

Reimagining Chile: Perceptions of English Pedagogy Students on the Future of Chilean Education and Society¹

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Abstract

This paper analyzes essays by nine English pedagogy students in Chile, written as a response to a national contest that took the poem “Let America be America Again” by Langston Hughes as a springboard to the expression of the students’ own dreams and aspirations regarding their country. The vision of these future educators is analyzed from a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) perspective, specifically from conventional qualitative content analysis, which identified nine different themes. The findings reveal a collective desire among the students for educational reform as a catalyst for social reform. Each essay contributes a unique perspective to the idea of a more just and equitable Chilean society through education. The implications of these findings emphasize the role of educators as agents of change in a society that needs an urgent transformation. This study contributes to the existing literature by offering insights into how future teachers see education reforms as the answer to broader social reforms.

Keywords: English pedagogy students, students’ dreams and aspirations, future educators, qualitative content analysis (QCA), Chilean education and society

Reimaginando Chile: Percepciones de Estudiantes de Pedagogía en Inglés sobre el Futuro de la Educación y la Sociedad Chilena

Resumen

Este artículo analiza ensayos de nueve estudiantes de pedagogía en inglés en Chile, escritos como respuesta a un concurso nacional que tomó el poema “Let America be America Again” de Langston Hughes como trampolín para la expresión de los propios sueños y aspiraciones de los estudiantes con respecto a su país. La visión de estos futuros educadores se analiza desde una perspectiva de Análisis Cualitativo de Contenido (ACC), específicamente desde el análisis cualitativo de contenido convencional, que identificó nueve temas diferentes. Los hallazgos revelan un deseo colectivo entre los estudiantes de una reforma educativa como catalizador de una reforma social. Cada ensayo aporta una perspectiva única a la idea de una sociedad chilena más justa y equitativa a través de la educación. Las implicancias de estos hallazgos enfatizan el

¹ This work originated from a literary contest regarding “The Chile of which You Dream” at a Chilean public university.

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papel de los educadores como agentes de cambio en una sociedad que necesita una transformación urgente. Este estudio contribuye a la literatura existente al ofrecer perspectivas sobre cómo los futuros docentes ven las reformas educativas como la respuesta a reformas sociales más amplias.

Palabras clave: Estudiantes de pedagogía en inglés, sueños y aspiraciones de los estudiantes, futuros educadores, análisis cualitativo de contenido (ACC), educación y sociedad chilena

Recibido: 11 de septiembre de 2024

Aceptado: 14 de octubre de 2024

Introduction

The aspirations and dreams we have as human beings may or may not become true, but there is value in the expression of those dreams and aspirations as they can become possible roadmaps. This paper intends to explore the perceptions that nine English pedagogy students from various pedagogy programs across Chile have for the country. The nine essays are inspired by Langston Hughes's poem "Let America Be America Again" (1936), which critiques the gap between the American ideal and the realities faced by marginalized communities.

The call for essays emerged after the social uprising in Chile that began on October 18, 2019, which resulted in the deaths of thirty people (Agencias Santiago de Chile, 2021). It is in this context of social uneasiness that visions for the future emerge based on the criticism of both the post-uprising conditions and past circumstances.

Although this is not the place to analyze the October 18 social uprising from a political and social perspective in detail, a discussion of the country's aspirations, unveiled through the movement and demonstrations, does have a place. What preceded the outbreak was the gradual sowing of seeds of discontent in the population that ultimately fueled the uprising in October. Aguilera and Espinoza (2022) point out that the protests included non-partisan citizens who had not previously participated in social movements (p. 11-12), thus welcoming a niche of expression for ordinary citizens. The demonstrations responded to sundry issues such as poor pensions, poor social education and health (Somma et al., 2021; Aguilera & Espinoza, 2022), and the

unfortunate statements uttered by some of Chilean former president Sebastian Piñera's ministers that showed their little connection and empathy with the working population. In addition, there seems to be a collective feeling that there is a divergence between the needs of the population and the governments' visions of the future; therefore, the needs are not being met. In this particular atmosphere the uprising took place, and people from all over the country proclaimed their right to a more dignified life.

