profit educational institutions, converting education into a commodity.

Chile was the first neoliberal experiment in the world (Harvey, 2007). Pinochet’s dictatorship imposed neoliberalism, following the recommendations of Milton Friedman, who was a mentor to an array of Chilean economists who completed their Ph.D.’s in Economics at the University of Chicago during the 1970s. They were known as ‘the Chicago Boys’ (Mönckeberg, 2001), and they implemented the neoliberal system in Chile, which in education can be summarized in three fundamental elements: school choice, competition between schools and privatization of education (Bellei & Cabalin, 2013). Education was commodified whereby parents are held responsible for their children’s education, while the state plays a subsidiary role (Oliva, 2008). In terms of access, Chilean education has presented a significant evolution thanks to specific educational policies and the proliferation of voucher or subsidized schools and private institutions. The privatization of schooling has considerably increased in the last two decades, and today, more students attend private schools than public schools.

The current educational policies in Chile are based on neoliberalism (Matus & Infante, 2011). A change in these policies would have been imagined with the transition from the dictatorship to democracy, but democratic administrations kept the free market as the method to develop the country. The governmental objective was to allow access to the global economy and strengthen the modernization process. Nevertheless, the unequal inheritance from the dictatorship became an annoying burden in education (Cavieres, 2011). Neoliberal educational policies have crystallized one of the main criticisms of neoliberalism: the colossal inequalities between a privileged minority and the majority of the population (Harvey, 2007). Educational inequality has been a major issue in Chile during the past few decades. Chile has a paradoxical structure in education, because educational coverage is increasing, whereas the unequal structure stays the same. The implementation of free market policies during the last three decades has not shown advances in quality and equality in education (Contreras et al., 2011).

The supposed neoliberal progress cannot be observed in the reality of Chilean education. On the contrary, the free market policies have been shown to be destructive for social justice. It is precisely for this reason that students took to the streets in 2011 demanding more quality and equality in the Chilean education system (Cabalin, 2012). The students have demonstrated that education is a place for ideological discussion in a country, which has tended to perpetuate privileges, avoiding political conflict. They have recovered part of social mobilization in Chile, resisting the pressures from conservative technocracy.

El Mercurio and framing theory

More than a newspaper, *El Mercurio* is a political actor in the history of Chile. Linked to a powerful and wealthy family, this newspaper has represented the voice of the elite since 1900. Its pages articulate dominant and conservative discourses. *El Mercurio* is also one of the most influential newspapers in Latin America, and as a holding company, it controls an extensive network of local newspapers, online media and radio stations with a weekly circulation of more than 400,000 copies and the highest advertising revenue of the Chilean press.

Its strong ties to the dictatorship of Pinochet have been a major criticism of its history. Stories of human rights violations have been hidden, manipulated and distorted. The book, *El Diario de Agustín* (Lagos, 2009) explains how this newspaper strategically operated to create a series of false news stories during the early years of the dictatorship that enabled the regime to repress political opponents, who were mostly members or supporters of left-wing parties. Its pages were also used to support the implementation of the neoliberal system in Chile and the series of political arrangements that allowed the dictatorship to lay the foundations of the system that the students challenged in 2011.

In order to analyse how *El Mercurio* deployed the conservative response to the student movement, framing theory was utilized. Framing is related to ‘the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences’ (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11). For D’Angelo (2002), framing is a research programme that can be described by three paradigms: cognitive, constructionist and critical. The first refers to the press coverage (news frames) creating semantics within the individual interpretation schemes of the subjects. From this perspective, the media provide accessible information so that individuals can activate prior knowledge and consider this information in their future decisions. The constructionist approach sees framing as a process of creating ‘interpretative packages’ (p. 877). The media give interpretive frameworks of news events that impact the construction of social reality. The critical perspective, on the other hand, establishes that the media select certain facts and omit others to maintain the status quo and favour the dominant powers in society.

