

**DOSSIER**

*Childhood(s), social movements and the city: curriculum(s) and teacher training*

**Children as political actors in school: a case of participation and conflict in the context of the writing of Chile's new Constitution**

*Niños y niñas como sujetos políticos en la escuela, un caso de participación y conflicto en el marco del proceso constituyente chileno*

*Crianças como atores políticos na escola: um caso de participação e conflito no contexto da redação da nova Constituição do Chile*

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**ABSTRACT**

Chilean children and youth have been essential to the country's social changes, including the social mobilizations that led to an agreement for a new constitution. This article seeks to delve into the complex relationship between the political subjectivities of children and young people and the school's role in this. We focus on an episode of school participation where there is a conflict concerning the violence suffered by women. Through critical discourse analysis, we analyze the value of conflict in politics and the possibilities for the school to integrate it as a form of citizenship education.

*Keywords:* Participation. Political Subjectivities. Social Mobilization. Citizenship. School.

**RESUMEN**

Los niños y jóvenes chilenos han sido esenciales para los cambios sociales del país, incluidas las movilizaciones sociales que llevaron a un acuerdo para una nueva constitución. Este artículo busca ahondar en la compleja relación entre las subjetividades políticas de niños y jóvenes y el papel de la escuela en ésta. Nos centramos en un episodio de participación escolar donde hay un conflicto en torno a la violencia que sufren las mujeres. A través del análisis crítico del discurso, analizamos el valor del conflicto en la política y las posibilidades para que la escuela lo integre como una forma de educación ciudadana.

*Palabras clave:* Participación. Subjetividades Políticas. Movilización Social. Ciudadanía. Escuela.

**RESUMO**

As crianças e os jovens chilenos têm sido essenciais para as mudanças sociais do país, incluindo a mobilização social que contribuíram para o acordo em relação à revisão constitucional. Este artigo procura aprofundar a complexa relação entre as subjetividades políticas de crianças e jovens e o papel da escola nesse processo. Nosso foco é um episódio de participação escolar em que há um conflito relativo à violência sofrida pelas

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mulheres. Por meio da análise crítica do discurso, analisamos o valor do conflito na política e as possibilidades de a escola integrá-lo como uma forma de educação para a cidadania.

*Palavras-chave:* Participação. Identidades Políticas. Mobilização Social. Cidadania. Escola.

## Introduction

On Friday, October 18, 2019, at about 3 p.m., a progressive shutdown of the Santiago underground train network was announced. The cause was multiple protests in the stations by secondary school students. These protests happened since October 6, when a fare increase on the city's public transport system occurred. They took the form of "mass evasions", in which young people of both sexes, organized in their schools and through social networks, jumped the Metro turnstiles in large groups to gain free access to public transport.

After several failed measures by the Piñera government, on November 15, the government and Congress signed a national agreement for a peaceful solution to the social discontent expressed in the protests. A national referendum was proposed for October 2020. In the referendum, citizens voted 78.28% for the Constitution created by the civil-military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet to be replaced with a constitution written in democracy. It is important to recall that in Chile, all those over the age of 18 can vote in every election. Following the November 15 agreement and amid state violence, citizens took to the streets in various ways, in self-convened meetings and other more formal ones, to discuss the Chile we wanted. Many of these meetings were between young people and children, who also had space to give their opinions. At our university, we organized various discussion groups with children of different ages who live in our neighborhood in the city center. However, in mid-March 2020, the health emergency caused by the SARS Covid 2 pandemic led to a series of lockdowns that changed the everyday landscape.

This work<sup>1</sup> examines the political role of children of both sexes in the social changes Chile has experienced in recent years, particularly in a case of participation organized in their school establishments concerning Chile's new Constitution. Our interest was to reflect on the political subjectivities of children and on how, in the Chilean case – although young students have set political agendas on multiple occasions during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries– much less is known about the role of school institutions in the emergence of young people's political identities, and even less those of children.

The first part of this work is a critical reflection on the idea of participation and political subjectivity in the context of a Latin American country. Our search for working materials led us to a conclusion similar to Raby (2014). Although we do not use the Foucaultian framework she proposes, we share that children's participation models are, many of them, a deepening individualism without a real political foundation, this is a relationship with others within a context where the conflict is central (Mouffe, 2014).