Our future educators experienced this revolt against authority, and like a significant part of the population, dreamed of a better future for the inhabitants of Chile. Historically, Chilean school and university students have actively participated in public demonstrations, and this time was no exception. In fact, the catalyst for the uprising was initially a protest by students against an increase in metro fares. So, what are the dreams that students have for our country? This is the question that was posed in an essay contest organized at the end of 2021 by a literary magazine run by English pedagogy students at a public university in Chile. This magazine has launched several contests since its creation in 2017, and on this occasion the call was open to all English pedagogy students in Chile, regardless of their language levels. Information about their levels was not requested in the submission guidelines of the contest. The objective of the contest was for students to write a 600-800-word essay based on the poem "Let America be America Again" by Langston Hughes that expressed their visions and reflections as future educators regarding the "Chile of which you dream." Two professors and two former students from the English pedagogy program judged the essays. By submitting their essays, students granted permission for the magazine to utilize their works for various purposes, including analysis and interpretation that could eventually result in publication of studies. The call was answered by students from nine different universities in five different regions across the country: Universidad Autónoma de Talca, Universidad Católica de Temuco, Universidad del Bío-Bío, Universidad San Sebastián (Patagonia/Puerto Montt), Universidad Adventista de Chile, Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Universidad Diego Portales, Universidad Central, and Universidad de Los Lagos.

This study delves into the dreams and aspirations of these nine English pedagogy students, focusing on the role of education and social priorities following the 2019 uprising, unraveling, therefore, the students' cosmovision and delineating a possible roadmap as to the social elements that need to be revised to diminish inequality in education and other aspects of society. The contest then provides an opportunity for students to engage critically with the society they live in, thus aligning with the tenets of critical pedagogy that advocate for this critical engagement. The first step towards transforming the reality students see is by reflecting on it. The contest allows this connection and enables the participants to dream about different outcomes for the injustice they witness nowadays, thus becoming, on a small scale, a liberatory act through which they can express their emotions.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section, "Theoretical Framework," establishes the conceptual basis for the study, exploring relevant theories and perspectives that guide the analysis of the students' essays. The second section, "Methodology," outlines the research methods used to collect and analyze the data. The next section, "Results and Discussion," presents and interprets the findings from the analysis, linking them to the theoretical framework and contextualizing them within current social and educational issues. Finally, the fourth section, "Conclusions," summarizes the key insights of the study, reflects on its limitations, and suggests directions for future research to further investigate the role of education in promoting social change.

1. Theoretical Framework

This work is framed within the post-October 18 reality, but it is set in an educational environment, where future educators are asked to reflect on their dreams. Therefore, at the outset, a discussion about Hughes's poem and the concept of dreams will inform this paper theoretically, emphasizing the relevance of literature as an input towards reflection to take place in the classroom. In addition, this connection is later contrasted with the few instances of reflection that occur in our educational system,

given its rigidity, and the relevance of moving towards a more critical pedagogy that will embrace other forms of learning that depart from measurement dynamics.

Langston Hughes's text portrays the dreams of post-slavery African Americans. Hughes, who belonged to the Harlem Renaissance movement, was a prominent figure not only of the cultural movements in the US during the last century, but also of the civil rights movement in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. His writing is infused with the concept of dreams, and "Let America be America Again" is a clear example of this. Hughes's "commitment to social justice" (de Santis, 2022, p. 1) is crucial in understanding the repercussions of his writings. He was a great communicator, who created in diverse genres, but also used the spoken word to convey his message:

And Langston Hughes was indeed a talker. In addition to his substantial textual legacy. . . Hughes left a rich legacy of a brilliant and modest man talking. Generous with his time, he traveled the world sharing his life and stories, engaging with schoolchildren, fellow writers, musicians, international dignitaries, journalists, teachers, scholars, politicians. (de Santis, 2022, pp. 2-3)

From de Santis's words we understand that Hughes was not only an artist that expressed himself creatively, but someone who wished to relate to others, to communicate with others, and invite others to reflect, all desirable characteristics in any educator. "Let America be America Again" is in this respect an invitation to observe the past, present, and future in a world where promises of integration and equality were not yet achieved. It is this particular reflective aspect of Hughes's thought that impelled the call for essays to English pedagogy students throughout the country.