Frames would impact the distribution of power within society (Entman, 2007), as the treatment of news could bias a fact in favour of particular groups. By assuming the media as agents of power and dominant institutions of cultural production, framing also responds to a narrative strategy or discursive disposition of the media to influence people’s perceptions and public discussion of social problems. The basic functions of framing, in line with Entman (1993), are the definition of the problem, the attribution of responsibility, the moral evaluation and the recommendation of possible solutions (p. 52). According to this author, selection and salience would be the most important factors in framing, referring to the significance of importance that is assigned to a news event. This usually occurs through the repetition of an idea or interpretation, allowing for the perceptions of individuals to become more permeable with each story. This study has opted for a critical approach, since the discourses of the media represent an area of ideological dispute, where the mainstream media reduce public values, such as the right to education ‘to nostalgic reminders of another era’ (Giroux, 2011, p. 9).

The critical discourse analysis

Discourse is a facet of social life in a dialectical relationship with other social facets (Fairclough, 2003). By acknowledging this relationship, the understanding of the text is extended, making the linguistic features an important part of the analysis, but not the central focus. Fairclough (2003, 2006) suggests that discourse should be understood as a social process on three levels: structure, practice and events. Social structures are abstract entities that define the possibilities of actions and the occurrence of events mediated by social practices. This author asserts that language is a social structure, while social practice refers to the order of discourse and events, to facts. The order of discourse, in turn, is composed of three elements: genre, discourse and style.

The editorial of a newspaper may be considered a genre that has a particular way of representing the world (discourse) and shaping social identities (style). Therefore, to critically analyse an editorial, identifying its linguistic characteristics, does not suffice. Rather, a transdisciplinary theoretical perspective needs to be adopted in order to detect the relationships of this particular genre with other discourses and fields in society. Fairclough (2009) emphasizes the transdisciplinary nature of critical discourse analysis, because studying changes in language in a complex society requires relating different theories and disciplines; in this case, I have used framing theory in media studies, because the media are the principal agent of the recontextualization of discourses. The media have the power to extend or restrict possible communications in society through their particular language.

I have analysed the framing of the editorials² of *El Mercurio* by establishing a time line from the start of massive student demonstrations in May 2011 and which concluded in November 2011 because it was during this time period that the congressional debate about the budget of the nation was consolidated or the student demands were rejected. In addition, many universities and schools that had been on strike resumed their academic activities and the students returned to classes to finish the academic year. The period was marked by seven months of intense mobilizations that were widely covered by the national and international press.

All discourses are historically and politically situated. The student movement and the neoliberal Chilean education system represent the context of the discourses analysed. The first methodological stage was to analyse editorials considering Entman's framing functions, trying to highlight the definition of the problem, the allocation of responsibilities, moral judgments and the recommendation of solutions. This strategy has also been used in other studies about framing and conservative discourses of the media (Tucker, 1998). To establish the framing categories, the editorials that addressed the student movement were analysed to determine whether they mentioned educational policies, public demonstrations, protests and riots, responses to the political system, or references to the movement (Cabalin, 2013).

Once identified, the editorials were each read carefully in order to implement a critical discourse analysis. This analysis was conducted following the model proposed by Fairclough (2003), who established that we must start by considering a social problem that aims to produce an emancipatory change. In this case, this emancipatory change is the rebellion against neoliberal education in Chile. Moreover, Fairclough (1992) stated that discourses can be analysed in three dimensions: discourse as text, which allows the researcher to observe the vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and structure of the text; discourse as a discursive practice, in which the researcher seeks to understand how discourse is produced and distributed in society; and discourse as a social practice, which allows the researcher to detect when discourse is being represented and recontextualized

in a dialectical relationship with the hegemonic discourses. This analysis of discourse involves linguistic description, intertextual interpretation and social explanation.

Therefore, after identifying the semiotic aspects of the social problem (the discourses about the student movement), I focused on the key words and sentences used to describe the movement and the neoliberal education system in Chile (e.g. 'highly ideological students', 'efficient private sector', 'lower quality public education'). Then, the analysis highlighted the recontextualization of the discourses and the social practices embedded in the discourses (e.g. 'managerialism in education', 'entrepreneurship in education', 'standardized measurements', 'system of experts'). Considering this, the content of the editorials of *El Mercurio* can be understood as a 'nodal discourse' (Fairclough, 2006), which represents the conservative response to the 2011 student movement. This nodal discourse articulates the neoliberal vision in education through three discourses that cluster around it: the neoliberal system is absolute (does not accept questions), the public is valued less than the private (the problem is the state, not the market), and education is a technical issue, not political (the depoliticization of education).