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For this reason, we will depart from the concept of citizenship and political action and concentrate on an empirical analysis of two characteristics of what we will call a “political actor” mentioned by Velásquez (2016), namely the primacy of conflict and the collective. Thus, we will explain why we consider that the traditional idea of political participation does not fit the Chilean context by introducing the concepts of organization and social mobilization, the first as the collective sense of the political, and the second as born of a social relation that is not harmonious but fundamentally conflictive. Consequently, we will go deeper into the Chilean context with a look at the student movements of the past century and then analyze the Chilean school’s role in the processes of political socialization until the present day. In the section on methodology, we will describe the work carried out and the characteristics of the school in which we worked. Later, in the results section, we analyze one working session in which there was a heated political conflict over violence against women. This reveals aspects that demonstrate the political subjectivities of the child participants and the school’s role in the teacher’s person. We end with some thoughts about the possibility of the school’s capacity to work as an agent of political socialization beyond its role in the conflict between students and the school institution.

### **Participation or mobilization? A discussion of political subjectivity**

When searching for material while planning strategies for post-18 October participatory work with children, we were struck by the number of texts on child or youth participation that cited the North American academic Roger Hart. Indeed, the few academic texts that existed in our country had this author as their primary source in defining and classifying forms of participation. While no doubt an academic tradition is lacking in Chile on this topic, in any field of knowledge, it is striking when a single author appears as the primary reference.

Analyzing the texts of this author, especially those widely disseminated and published by UNICEF, one of his main contributions appears to be “Hart’s ladder” an extremely simple scheme that depicts the progression of participation in childhood, divided into levels of “non-participation” and of “genuine participation”. One of Hart’s (1992) most frequently cited texts is *Children’s Participation, from Tokenism to Citizenship*, an Innocenti Research Centre essay published by UNICEF. This text is relevant for our analysis in that it considers participative and non-participative forms of child and youth participation, using as a criterion the involvement of the adult world in participatory processes. Among the forms that are “non-participation,” Hart mentions social movements as problematic to categorize on the assumption that adults could organize these. From our perspective, this viewpoint conflicts with the Chilean experience of youth participation. The preponderantly liberal view of participation as a space for deliberation free from influential adults, like that proposed by Hart, responds to a tradition that idealizes childhood as a space constantly protected and therefore influenced by the adult world. The assumption is that childhood occupies a subaltern position while ignoring forms of relationship with the adult world that go beyond mere reproduction, such as resistance (Peña; Chavez; Vergara, 2014), negotiation (Punch, 2001), criticism (Boltanski, 2013), and other hybrid forms identifiable in the field of post-colonial studies which show us the coexistence/mixture/creation of new forms of social relationship.

In Chilean history –and as part of a Latin American tradition resistant to the forms taken by European colonization– the social locus of children is not necessarily one of subalternity at home or school. Instead, it is the product of a history of constant struggles, in which children have been, for example, workers and delinquents, participants in complex forms of autonomous social organization in which families answer to complex non-nuclear formats, such as the matriarchal Afro-Brazilian family mentioned by Segato (2007); with states that colonial contexts have shaped, and with epistemological and ethical frames in constant tension– as far as cultural differences are concerned– with punitive models. Examples are child labor and the battles of the International Labour Organisation with child worker organizations in Bolivia (Pedraza, 2007); the forms of upbringing practiced by the original nations of the South American altiplano (Olivares, 2019), reproved by Western justice models; or the forms of motherhood that allowed children to circulate outside the ambit of the family as a form of social and economic protection, categorized as child abandonment according to traditional Western logic (Milanich, 2001). Hart (2008) will recognize the problem of the cultural limitations of his own ladder model, distinguishing between individualistic and collectivist cultures.

This absence of historical context in the child participation proposals advanced by UNICEF, and by Hart in particular, speak to an essentially depoliticized idea of participation, in which there is no conflict, but instead an idealized orchestration of an individualistic citizenry that is taught how to participate in its community. What this fails to acknowledge is that children are political actors, as we maintain, from the moment that they find themselves up against relations of power in which they must devise strategies and tactics to achieve their objectives in a social world crisscrossed by social relations, whether of class, ethnicity, generation or others (Peña; Chavez; Vergara, 2014).