The possibility to reflect when pursuing studies is something that is not granted. The pace of today's education, marked by standardization, does not necessarily allow processes of reflection inside the classroom (Apple, M. W., 2006). However, the capacity to reflect on both our environment and our own lives is vital for understanding what lies within us and what exists around us. For future educators, the capacity to reflect on

their country and the situation and aspirations of their people seems at least desirable. As Pedro Tabensky (2020) states,

Generally speaking, and following Dewey, a central task of a successful educative process involves helping students to integrate what is learned into the narrative of their lives. It is in this process of integration that this subject matter becomes interesting to the student. . . They [educational institutions] do not sufficiently invite students to refine their ability to self-critique, to understand the world and the ways of seeing the world that they have inherited. (p. 4)

Tabensky's (2022) thoughts point to a more integral approach to the learning process, one that makes the student reflect on their own situation in relation to what surrounds them, and that critically revises the notions that predominate in society. In other words, there is a need for an education that centers more on the human and less on the instrumental. In this respect, literature can bring an opportunity for this reflection to take place. As Marta Gil (2017) states,

The reason that literature has a preeminent place is that it. . . predisposes our understanding in a more receptive way to the problems that beset people's lives and makes us feel involved even with those who seem very different from ourselves. (p. 1142)

The appeal to the human, to the lives of others, is inherent to literature. So, the use of literature in an educational context becomes a connection to exactly that, allowing students to understand not only others' realities but also their own. When Hughes refers to his own dream, he connects us all to it while also leaving the door open for us to connect with our own dreams. Thus, literature promotes an internal and external reflection that is not exclusively rational, but also emotional.

Having this in mind, any opportunity for reflection should be valued, given the relevance it has for the educational world. However, the opportunity to reflect on the educational process that someone undergoes or will be in charge of is not a given in education. Nowadays, schools and universities live under the yoke of standardization.

In a neoliberal country such as Chile, the systems of measurement at all educational levels are quite perverse; thus, the possibility to move away from this rigidity is a healthy practice.

Flórez and Rozas (2020) have gone deep into the consequences of an education that centers on accountability, discussing the perversion of this system in Chilean education. The authors state that the system of accountability that predominates in Chilean education is result-based accountability. This centers on establishments being responsible for their students' results, mainly measured through international and national standardized tests. Their discussion also touches on the numerous studies worldwide that alert about the negative consequences of this system: “the narrowing of the curriculum” and “discrimination against underperforming students or traditionally marginalized groups such as students living in poverty, immigrants and ethnic minorities” (p. 159). Additionally, Flórez and Rozas discuss the stigmatization that exists as a result of not performing well on these standardized tests (p. 160). In addressing the warning sent to us by these two researchers, a response is required that is consistent with a different view of the educational process, a view that does not fracture, but rather unites.

In line with this, Giroux's (1997) perspective is essential since he advocates for a critical pedagogy that challenges power structures and social norms. This type of pedagogy allows students to envision a more just and equitable world. According to Giroux (1997), “[t]eachers need to define themselves as transformative intellectuals who act as radical teachers and educators” (p. 112). This means that the role of teachers not only focuses on providing students with knowledge, but also on inspiring them to critically engage in social activism. However, teachers' roles are increasingly restricted by dynamics that are unhealthy and that go against autonomy of thought. Giroux and Filippakou (2020) point to the increasing number of schools that “are falling subject to the toxic forces of privatization and mindless standardized curricula, while teachers are subjected to intolerable labor conditions” (p. 2088). Giroux and Filippakou capture the perversity of the system that restricts the possibilities of education as an act of solely

transmitting concepts and/or preparing for national tests. Not only is the role of educators limited, but also the world and opportunities presented to the students, and, therefore, the possible visions they might have about themselves and their communities. Having this in mind, instances that move away from dynamics of standardization and move towards fostering critical views on society are needed in the educational systems nowadays in Chile and other parts of the globe.

Along the lines of Giroux, hooks (1994) defines education as a liberatory practice which empowers students to challenge and resist systemic inequalities in society. She argues that education should help students to engage critically with their own experiences and the social realities that surround them. Similar to Giroux's perspective, hooks views education as more than acquiring knowledge or a mere transmission of concepts. Instead, she sees it as a nutritious endeavor, an opportunity to foster critical consciousness in students that will allow them to transform oppressive structures. This aligns with the vision of Langston Hughes, who, through his poetry, sought to address the struggles of marginalized communities, focusing on social injustices.

Finally, Freire's concept of critical pedagogy and Dewey's concept of progressive education are crucial to understanding the theoretical foundations of this discussion on educational reform. Freire (1998) asserts that "[t]he kind of education that does not recognize the right to express appropriate anger against injustice, against disloyalty, against the negation of love, against exploitation, and against violence fails to see the educational role implicit in the expression of these feelings" (p. 45). Freire's concept of education embraces a more critical stance towards society and opens a possibility for students to express their emotions when faced with all kinds of injustice that are present in our communities. For this to happen, education should not only focus on providing students with information and knowledge, but it should also center on providing instances to develop critical thinking so as to fight against everything that can be considered unfair.