The conservative response

From 13 May 2011 (when the first editorial appeared) to 26 November 2011, *El Mercurio* published 97 editorials about education and student protests. This demonstrates the importance assigned to the conflict and the need to respond from the conservative trenches to the demands of students. All translations are my own.

Discourse 1: the neoliberal system is beyond challenge³

From the critical discourse analysis of the editorials in *El Mercurio* emerges the need to preserve the core values of neoliberal education. The first principle and what seems like an inviolable rule is the defence of the freedom of teaching over the right to education. This rhetorical device defends the privatization of the system and maintains the importance of school vouchers. It encourages the state not to intervene in the system, allowing for only certain adjustments, such as increasing the number of scholarships for students, so that there is always a constant flow of students into private universities. It upholds the principle of non-discrimination to avoid state intervention in favour of public universities and emphasizes the contribution of new private universities, which do not legally profit, yet some of them act as real businesses. It is argued that there is no criticism of the system as a whole. For example, *El Mercurio* states that:

In the debate, there are many approaches to primary, secondary, and tertiary education reform, some of them valuable, but the main idea of radical change argues that primary, secondary, and tertiary education are in crisis. It is true that there are a significant number of serious problems, but we are certainly not in a terminal crisis. (*El Mercurio*, 2 July 2011, p. A3)

In addition, this rhetoric specifies that there is no actual student interest in mobilizing and that they do not have representation in society. These assertions are intended to contend the vision of a general social malaise, hiding the structural inequality that the education system reproduces. According to the editorials, the system would promote social mobility, equal opportunities and access to education. In order to do this, figures and evidence that would corroborate each of the assumptions being promoted are used. It would seem, therefore, that this successful formula should continue to exist. Utilizing

Entman's framing functions, the editorials delimited the problem and suggested the following solutions: continuing with the global neoliberal system and increasing the role that private initiative plays in education:

(Freedom of Teaching) It seems to be the right path, instead of returning to a system like the one that existed 40 years ago, which enjoys little appreciation not only in Chile but also in many other countries and among some of the most distinguished experts. (*El Mercurio*, 7 July 2011, p. A3)

A common phrase in the editorials is 'not revert to 40 years ago', which is an indirect allusion to the socialist government of Salvador Allende. *El Mercurio* defends the for-profit spirit in education, trying to place the discussion in a dispute between the supposed socialist and retrograde past and the future neoliberal progress:

(End of profit in education) With this, the country would regress 40 years economically and additionally would break the delicate, but essential link, between remuneration and effort, the engine of human endeavor in all its facets. It would be inconceivable for Chile to destroy an invaluable tool of progress, as a result of a poor and primitive analysis of the problems of the education sector. (*El Mercurio*, 2 September 2011, p. A3)

With this discourse, neoliberalism is strengthened because it would mean that progress and development are irreversible global tendencies. The foundations of the Chilean educational system are situated outside the scope of local political actors, because it is a response to the hegemonic world structure. In other words, the particular becomes general. This universal status of the neoliberal system is consistent with its hegemonic project (Fairclough, 2003). This universality and absolutism of the neoliberal system in education would be sustained in the global economy and in the process of capital accumulation, so that education may respond to these objectives and, consequently, the manner in which the economy functions affects the structure of the educational system. Therefore, the neoliberal project unfolds beyond trade relations and is also imposed on educational relations. This logic expresses that economic rationality is transferred to education. With this recontextualization, neoliberal discourse is imposed as a process 'construed as being due to inevitable, external circumstances or facts that must be accepted as irreversible, with no possible reorientation, and as a process with no responsible actors' (Fairclough, 2000, p. 17). Consequently, the system is absolute, unquestionable and functions outside of any social tension. The students' criticism of the neoliberal system would be unproductive, inefficient and even ingenuous, because the system alone would ensure its absolutism.