## **History, conflicts, and the political meanings of student mobilization in Chile**

Even though universal and compulsory education in Chile was established in 1920, schooling processes were flexible. Only in 1967 could we count on universal instruction up to the fourth year of primary education, a milestone pioneered by Chile in Latin America. School competed with work, and to the extent that schools were able to cover the secondary expenditure that education entails, such as food, school enrolment increased (Illanes, 1990). It must be understood, then, that the Latin American historical context involves forms of autonomy that differ from childhoods in developed countries. The children’s strike at the National Glass Factory in 1925 is an example of this. Organized by children, as described by Rojas Flores (2016), it was a protest for a wage increase spearheaded solely by child workers, since only children worked in this facility. Another important twentieth-century autonomy milestone, in this case involving youth, was the Federation of Chilean Students (FECH) creation in 1906. Here there was a dialogue involving agreements and disagreements between university and popular actors that culminated in the arrival to power in 1971 of the “Popular Unity” government, with Salvador Allende at its head.

During the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990), student movements, including secondary school students, played an essential role in the resistance to the regime. After a long interval of so-called “youthful political disaffection” (Zarzuri, 2010, p. 6) which coincided with the return to democracy, in 2001 the “backpackers’ movement” (*mochilazo*) took off, in protest increases in

transport fares, with the first appearance of the Coordinating Assembly of Secondary Students (ACES). This ongoing organization in 2006 led to the Penguin Movement. The “penguins”– the name was for the color of their school uniforms– organized protests throughout the country, this time coalescing in a broader political demand for a new educational model. The movement ended with the formation of working groups in cooperation with the Bachelet government and the subsequent repeal of the Organic Law of Education (LOCE), one of Pinochet’s so-called “tying-up laws” (*leyes de amarre*).

*At that moment, a new cycle of protest repertoires and political opportunities began, in the words of Aguilera-Ruiz e Alvarez-Vandeputte (2017) involving mass protests that included students and other social actors, with demands for radical changes to the neoliberal model that affected the social rights of Chileans, especially to education, health and social security. A second stage was the mass feminist protests that since 2017 have demanded reproductive rights for all women and an end to gender-based violence in general. This cycle reached its apogee with the protests of 2019– they coincided in their massive scale and their demands for radical changes in which concepts such as dignity, justice, and the end of impunity for crimes against humanity were central. According to Aguilera-Ruiz e Alvarez-Vandeputte (2017), a feature of student movements in Chile has been their positioning outside the political parties, the extreme youth of their members, their absence of a union background, and their very democratic internal practices. These aspects have contributed to spontaneity, de-centralization and synchrony, which has increased in recent years due to social networks. Likewise, they become visible contextual moments of social conflict.*

## **The school as a producer of political subjectivity**

From a more traditional perspective, the school has a role in individuals’ socialization. From this point of view, the school and the other socializing agents are neutral in the process, which from a political subjectivities perspective is a problematic assumption to make. On the contrary, we consider that there is a conflict inherent in school disciplinary practices with the educational institution, whether it be the educational system or the school itself. Thinking of a school proposing citizenship education from a curricular logic is problematic. We agree with authors who propose that school is a form of social control (Álvarez-Uría; Varela, 1991), a reproduction of cultural arbitrariness (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1979). However, we also understand that it is possible to do something about it by adopting a critical and emancipatory position (Freire, 1985). Although this has been studied more from the teaching side (Giroux, 1990), it does not preclude forms of resistance by youth and children. As Mahmood says, following Foucault and Butler, “one may argue that the set of capacities inhering in a subject – that is, the abilities that define her modes of agency – are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations” (Mahmood, 2006, p.17).

In the Chilean case, we have been able to appreciate that the school plays the role of a political agent, as part of a system that students as political subjects have critically confronted over a broad arc, ranging from everyday classroom problems to the country’s structural issues. However, there is an insistence on thinking of models of political socialization in Chile as part of an imposed political agenda. For example, Cumsille and Martínez (2015, p. 430) argue that

the political socialization of young people is key in the agenda of strengthening democracy. For the healthy functioning of a democratic society, social institutions such as the family and the school must cultivate certain key dispositions in people, among which participation in civic life is essential.

These authors define political socialization as “all those processes through which children and youth learn attitudes and patterns of behavior as citizens and, at the same time, become aware of how power is distributed in society.” (Cumsille; Martínez, 2015, p. 430). We do not consider the definition to be wrong, but incomplete. The relationship with the socio-historical context and its conflicts should be considered, since the school is a product of that context, and the students as subjects are part of that reality.