Dewey (1997), for his part, states that progressive education should include learning experiences that are socially engaging. The social factor is present in Dewey's

definition of progressive education since the school is considered a social institution. For Dewey, education is not an isolated activity but a dynamic process that integrates students into the broader social context, which helps them to contribute to the development of a democratic society. Dewey (1939) believes in democracy and highlights the relevance of being coherent in thought and action:

Democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature. . . faith in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth. This faith may be enacted in statutes, but it is only on paper unless it is put in force in the attitudes which human beings display to one another in all the incidents and relations of daily life. (p. 164)

Dewey's stand is one that encourages social responsibility. Our actions should not only be coherent with what we declare on paper, but we should also enact them in whatever setting we are, and whomever we are with. In this sense, schools should be places where differences are not only respected but where efforts are made to bridge existing gaps of inequality.

In essence, both Freire and Dewey regard education as a driving force in the social transformations that society needs in order to move forward. Their theories highlight the potential of education to address social inequalities, fostering a more just and egalitarian society. This study aligns with their ideas by exploring how reflective practices in English pedagogy can empower future educators to challenge existing power dynamics and promote critical consciousness among their students. By integrating critical pedagogy into their teaching approaches, of which this contest is an example, these educators can actively participate in the pursuit of social justice, reinforcing the transformative role of education highlighted by Freire and Dewey.

If we turn to studies that have gathered perceptions of pedagogy students in Chile regarding our education, numerous papers touch on the pre-service students' perception on different topics such as the relevance of the use of ICTs (Flores-Lueg &

Roig, 2016) and the development of sustainability (Berríos & Bastías, 2020), among others.

Regarding students' perceptions of social issues, the study by de la Barra and Carbone-Bruna (2024) explores how English pedagogy students viewed violence, conflict, and peace within the educational process during the pandemic. Their findings reveal that during this period students were able to perceive more clearly the triggers of violence and the role of language in the construction of reality. When looking at their role as future educators, they acknowledged themselves as builders of peace. Martínez's (2020) study on the perceptions of pedagogy students concerning their training in university and their professional future, on the other hand, reveals a difference between their training and the professional world they will confront. The aspect that concerns this research more closely and that is briefly discussed in the essay refers to the importance given by pre-service teachers to the development of soft skills, such as collaborative work, empathy, and closeness in their involvement in social contingencies.

The two above-mentioned studies contribute valuable insights into the perception of pedagogy students regarding the educational process. However, there is still a gap in research concerning pedagogy students' perceptions of education as a catalyst for social reform. The study that we are presenting here intends to fill this gap by providing valuable information in regard to the educational and social dreams of English pedagogy students and their potential to transform society in their future. The opportunity given to students to engage in a reflective and critical pedagogical practice provided through the contest is a unique occasion for immersing ourselves in the students' views, providing a first step to the development of a topic that has yet to be fully addressed in the literature.

2. Methodology

As previously stated, the contest that informs this paper is conceived as an opportunity for pedagogy students to reflect on their country and the dreams they have

for it. In this sense, the contest is framed within a dynamic that privileges personal reflection and the perspectives for change that are needed.

This study employs Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as its research method to explore the perspectives of English pedagogy students on the future of Chilean education and society, using Langston Hughes's poem "Let America Be America Again" as a starting point. The sample consists of nine essays submitted to a literary contest at a public Chilean university, with the topic of the "Chile of which you dream." The contestants were English pedagogy students from various universities in Chile. They had the opportunity to write about their dreams and aspirations regarding the future of Chile.

Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) point out that "[t]he objective in qualitative content analysis is to systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and concise summary of key results" (p. 93). This analysis process begins with identifying meaning units, which are concrete meaningful extracts from each essay. These meaning units can range from a single paragraph to more paragraphs, depending on the meaning provided by the student. Each extract is assigned a code, which is a label that encapsulates patterns found within the extract. These codes are then grouped into categories based on their context or content. Ultimately, these categories are grouped together to form a theme which represents the most abstract meaning of the essay. Therefore, the analysis goes from the concrete meaning unit to the abstract theme.

The specific type of QCA used in this research is conventional qualitative content analysis, "in which coding categories are derived directly and inductively from the raw data" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 319). In this type of analysis, the codes are not predefined, but they are extracted from the essay. The data obtained by conventional qualitative content analysis can contribute to the development of an overarching theme that highlights the dreams and aspirations of the students regarding the transformative potential of education, revealing how their reflections align with broad social goals aimed at fostering equity and social justice.