Discourse 2: the inefficient public education

Hand in hand with the defence of the neoliberal system, the editorials support the superiority of private over public. With reference to the competitiveness and effectiveness of both, the editorials present education as a business that must be correctly managed. The editorials fit with Apple's (2005) criticisms about the public discussion: 'The language of privatization, marketization, and constant evaluation has increasingly saturated public discourse' (p. 19). In opposition to the values of the private in education, the shortcomings of public education are exposed. It questions the role of public universities, which are described as dull, mediocre and are unable to be accountable. The 'audit culture', a term also coined by Apple (2005), is imposed in the educational setting as unquestionable logic. Public institutions are not modern; they are ineffective and have

shown progressive deterioration. It is established that the modern and the innovative come from the private. Underdevelopment and delay in schooling are public issues. Due to this, knowledge also becomes privatized and commodified, transforming it into an economic value, rather than a social one. As Lipman (2010) states: ‘The neoliberal agenda extends the logic of the market to all corners of the earth and spheres of social life’ (p. 241). Knowledge, therefore, is a product of neoliberal education that becomes a commodity. However, the fact that most research universities in Chile, whether public or private, are non-profit institutes with long tradition, is not recognized:

The debate over whether public funding should be allocated to state universities only because of their legal nature, without more accountability, is a more complex topic. (*El Mercurio*, 13 May 2011, p. A3)

Something similar occurs with respect to increases in direct fiscal support or, more generally, the public funding to state universities. This funding system is in retreat around the world, as more resources are allocated based on performance agreements with counterparts associated with the volume and quality of research and development, and specific demands on teaching. (*El Mercurio*, 29 June 2011, p. A3)

In addition, editorials establish that the students who led the protests are mainly from public universities and that with their mobilization they also helped deteriorate the education system they say they want make better. That is, students are held responsible for the damage to public education through their actions. Teachers are accused of being interest groups seeking to protect their jobs without a real commitment to improving education. Therefore, the authorities, students and teachers of public institutions would be responsible for the deterioration of public education, erasing the structural factors that resulted from neoliberal policies. The historical neglect of more than three decades is ignored. On the contrary, there are attempts to demonstrate a supposed governmental interest in public education:

In this way, for example, the complaints about the neglect of public education would not be consistent with the broad set of reforms adopted in recent times, whose main priority is precisely to promote this type of education. It can always be debated if schools are not up to par, but there is no basis to argue that the educational system has been neglected. (*El Mercurio*, 11 June 2011, p. A3)

With a smaller proportion of students in public elementary and secondary schools, the possibilities to strengthen these spaces are becoming more difficult. (*El Mercurio*, 1 November 2011, p. A3)

By implementing Entman’s (1993) framing functions, it is clear that the educational problem focuses on the failings of the public system; that those responsible for these problems are the agents of these institutions, and it is recommended that the benefits for private education institutions be increased in order to solve this problem. To do this, the effectiveness of the private sector over the public is emphasized; an argument that neoliberal discourse in education has sustained since the 1980s. In the editorials, free education is rejected because it is assumed that this is a personal investment with high return and the subsidiary role of the state is promoted, another characteristic of neoliberalism. However, when modern states were first becoming established, education was seen as a project for the construction of identity and citizenship that the nation-state required. In the mid-twentieth century, education was essential for developmental processes and the possibility to expand opportunities to the population, thus consolidating post-Second World War democracy. In fact, the universal declaration of Human Rights

recognizes the value of education as a fundamental right. But since the 1980s, education has become a business or, more precisely, it has transformed into a commodity (Ball, 1998).

The concept of human capital was established as a system in education, but this 'approach is problematic because it is economic, fragmented and exclusively instrumentalistic' (Robeyns, 2006, p. 69). This conceptual change means that education is no longer associated with democracy, but with the market, as it is only 'useful' if it can boost productivity and competitiveness in the global economy. For this reason, it does not matter if schools promote critical thinking or 'teach to the test'. The point is to generate a flexible workforce, which is multifunctional and competitive. This global architecture in education nurtures the new economy (Carnoy, 2002). For this reason, private education is more functional to this strategy than public institutions.