The Chilean school would embrace this “socializing” role in a context that has not been exempt from controversies and paradoxes. Already in the year 1990, just after the Pinochet dictatorship, the teaching of our recent history provoked curricular debate, since pro-government groups considered that referring to the military dictatorship as a “dictatorship” or speaking of a “coup d’état” was a distortion of the historical truth (Toledo; Magendzo, 2013). The same has occurred with the colonizing role of the Chilean state over the native peoples, especially in the most current case— but not the only one— of the so-called “Mapuche conflict.” Indeed, a “monocultural” curriculum like that of Chile has been an issue in the ethnic conflicts the country is currently experiencing (Quintriqueo; McGinity, 2009).

Even the debate over civic education in Chile has been part of a broader political context. In 1912 civic education was established as an independent subject; later, in 1967, it was merged into the Social Sciences, but became independent again in 1980. However, in 1997, in democracy, it disappeared as a course and was defined as a transversal objective, cutting across the school curriculum. Only in 2016 was the Citizen Education Plan created for all the country’s educational establishments. In 2018, as part of the update of the Curriculum Guidelines, the National Education Council (CNED) approved the creation of the new subject of Citizen Education for the final years of secondary education (Elizalde, 2020). 2011 parliament discussed this issue, but Chilean right-wingers voted against it or abstained, questioning the legislation procedure.

So, what is happening in Chilean schools for their students to have managed to organize themselves in this way? Finding answers to this question is not easy, not only due to the lack of research and analysis to date but also due to the very nature of the phenomenon of political subjectivities, which can move in complex ways, coalescing in fleeting or anti-systemic identity phenomena that are elusive factors for the adult world.

One of the hypotheses worth examining is the emergence of these movements in Santiago’s so-called emblematic establishments, highly selective public institutions with a political tradition and a visible leadership role within the country’s educational establishments. This may be plausible, but it omits smaller movements or those hidden from public view in peripheral city neighborhoods or other country areas. A second hypothesis is a curricular change introduced in 1993 that changed the traditional colonial curricular model in which Spanish was taught as the official Chilean language for a course geared to communication and language competencies. This hypothesis is one of the few that gives the school a role in the political education of students, but clear evidence of it still needs

to be provided. However, in addition to classes within the regular curriculum, there have been other school experiences bordering on political subjectivation, such as the “National Debate Tournaments” that were organized with funds from the Education Ministry from 2001 until 2006– the year of the “Penguin” movement– when this funding abruptly terminated. According to the women’s magazine Paula (September 25, 2008), this coincidence of dates could be because many of the leaders of that movement gained their skills in those debates. Nevertheless, it is difficult to know if the debates were formative or if “the penguins” were displaying skills they had already acquired: there is no academic material in those years. The debates still occur under some universities’ auspices but without state funding.

## Methodology

We worked for a little over a semester with 13 - and 14-year-old boys and girls in three volunteer schools<sup>2</sup>. Two of the schools are public, while one of them is a subsidized private institution. All three are in lower-middle-class neighborhoods in the Metropolitan Region. The design is based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) perspective. PAR is “the process that simultaneously includes adult education, scientific research and political action and considers critical analysis, the diagnosis of situations and practices as sources of knowledge” (Fals Borda, 1987, p. 67) while constructing new formulas. The PAR principles are common in education, especially in the curricular field, since Carr and Kemmis updated it in 1988. Part of this team had already worked on PAR with children in schools, using the concept of “progressive immersion.” by Guber (2004), where we make the progress and planning of the research hand in hand with the school community, with the children as protagonists. The process was carried out with a quasi-ethnographic perspective that involves the assumptions and techniques of classical ethnography in a more limited time (Iñiguez, 2004), allowing the researcher and her team to take notes, have conversations, review documents and images that allow a better understanding of the participatory process of boys and girls in a school within the framework of constitutional change. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantines, all research was planned and carried out online through Zoom.

### *Stages of the process*

Definitions with schools and their educational communities, where the “collaborating pair” of the school was first defined, which will be the direct contact with the researcher. After this, we worked with this person on the first design of the process with the consequent review of it through consultation with children that could be through a consultative body defined jointly for this and that may continue to function during the process. This article is the result of the analysis of this part, where we work with the children on the importance of their participation. The third part is the activities design where we proposed models that prioritize children’s participation in all process stages, generating a work calendar. This design will be done in conjunction with the schools and

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<sup>2</sup> We thank the three schools that opened their doors, their directors, the teaching monitors and especially the participating children.

maintain the guiding principles for the “meaningful participation” of boys and girls that the Council for Children (2016, p. 23): recommends: that is, that it be (i) relevant, (ii) appropriate and (iii) subject to accountability. Finally, the results were disseminated through specially edited material to children’s offices in communes and territories, the Ombudsman’s Office for Children, the Undersecretariat for Children, and the media.