3. Results and Discussion

The conventional qualitative content analysis of the essays highlights nine relevant themes that show the students' dreams and aspirations regarding the future that they wish for Chilean education and society. These themes offer valuable insights into the desires that the students share for having educational and social transformations. From each essay one theme is extracted. The categories and themes derived from the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Categories and Themes of Students' Essays

Title of Essay	Categories	Theme
Let Chile Start Being Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges and critiques of education systems - Visions and goals for educational reforms - Roles and responsibilities of teachers 	Reforming education through challenging old norms and embracing new teaching paradigms
A Chile of Change and Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visions for an inclusive society - Role and recognition of educators - Social and environmental responsibility - Future aspirations and challenges 	Building an inclusive and progressive society through education and social responsibility
The Symbols of Words, from Being Unable to Able	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language and its impact on capability - Cultural and national ideals - The role of language in personal and national aspirations 	Shaping national identity and personal empowerment through language
A Country Called Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dreams and aspirations - Education and equity - Injustice and redemption 	Transforming inequity into opportunity through education
Chile, the Oasis that Never Was	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political and social context - Public protest and mobilization - Economic issues and inequality - Impact of privatization - Educational disparities. 	Addressing systemic inequality through political reform and public mobilization.
From Education to the Stars (My Dream for Chile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational challenges and innovations - Vision for social transformation - Impact of systemic issues on well-being. 	Transforming education and society to improve well-being and equity.

Allow Me to Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal motivation and vision - Social awareness and advocacy - Admiration and inspiration - Educational and social aspirations 	Inspiring social change through personal commitment, advocacy, and educational aspirations.
Chile, Beautiful and Beloved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal and social aspirations - Social unrest and its implications - Hope and vision for change 	Dreaming of a better future through social awakening and reform.
Chile, Where do We Go Now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historical reflection and modern appreciation - Aspirations for educational improvements - Mental health and support needs. 	Advocating for a transformative future in Chile.

The discussion of the results will be presented essay by essay, following the order outlined in Table 1.

Essay 1: Let Chile Start Being Chile

The first essay addresses the struggles of future Chilean educators who aim at reforming an outdated and unequal education system, with a big gap between public and private education. The theme of this essay, ***Reforming education through challenging old norms and embracing new teaching paradigms***, criticizes outdated educational practices in favor of embracing new transformative practices which can help both students and educators. As the author of the essay states, the transformation that is sought implies a new way of looking at things:

And that is a challenge, to encourage students to develop their critical thinking, share their opinions, analyze situations from a new perspective, but always bearing in mind to respect and treat students as equals. Young teachers will give learners the liberty to create their own knowledge therefore the learning will be more significant for them.

In the eyes of the author, there is undoubtedly a need for a Chilean educational reform, a need for leaving aside certain outdated and even authoritarian ways of educating and opening to new ways that embrace a more respectful, horizontal, and democratic approach to education that does not allow inequality between public and private schools to take place. The essay then centers on a reform where newer

generations of teachers play a pivotal role as agents of change. This change implies a review of current views on education and an opening towards a more inclusive learning environment. This understanding is the kind of understanding that Tabensky refers to when he states that it is necessary to observe the world that we have inherited. In order to move away from dynamics of inequality, a critical conception of our surroundings is needed.

Essay 2: A Chile of Change and Acceptance

The second essay aligns with the previous essay in that it envisions a reformed Chile where education promotes equality, acceptance, environmental awareness, and mental health, fostering, therefore, a better nation. The theme of this essay, ***Building an inclusive and progressive society through education and social responsibility***, shows education as a catalyst for social reform where inclusivity and respect are fundamental values. This theme emphasizes the need for a more nondiscriminatory society, in which education and social responsibility are at the center of the process. Resonating with the previous essay, it reflects on the importance of recognizing teachers as agents of change, understanding that they are the ones who can transform education in favor of students and society in general:

As a future educator, I want to be an agent of change, I want all teachers to be protagonists in the process of reforming. I want an equality and parity country with environmental awareness and in which mental health is the focus of many programs.

The author's critical view of society and the wish to transform it responds to what Giroux (1997) expects from teachers in that they should acknowledge their capacity to reshape the reality that surrounds them when the situation requires it. The student's critical view also places mental health in the spotlight as a sensitive issue today in our country. The views expressed in this essay bring to light the risks of an education that sees in measurements an excessive value, leaving aside, in turn, a more integral approach that seeks more significant and human connections. Quality then

becomes as important as or even more important than quantity, and this is undoubtedly a turn in a new direction.