Discourse 3: apolitical education

The student movement is presented primarily as an assault on institutionalization. The students are criticized for their actions, they are criminalized and the social protest is presented as an act of vandalism. The 'moral panic' about youth is represented here (Thompson, 1998). They were also delegitimized as political actors and were denied the opportunity to engage in the political discussion, because they were considered ineffective and irresponsible. There is contempt for their autonomy and they are accused of being manipulated. Students are criticized for their methods of protest. Following one of Entman's framing functions, editorials make moral judgments about the legitimacy of marches and demonstrations which, as mentioned above in Di Cicco's (2010) Nuisance Paradigm, was also done in the USA where protests were presented as bothersome and unproductive. *El Mercurio* applies the same discursive strategy as American conservative newspapers to depict the student movement:

We are against the agenda of the left that has not been able to convince the electorate of the desirability of its proposals and aims to take advantage of the sympathy that is often aroused by the students' demands to try to push them. It has become clear that the student or social movements are far from representing the vast majority of citizens. Therefore, we do not have to dramatize their demands. It is reasonable to try to concentrate again on the agenda of proper education. (*El Mercurio*, 1 July 2011, p. A3)

But there is no clear evidence that the country agrees to adopt all the suggestions from students, and less their way of settling differences is through a permanent street strength test, which radicalized and polarized positions. (*El Mercurio*, 18 August 2011, p. A3)

It is constantly emphasized that there is a need to resolve the conflict from a technical point of view, referring to effectiveness and efficiency as values that should guide the discussion. One of the changes based on the order of neoliberal discourse is moving management concepts to education. By making the discussion technical, the discussion is void of meaning and students are prevented from transforming into political actors. There is a want to encapsulate education into a technical sphere, by the technocracy and in the field of experts. Education has returned to be a matter of economic distribution and not of political values, distancing it from society and the critique of citizens:

Therefore, it is difficult to understand the intellectual and empirical validity of the claims of the student leaders and their supporters, when they seek not only to eliminate entrepreneurship in the field of education, but it is also easy to notice, that they seek to end it in other productive areas as well. (*El Mercurio*, 3 November 2011, A3)

The only reference to politics is the critique of the political system established in the Parliament. The main political criticism made by the editorials of *El Mercurio* is directed to the centre-left opposition, which after ruling for 20 years, lost to the right-wing candidate, Sebastián Piñera, in the 2009 election. *El Mercurio* has called to achieve elitist institutional arrangements that have characterized the transition from dictatorship to democracy. However, this style only distanced the public whose focus is what has generated the delegitimization of Chilean democracy and the political system (De la Maza, 2010). Editorials try to focus the policy discussion in parliament, removing it from the streets, to prevent the participation of social actors. Appealing to stop the radicalization of the student movement, ignoring the structural demands of students and focusing on the settings for the system to continue to operate without major neoliberal conflicts, *El Mercurio* attempts to depoliticize the student movement in an effort to also demobilize students from channelling the discussion on a path where 20-year institutions have been safeguarded by the legacy of Pinochet. In order to achieve this goal, students are depicted as idealists and utopians without the expertise needed. *El Mercurio* utilizes 'ideology' as a pejorative in order to avoid the political discussion:

There is no apparent relationship between abstract aspirations and highly ideological aspirations as the student movement envisions the country's educational organization for the future and the real possibility that this will result in improved quality. (*El Mercurio*, 14 September 2011, p. A3)

The utopia of reshaping the higher education system, renouncing, for example, its mixed character – which, incidentally, is historical – should be abandoned. Instead, there should be a serious proposal of a horizon for the coming decades, developing from this goal the necessary reforms and taking care always to use resources well, while remembering that they have an alternative use and availability in education will always be bounded. (*El Mercurio*, 22 November 2011, p. A3)