We chose 3 Santiago schools belonging to the communes in the first regional third of voting for the “Approval” in the plebiscite of entry to the new Constitution held on October 25, 2020. School 1 is a high-performing municipal secondary school but in a neighborhood of high social vulnerability. We knew this school had an active student center and council. The principal proposed that we work with the 16 councilors elected by their peers. They wanted us to work on choosing relevant issues and then compile some proposals for the Constitution.

School 2 is in a peripheral industrial neighborhood, with poor performance on standardized tests. It is also a municipal secondary school, the closest thing to the “public education” idea in Chile. The teachers needed to be more explicit about the objectives. One of the teachers said, “I would like them to be able to think about participation beyond the organization of the class field trip.” They agreed to work during the Orientation class. This subject is a comprehensive training process for students, promoting their personal, affective, and social development with participation as one of the main goals. This paper analyzes one session with the 8th-grade group of School 2. There were 15 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 14. School 3 is in an old industrial neighborhood closer to the center of Santiago. It is a subsidized private school, part of a private foundation.

We analyzed the data through critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA, as Fairclough (1989) mentions, is a cross-analysis of theoretical concepts that allow a better understanding of how discursive practices are social practices that can reproduce or transform the dominant order. Although we take some fundamental elements of conversation analysis as reactions and speaking turns, we are always interested in connecting with the macro structures (institutions or social forms) rather than the microstructural aspects of the conversation (see Fairclough, 1989).

The sessions were on the Zoom online platform due to the health emergency caused by the SARS-Covid 2 pandemic, and the children expressed themselves orally using microphones but also in writing using the chat.

Universidad Diego Portales ethics committee approved this study. The children and their parents agreed to their participation and the use of their opinions in academic studies, public documents, and working documents for the Convention members for the districts to which the schools belong.

## **Description of the results**

### ***Conflict as part of political subjectivities***

We will analyze a session with the 8th grade of School 2<sup>3</sup>. There were 15 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 14. It was the second intervention session, and the purpose was to discuss the

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<sup>3</sup> Group session held on May 19, 2021.

issue of children's participation. The session was conducted on the Zoom online platform, and the children expressed themselves orally using microphones and in writing using the chat. That day, we proposed to discuss whether they felt their opinions were listened to and valued. The session struck us as necessary because it shows in miniature a discussion that is topical in Chile, and we dare say in other parts of the world: it exposes contrary positions on the life of social groups, in this case women, showing familiar arguments in a conflict between parties that is also common. We will divide the session into three parts.

### ***Part 1: The importance of expressing an opinion and participating***

Initially, the students spoke about the value of their opinions in the adult world. Some considered they were listened to, while others said they were not. When they went into it, they commented that opinions depend on who they are addressed to. For example, Angela declared "... All I know is that you cannot talk about politics with my grandmother, but with my grandfather and my stepfather you can, and they do not mind".

The discussion focused on the generation gap. For example, Katy said that adults would not readily accept her opinion "because if a small person, [is] a child, and wants to give an opinion on a more adult topic, they will shut her up with the excuse that 'you don't know, you are too young, you are too young to know', or things like that". This led to the following exchange:

Claudia: "I say yes, they tell me that too [what Katy said], but then if I don't know something and I give no opinion, afterward my mum, someone older than me who knows, explains it to me and I understand."

Susan: "Sometimes I feel excluded like Katy but sometimes I feel good because often you can explain a topic to the adult, because you can often know more than they do".

Katy: "It really depends on the person, sometimes they can take it as a lack of respect, or they can take it very well and congratulate you, I mean it depends on the person".

Up to this point, the children had shown that they could recognize the contexts that the adults around them set, and they also managed to distinguish between them. It is significant how one of the girls appears open to negotiating his opinions with adults; there is a search for the truth in the act of expressing an opinion, but the conversation quickly turns to show that reason is not exclusively an adult matter, but one that must also be understood contextually, as Susan explained through the microphone:

I [talk with] my grandmother when we go to the center [of Santiago]. Someone might insult someone from another country, and I made sure to speak to my grandmother about that and I would end up explaining many things to her, or also about the LGBT community [...] I also explain many things to her because grandparents can see things, well, as not of the time, as very euphoric [*sic*].