Essay 3: The Symbols of Words, from Being Unable to Able

The third essay moves the discussion into the realm of language by exploring how it can forge our perception of achievement by limiting or empowering our potential. The focus is also on transformation but centering on how we can go about creating this change. The theme of this essay, ***Shaping national identity and personal empowerment through language***, highlights the importance of positive language in the formation of a personal and national identity. The essay addresses a cultural phenomenon that is reflected in how we use language in a negative way:

‘It is impossible to change this country’ has been our excuse for decades. We have embraced the words “can’t” and “unable” as our brothers and sisters, waiting for us in every corner of our mind and language. Do we really dream with a country based on a pessimistic point of view? That is a question that we should think over and over until we understood what language has done in our lives.

The author reflects on our use of pessimistic language and how it has shaped and can shape the way that people see themselves and their country. Our views of the world, inherited or not, are expressed through language and, therefore, our use of it has a potential to be either empowering or limiting. A shift towards embracing positive language is signaled by the author as a roadmap towards achieving our objectives

Essay 4: A Country Called Green

The fourth essay is quite an emotional depiction of a childhood dream, of an ideal world called “Green” where justice and equality are the norm. The theme of this essay, ***Transforming inequity into opportunity through education***, emphasizes the critical role education holds in transforming a discriminatory society into an egalitarian one through meaningful opportunities:

Is it possible 'To build a 'homeland of the free' (1936) as Hughes hoped for? I believe it is possible if we give equal education and opportunities to all Chilean kids. I'm a clear example of this. I grew up with a lot of vulnerability and so did my friends, but there was a difference. I was given the opportunity to study at a better school, but they were not. They stayed in the same place and something unfair happened. I was freed and they were not.

This theme focuses on personal and historical struggles for justice. The author's access to education meant access to another reality, but unfortunately, this opportunity was not shared with others. There is a relevant association between educational opportunities to an achievement of freedom, reminding us of Hughes's vision of a more equitable world, but also of hooks's words and the liberating nature of education. It is through education that the author experiences an opening to other dimensions of being in this world.

Essay 5: Chile, the Oasis that Never Was

The fifth essay criticizes former president Sebastian Piñera's claim that Chile is a "true oasis," highlighting the disparity that there is in the country, linking it to the economic policies promoted by former dictator Augusto Pinochet. The theme of this essay, ***Addressing systemic inequality through political reform and public mobilization***, deals with the disconnection between political discourse and reality as a driving force behind public demonstrations in Chile:

To paraphrase Langston Hughes's 1935 poem "Let America Be America Again": the oasis never was an oasis for us. Forty years ago, the state took a step back, so to speak, and left the wellbeing of its citizens in the hands of the free market. The private sector was indiscriminately welcomed into every aspect of people's lives, thus creating an unbridgeable gap between those who could afford to join it and those who were relegated to what little was offered by the state. Just think

of how different the prospects of a student in a municipal school in Puente Alto are to those of a student in a private institution in Lo Barnechea.

Along the lines of the last essay, the issue of opportunity is also discussed, but here in terms of how the economic decisions that have been made since the dictatorship was established have affected every aspect of life. This theme concentrates on the contrast that there is between the idea of Chile as being an “oasis” and the reality of the country that shows a small group of people who possess most of the wealth. The essay emphasizes the way privatization and historical policies have maintained disparities in education, healthcare, and wealth, which allows inequality to be the norm. Additionally, the role of public demonstrations is shown as a way of demanding changes that are necessary for all people to be equal. In this sense, the need for a new constitution is essential to move forward as a country.

Essay 6: From Education to the Stars

The sixth essay conceives a Chile where education can adapt to students' needs, fostering equal opportunities, which can nurture talents and joy in children. The theme of this essay, *Transforming education and society to improve well-being and equity*, highlights the need for a more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable society in which all individuals can thrive. This theme explores the need for an education that evolves towards supporting and reinforcing students' talents and needs, and it denounces a system that “prioritizes the ‘useful’ over what would bring people joy; hence, the world is filled with adults who are unhappy.” In line with some issues already discussed in this study, this essay confronts education in terms of utility versus humanity, pointing to a recurring dilemma in terms of the focus that education should have. For the author happiness is a factor to be considered in the equation, and the question that arises is whether it is, in fact, considered nowadays. The discussion goes further by stating that:

Every hundred years there are scientific advances, however, the area of education is something that has not evolved over time, the children continue to sit in a room listening to the monologue of the interlocutor (the teacher) and the

problem is not the intentions or the teachers, the problem is the system that seeks to force learning, while children want to understand themselves.