El Mercurio calls on the political system to address the student movement, but considering the technical expertise in the design of solutions in order to impose economics over politics. However, education should be a political discussion, because it is in this sphere that the future of society is forged. Through it, opportunities for the present and future generations are organized. It also distributes power in society and roles are assigned in the social structure. In the neoliberal discourse, ideology is hidden behind a technical approach with the objective of ignoring the negative political consequences of neoliberal system. However, educational policies are influenced by ideology, as demonstrated by various projects. For example, in 2004, the Renaissance 2010 programme was implemented in Chicago, which involved the closure of public schools and the opening of private ones. That is, entrepreneurs entered into the business of schooling, arguing that the state was unable to manage and deliver quality schools. This project clearly expresses the intersection between economic policy and educational policy in Chicago, because powerful groups seek to convert this city into a global economic centre (Lipman & Hursh, 2007). To do that, intervention needs to occur in the city and business options need to be open to investors. Renaissance 2010 is not, then, only an educational improvement plan, but is also a political strategy sustained in a neoliberal vision (Lipman & Hursh, 2007).

In the case of Chile, by introducing the technical aspects of education, the ideological lines that support each educational project are hidden, blurred and transformed into numbers. With this, the public space is also depoliticized, establishing the boundaries of the discussion on education, where the voice is that of the experts. Education, therefore, is

displayed as a routine system with a mechanical structure. Everything must be measured, programmes, students, teachers and faculty at the university. The education workforce is subjected to the fragility imposed by the neoliberal logic to measure, quantify and cut educational plans (Tuchman, 2009).

Final remarks

The conservative response in *El Mercurio*'s editorials can be considered a part of the 'neoliberal newspeak'. In the article *Neoliberal Newspeak: Notes on the New Planetary Vulgate*, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001) consider that a public vocabulary has been imposed to transform neoliberal terms (flexibility, efficiency – to name a few) into commonplaces in the cultural production, affecting the international circulation of ideas. These commonplaces are now a 'universal common sense' thanks to a media repetition (p. 3). In the case of student movement, *El Mercurio* produces this common sense repeating three main concepts that are elements of the neoliberal discourse: neoliberalism in all social spheres is an irreversible process; the market in education needs to be free in order to constrain the role of the state; and education is a technical issue that must be managed by experts. These ideas are the base of the majority of editorials. There is an ideological disposition in *El Mercurio*'s discourse to neutralize the student movement. The editorials call to ignore the students and produce little modifications in the institutionalized structure without transforming the neoliberal system. Students are depicted as fanciful and pretentious young people. According to *El Mercurio*, they cannot be political actors in the educational debate, because education is a matter for adults and experts. These experts are not named; it is not known whom they represent, or who they are. With this discourse, the discussion about educational policies is associated with an apolitical process in order to enhance the neoliberal system.

The editorials present a discourse that did not change in the seven months analysed. *El Mercurio* has a consistent and coherent discourse during this time, defending the neoliberal legacy of Pinochet's dictatorship. In its editorials, there are no severe criticisms against the current Chilean educational system. Rather, there is a constant request to keep the system in order to avoid going back '40 years' in Chilean history. However, students are not asking for an educational programme like that, they are protesting in favour of more equality and social justice in education. The editorials try to misrepresent the students' demands in order to diminish their power.

El Mercurio acknowledges some flaws in Chile's education system, but repeatedly insists that their roots are not systemic, but rather a specific problem related mainly to an 'unfair' allocation of resources among public and private education institutions. The editorials defend the role of the private initiative and the validity of profit making in the education system. *El Mercurio* blames the conflict on the students, the rectors of traditional universities, and the teachers. In consequence, the editorials make a distinction between the promoters of neoliberalism in education and those who sought to increase the role of the state in education. Thus, the conservative response to the 2011 Chilean student movement is the nodal discourse of the editorials that allows seeing how neoliberal education is promoted and protected in Chile.

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Notes

1. For a more detailed description of the Chilean education system and the student movements, see (Cabalin, 2012) and (Bellei & Cabalin, 2013).
2. For Canel (1999), 'the editorial is the genre that sets forth the ideological and journalistic profile; it is the text in which the newspaper adopts a political position in the name of the paper' (p. 98).
3. I would like to thank one of the reviewers for the recommendations about the categorization of these three discourses.

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