Susan was responding to a classmate who told her that he explains video games to his grandparents, going deeper into more controversial issues for Chilean society, like the increase in immigration rates and the greater acceptance of the rights of sexual minorities, issues that could

place her in a situation of generational conflict with her grandmother. The children could show themselves competent in what they know; they recognized themselves as capable and saw a lack of factual and emotional knowledge in the adults.

## **Part 2: The conflictive opinion**

With the session already underway, Bastián appeared in the chat, announcing that he had arrived late. While discussing relationships with the adult world, he announced, “The other day, an old man thought he was being mugged”. Other children ignored him, enthusiastically recounting their conversations with the adults in their families. At that moment, the facilitator asked what issues they thought they could not involve themselves. Bastián wrote in the chat, “Or feminist comments. “The group ignored him, but he insisted: “Feminasi” (sic). His female classmates and the teacher who was present corrected him. They explained that feminazis do not exist, and that word is offensive to feminists. Bastián continued correcting his spelling: “Does feminazi sound better”?

At that moment, a conflict led by Bastián began, in which the point at issue was that more men are killed than women. Other male classmates joined Bastián, who gave figures demonstrating that more men die than women. A female classmate, Angela, explained to him eloquently what the feminist’s struggle against gender violence means:

On Diego’s comment [a participant in the discussion] who was saying why the feminist movement exists if they kill more men than women, and there is the difference in that gender violence exists, which [means] that they are not going to kill a man for being a man. For women, that’s why I think [there is] also the term femicide... like when the brother, the father, the ex-partner, suitors kill her. There are men, however extreme it sounds, there are men who kill women because they have been rejected, because they declare themselves and [the women] tell them “No, I don’t want anything to do with you” and they kill them, and that’s why the term exists. Some women are murdered by their husbands, their fathers, and their uncles, they rape them, assault them and all that is called gender violence for a reason. They kill men, but that’s in a robbery, when they are in the street, they steal their cell phones, things like that [...] There are very few cases, very few, in which a man is killed and raped, because yes it has happened, I don’t deny that [but] it happens much less than to a woman, there’s never a shortage of woman who has been sexually assaulted, then murdered or beaten in whatever way.

Bastián replied by chat, “Those are dirty old men,” and then gave a series of examples in the chat in which he tried to demonstrate that there can be women who kill men and that, according to his argument, men cannot defend themselves if a woman assaults them. At this moment, more male classmates joined in support, using the symbol “x2” until reaching “x4” (multiplied by 4). The teacher and the facilitator explained to Bastián with arguments like Angela, that there are differences of power between men and women, to which Bastián replied that if only there were a male teacher present at that moment.

It is striking how, at this moment, a discussion of gender differences was reproduced that can be heard in adult settings. Bastián was determined to provoke a conflict with no resolution, in

which critical elements of a typically male representation are present, for example, by presenting gender conflict as a problem against men and their masculinity. The problem was not that they kill women, but that not all men do so (Segato, 2003). It is as if the feminists were to make accusations against men for being men, while also arousing male fear of losing the dominant position, and that is the reason why, as occurred here, a group of males joined together to defend themselves. What is essential here, Segato would say (2003) is that a sign of masculinity that is typically threatening for women is also threatening to males who do not join the group. It is not only a confrontation with women but also a form of group reinforcement of masculinity that is constantly under threat. Finally, after a long dispute, Bastián wrote in the chat. “Viva Pinochet”.

Bastián related his dispute with the feminists to the authoritarian model of the dictator Pinochet. Even though the group ignored him, the facilitator tried to persuade them to listen respectfully and asked Bastián to stay behind after class to talk. Angela continued to give arguments, this time against disinformation. She added a new argument:

They (men) bring up issues of violence toward men just when one is talking about feminism. I can assure you that no one here has ever shown interest in these issues, has never done anything to change them, to inform people, they never have, and they touch on it just (she stresses “just”) when one is talking of feminism.

Angela raised an important issue: if Bastián brought up the political context by mentioning Pinochet, Angela brought it up too by saying that politics is done by activism, by being a part of the movements, and by expressing oneself in the representation of another. After this, Bastián asked to speak on the microphone, but it was now late, and the adults had to wind up the session. Bastián insisted on another position: “Angela nearly hit me...” Another boy said, “Angela gets angry straight away”. Bastián said directly to the teacher “Yes, it’s true, see prof, and I was only giving an opinion here”.