The author is right on target when they bring self-knowledge into the discussion. In a highly standardized system, self-knowledge will undoubtedly take a secondary place, if a place at all, since as Flórez and Rozas denounce, one of the consequences of result-based accountability is the narrowing down of the curriculum (p. 160). This “forcing of learning” that occurs is a forcing of what the system sees as more valuable, and what is valuable is what is measurable. More integral and humane aspects of the educational process do not fit into the equation in this paradigm, but they should.

Essay 7: Allow Me to Dream

The seventh essay reflects on the student’s commitment to improving the injustices that continue to exist in Chile through education, taking into consideration the experiences of injustice that the student has had to cope with. The theme of this essay, ***Inspiring social change through personal commitment, advocacy, and educational aspirations***, shows both a deep personal connection to Chile and a strong desire to contribute as much as possible to improving the country through education:

In my short life, I witnessed injustice, poverty, grief, anger, and desperation among the people I was surrounded with. I knew people needed a better life. It was not until I finished my secondary school education that I felt the urge to do something for this country and its people. . . I imagined myself being a pillar for this country, educating people to go out there and find their place in the world. I believed in change through education and I decided to become a teacher.

Along the lines of what hooks states in her desire for students to engage critically with their environment and learning process, this essay provides a personal critical view of the past and the student’s commitment towards a transformation of this past through education, despite the challenges it may entail. By becoming a teacher, the

student finds a way to defy the systemic injustices that exist in society and sees themselves as agents of change that can help revert these injustices. This path is taken without fear, as a natural step towards assuming a place in society and being responsible for it: “We were born to learn and grow; eventually, part of the journey of life is pure learning. I was told not to fear change, not to fear challenges and making decisions.” Undoubtedly, a share of courage is needed to work against the unfairness of the system and the inequality that exists, and the author does not shy away from this opportunity. On the contrary, education is seen as a driving force that can help society have a better future.

Essay 8: Chile, Beautiful and Beloved

The eighth essay reflects the student’s change of heart from wishing to leave Chile for a better life to committing to improving their country. The theme of this essay, ***Dreaming of a better future through social awakening and reform***, addresses a journey from feeling hopeless to feeling hopeful for the future of Chile where education plays a pivotal role in this task:

When I had to go to university or go to work, I remembered seeing many faces in the street with tired eyes, lost in the middle of nowhere but at the same time knowing that they were sadly in this country, in this reality. Like you already know that everything was wrong but you have to keep moving, otherwise people would walk over you no matter what. . . Just one thought was in my mind and it was repeated over and over again; *Am I the person who will do something tomorrow or I will be just a grain in the sand?*

The essay discusses the atmosphere of disillusionment and despair that existed on the streets, and whether to take a role in bringing about the change needed or to stay on the sidelines. The student refers to the beginning of a journey that will embrace the possibility of transforming the reality that surrounds us. As an educator, they state,

Perhaps I am dreaming of a utopia or I am forcibly believing the fairy tale that I wanted to hear when I was a little, but one part of my heart, mind, body, or

whatever it is, is telling me that there is still a place for justice. . . This is the Chile that I dream of, full of encouragement and strength, without fear. And perhaps I am just a grain of sand who will be an English teacher without fear, and who will speak and shout next to my future students', the next bravest students' generation.

When reading these words, Dewey's concept of democracy and the faith that is needed in human beings come to mind. The author points not only to their responsibility as a future educator, but also to the idea of creating community with students in a fight for justice.

Essay 9: Chile, Where do We Go Now?

The ninth and last essay envisions a Chile where there is strong family support, free education, and counseling for both students and teachers to improve social well-being. The theme of this essay, *Advocating for a transformative future in Chile*, stresses the importance of gender equality, educational access, and mental health support in Chile so as to move forward in the right direction:

. . . it is evident that Chile has progressed in several aspects in the past decades. The Chile of the past is marked by hardness, which is not useful to bring back. Nevertheless, that past is needed to understand the present. In my own experience, I value the things that make our life better such as opportunities and more equality, but I am also aware that there are immediate needs that must be addressed such as family support, free education, and counselling for the school community. These improvements will definitely lead us where to go and make Chile a better place to live.

The author reflects on a desire to learn from past lessons so as to improve Chilean society in the future. The essay deals with issues that have affected us as a nation along our history, such as gender, educational inequalities, and mental health,

which have been the focus of Chilean reforms in recent years. It advocates for changes in the educational system to have a better society with family support, high-quality education, and more help in the mental health area. This can foster a more equitable society for future generations.

The nine themes collectively depict a holistic vision of Chilean education and society, focusing on the transformation of society through the transformation of education. These future educators see the need to leave the old ways of educating behind to embrace new ones that can lead us to a reformed society that is more egalitarian.

The overarching theme that can be derived from the conventional qualitative content analysis conducted in this paper is **Education as a Catalyst for Social Reform**. This overarching theme focuses on the fact that transformations in the Chilean education system are seen as the foundation for achieving broader transformations in Chilean society in order to move towards a more inclusive and just society. So, the roadmap that is delineated by these future educators advocates for embracing new teaching paradigms, which can lead to social reforms. This overarching theme then emphasizes the interplay between educational reforms and social reforms, resonating with hooks's conception of education as a liberatory practice that empowers students to challenge systemic inequalities and transform oppressive structures.

Along these lines, we find that ideas of Freire and Dewey are also captured in these essays. Freire's concept of critical pedagogy emphasizes the importance of a pedagogy that addresses injustices and encourages students to engage critically with their social realities. Dewey's progressive education highlights the value of learning experiences that are socially engaging and relevant. Both Freire and Dewey advocate for an educational approach that fosters social change and reflects the interplay between educational progress and social progress, reinforcing the overarching theme, which establishes education as a catalyst for social reform.

Additionally, Langston Hughes's poetic vision of social transformation through the realization of dreams aligns with the students' dreams and aspirations for social

justice and equity. His emphasis on dreams as a means to achieve a better future complements the students' capacity to dream and, therefore, aspire to use education as a tool for social transformation.

The conventional qualitative content analysis carried out throughout this study reveals findings with significant implications for educational practice. The nine future educators that participated in the literary contest emphasize the need for an educational reality that is more inclusive and innovative, highlighting also the social responsibility that comes along with being educators.

4. Conclusions

This study discusses the dreams and aspirations of nine students from different Chilean universities. Conventional qualitative content analysis was employed to analyze these essays in order to extract one theme for each one, which captures the main abstract meaning of it. An overarching theme was developed from the nine themes, highlighting the collective vision of these students for an education that not only fosters personal growth but also serves as a vehicle for social change.

The students' essays collectively reveal the need for educational reforms, which lead to social reforms. Teachers are regarded as agents of change in the transformation process. These ideas are supported by Freire (1998) and Dewey (1939; 1997) who assert that education is a social process that should be in favor of not only students but also of society as a whole. They are also supported by Hughes's (1936) vision of social transformation through dreams and aspirations, aligning with the students' dreams and aspirations for a more just and equitable society.

The future teachers that participated in the literary contest highlight the importance of education as a catalyst for social reform, especially after the October 2019 uprising. They collectively emphasize that it is necessary to change our society for the better, taking responsibility for their roles as future educators and acknowledging, therefore, that it depends on people to change the conditions that our society has imposed on them. In this respect, the nine students share the metamorphic quality of education as an impeller of broader social reforms.

The contest and the findings of the study are relevant for understanding the dreams and aspirations of different English pedagogy students regarding the Chile that they dream of. However, it is important to address the study's limitations, which include its small sample size and its focus on English pedagogy students from Chilean universities. The nine participants represent a small sample which may limit the breadth of perspectives captured and may not fully encompass the diverse experiences and aspirations of all English pedagogy students across Chilean universities. Furthermore, the fact that this research centers only on English pedagogy students from Chilean universities restricts the perspective of the study. To address these two limitations, a wider sample of students would be desirable to generalize findings. Besides, future research could focus on students from different pedagogies to understand in a broader manner the viewpoints of Chilean future educators regarding the role of education in social reforms.

In conclusion, the essays not only represent the students' dreams and aspirations but also address a much broader social issue. There is a need for a transformative educational system, which in turn can lead to significant social change. Education can be the driving force that supports the transformation that society needs in order to be more just and equitable.

Acknowledgements

This work was funded by the National Agency for Research and Development (ANID) / Scholarship Program / MAGÍSTER BECAS CHILE/2021 - 22210241.

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