### ***Part 3: Resolution without closure, a new affective scene***

After these intense 20 minutes of discussion, the children were tired. The adults as well. There were three ways out of the discussion. Diego proposed the first, who asked that a male teacher be present the next time they discuss the subject. Our male research assistant, who had devoted himself to taking notes (true to the role that we had previously defined as a team) but who had felt he was on the spot, gave his opinion at that moment in favor of gender equality and respect for feminism.

The second proposal was that of Bastián, who had started the argument. Bastián went directly to the teacher to call out the attitude of his feminist classmates as aggressive and disrespectful of his opinions.

The final option was the one that Diego, once again, proposed after the assistant’s intervention. He asked the teacher not to touch on these issues again in the Orientation class since it ends with an argument whenever they are raised. The teacher replied that the things he doesn’t like “can’t be swept under a rug.” She then insisted that if someone felt bad, the fault was in the words they chose

to use, the stickers they used in the chat, and that each one had to take responsibility for that. She ended by saying:

People should not say that the others were to blame, no, everyone knows what they did, what they said, how they said it, and that's why one must take responsibility [...] and we are not going to drop the subject because it causes problems. On the contrary, we must clarify it so that we know what we are talking about later.

The class was already over time, so the conversation was closed.

## Discussion

The debate was extremely rich in meanings and discursive modalities. However, its particular interest was the undercurrent of politics in the event, how it was expressed through the children's discussion as they presented a topic that interested them, that they knew to be controversial, and gave rise to a discussion between opposed views. We can see how politics reveals itself as a controversial topic involving agreements and disagreements but also has performative aspects present in this case.

The opposition of views was a "contradictory opposition," as Laclau and Mouffe (2004) citing Colletti (1975) call it, that is, not A versus B, but A versus not-A. That is why the girl said to Bastián, if this matters to you, get involved, transform your argument into something positive rather than just an attack on our position. In the case of girls who defend the feminist position, the political is performative insofar as it requires mobilization: one must discuss and argue, but one must be part of a collective world and do things concerning that. This is of great importance in understanding Chilean student politics; as we have seen, this is seen to be a social "movement", one of whose characteristics is the radical democratization of the rank and file (Aguilera, 2016), in which representation is consulted and constantly subject to the collective members' vote of approval. But, on the other hand, the children performed a political position in the very act of the discussion: they united in well-known rhetoric's such as that of matching victimhood on both sides to minimize the adversary's position; veiled threats in a joking tone with the figure of Pinochet behind them; and criticism read as a personal attack in which victimization emerges as a strategy. The last two rhetorical forms leave the facts to one side and appeal to the other emotionally through fear, either one's own or the fear one can instill in the antagonist.

It was as if the girl's simple opinion triggered in Bastián the fear of losing what identifies him as a man, and even before this could happen, he interrupted the discussion by planting a flag on the territory that the girls would try to conquer. The other boys in the class heard the call and some joined in, some of them openly, others with a simple "x1", multiplying the power. The essentialism of the arguments aiming to erase anything but the binary, as well as the political act of mentioning Pinochet, were forms of moral violence (Segato, 2003), part of a set of custom-trying mechanisms to guarantee the maintenance of gender-based status differentials: a warning light went on and thence it would be up to the girls - as women, again - to assume and endure in submission.

The role of the teacher here was the teaching role par excellence: to draw a conclusion, an objective lesson, in this case the appeal to take responsibility for one's words and actions. Although the teacher took a position at some moments and was able to close the discussion so that the students ended by calmly exchanging goodbyes, we wondered how it would have been if, faced with the same situation, the teacher had proposed an analysis of what took place, a broader look that would have led to a new discussion about what happens when they give their opinion, what emotions are aroused, what fears emerge and what outcomes they have. In other words, political subjectivity— more so in the context of drawing up a new constitution that aims to depart from an authoritarian model— is a question of how we do things, how society is democratized and what we understand by democracy.

We return to our initial question about the role of the school in political subjectivity. Can the school be a space for political development, not simply in the sense of instilling discipline? It can, if it accepts that political participation is conflictive, in Mouffe's (2014, p. xx) terms, if political life is assumed to be part of social life, is plural and therefore full of antagonism. The transition from antagonism to agonism proposed by the same author could be a pedagogically relevant perspective, i.e. by thinking up proposals for work that not only opposes positions, but also highlights the value of pluralism and the possibility of the common good. It is also essential to define what is debatable and what is not for children and young people.

Perspectives like this have a history in Latin America, models of pedagogical/political action such as that of the Colombian Orlando Fals Borda (1967), the Chilean Hugo Zememann (1989) and the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1985) were able to grasp the importance of recognizing the value of differences and the importance of agreements contingent on the problematics raised by political actors. All three were historical projects that saw the value of community knowledge in defining the future. In Zememann's case, he understood the unfinished character of social life, as argued by Laclau, but instead of the negative Lacanian view of a fault or blind spot, Zememann proposed a social surplus, and therefore the idea of the alternative and utopia was always present. Both views of conflict as inherent in society are relevant to thinking about politics in schools. In the end, it is about thinking about how to work with this, the aim being to find agonistic logic in the sense that Mouffe (2014) proposes, that is, a plurality of positions can exist that permits legitimate recognition of the other.

Conceptualizing the political in this way could lead to the conclusion that what is required for political socialization is something closer to those debates where students defend opposing positions. In Chile, this was done in a limited number of public and private schools for several years, as we saw earlier. Are debates a better format than citizenship classes? They may be, in so far as they presuppose that the participants have a contingent and active role. However, such debates as we know them are essential to competitive goals rather than the co-construction of shared perspectives.

There is another big puzzle: Are adults tolerant of conflict in children's social life? Traditional child psychology models put conflicts on the side of pathology. Discourses on childhood assume irrational children must become rational, and in rationality there is seldom room for conflict. When someone says "Long live Pinochet" in an argument, they may suspect the phrase's value in inducing fear. The rhetorical competence of the speaker is evident, so it is not just a matter of teaching

what to say, but also of reframing social conflict constructively, which has objectives. Proposing an educational strategy based on the transformation of antagonistic conflict into an agonistic one – to put it simply – would involve assuming an adult role that proposes alternatives or strategies of agreement and assuming a perspective in which conflict flourishes and is not stifled. For the adult world and for the school institution, this implies having a vision of childhood that must move away from those rationalist and positivist logics that assume that there is only one way to resolve conflicts or a single correct response.

## **Conclusion: Political subjectivities in the school and the adults' role**

Do we insist on citizenship classes? Or do we insist on a model of cross-curricular objectives? The discussion about how we become political subjects is not only a curricular issue, at least in the classical sense. With the present work as a starting point, we can demonstrate the importance of children's political performativity. As political subjects they face points of view and propose ways of improvement; they are more than actors who perform gradually according to their ages or the spaces that adults make available to them. They do not necessarily know how to do it, and it is possible that we adults have more to say on this by showing and discussing the mechanisms of public discussion. That is why the school must embrace its public role. The public nature of education lies in the joint project of society and the role in this project that corresponds to those who comprise it. Children are not trained in a laboratory for an imaginary future but instead immersed in a public arena that depends on their political participation as subjects who constitute a social reality.

Hence, if citizenship courses are offered, these should be geared to important contextual issues. The urgency that the gender violence issue so clearly has for some girls is a highly relevant issue, given that it can change the lives of millions of people. Citizenship should not be the simple exercise of a vote or the exercise of nationality in a world where this is in crisis; rather, it should be the role of the subjects that inhabit a territory as decision-makers and protagonists, motivated to discuss in protected spaces, to reach common conclusions about what has done and not necessarily standard agreements could be a preparation for understanding how democracy works and how we are part of it.

Our brief study has many limitations. Working by Zoom and not face-to-face might have triggered the conflict we witnessed. In addition, the empirical elements on which to base a deeper knowledge of political subjectivities are still sparse. We hope to continue working on this question, whether directly in politics and childhood or in other related areas. There is a vanishing point in the politics of children and young people: sometimes it does not happen with us adults. It happens elsewhere and sometimes against us. The schools must understand and respect this and be aware of cultural and political changes where children and young people are protagonists.

As Mouffe (2014) said, politics and democracy are not possible without conflict. The community of students is a political body with inner movements that make them identify as different individuals but at the same time in a relationship as antagonists. Working with that community can be a challenge but also a deep participation model. Here we witnessed an unprepared debate,

with positions aimed by identities more than prepared positions, where affections took place. For adults around, caring for and protecting the community of students' relationships can be a good thing to do.

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