Abstract: The objective of this review is to make a critical description of the book *Una Mirada a la Escuela Chilena: Entre la lógica y la paradoja*, written by María Isabel Orellana Rivera (in English: A reflection on the Chilean School: Between Logic and Paradox). This text received the financial support of DIBAM and the Museum of Education Gabriela Mistral, both of them located in Chile. That way, the reflection on Education in the Republic of Chile made thanks to this book will have three main topics: Education and Teaching, the role of women and the Republic of Chile, i.e. from the beginning of the independence of Chile onwards. At the same time, the situation of the Chilean school during the Colonial Period will also be considered. However, all of that will be done under a critical analysis of both the philosophies behind Education and the political reality in the Republic of Chile and the author’s view on her assumption of an evolution in Chilean Education.

Keywords: Education; Women; Chile.

Educação e Ensino, o papel das mulheres e a República do Chile

Resumo: Esta resenha tem como objetivo fazer uma descrição crítica do livro *Una Mirada a la Escuela Chilena: Entre la lógica y la paradoja* da escritora María Isabel Orellana Rivera (em português: Um Olhar à Escola Chilena: Entre a lógica e o paradoxo), texto escrito com o patrocínio da DIBAM no Chile (Direção de Bibliotecas, Arquivos e Museus) e o Museu da Educação Gabriela Mistral no Chile. A reflexão sobre a educação no Chile republicano feita graças a este livro terá três grandes focos de concentração: A Educação e o ensino, o papel das mulheres e o contexto do Chile republicano, isto é desde o começo da independência do país. Ao mesmo tempo, será considerada a situação da escola na época do Chile colonial. Mas, tudo aquilo será sob um olhar crítico tanto das filosofias atrás da educação e a realidade política na República do Chile quanto da visão da autora a respeito da suposta evolução da educação chilena.

Palavras-chave: Educação; Mulheres; Chile.
Introduction

Historically speaking, education has always been an important matter of concern due to its complexity. Generally, it is viewed from a contemporary perspective only. Nonetheless, a critical analysis of today’s education and its application in schools requires people taking the time to reflect on past events and experiences in the field. Thus, we will be able to not only understand how things were in a certain way but also how we can improve our current context and, at the same time, how we can avoid future errors that were actually made in previous eras.

Regarding a call for a memory on Chilean Education, i.e. a critical reflection on the history of previous periods in the Republic of Chile, the book written by María Isabel Orellana Rivera has been a very good contribution to Education in Chile. It is called Una Mirada a la Escuela Chilena: Entre la lógica y la paradoja, (in English: A reflection on the Chilean School: Between Logic and Paradox). It deals with a necessary debate that is to be done today and in the years to come. Particularly, María Isabel Orellana Rivera takes a position in which she sees Education in Chile throughout history from an evolutionist perspective. To her, things have mainly improved as time went by. But, it has not always been like that and that is why we will focus on both the author’s contributions to the understanding of Education in Chile and in the limitations of her discourse as, we understand, it must cope with the constraints of being polite. She wrote this for a museum and her criticism must be about the past rather than about the present time.

Education and Teaching Methodologies

In this pursuit, Education and Teaching Methodologies will be distinguished. The first one will be related to the overall context of educating citizens, mainly from historical and philosophical points of view, whereas the second one will be Education applied to schools. It is about how it is that students are actually educated so as to fit the Education paradigm in the Republic of Chile. However, before analyzing Education as a whole, we will refer directly to the application of it in the school context.

To start with, classroom management was of paramount importance in teaching as students were thought of as empty recipients who needed to be filled in with knowledge, or rather information only, by their teachers. So, since students were not active learners - they did not spontaneously participate in the act of creating knowledge
both during the Colonial period and in the first century of the Republic of Chile, they had to behave as if they were members of an army, mainly quiet and open to obey their teachers’ instructions. But, if they did not stick to the requirements at that time, then punishment came. Physical punishment was allowed to fulfill teaching objectives, though.

The violence of the educational context changed as teaching methodologies were to be adapted based on different teaching objectives (learning objectives included). At the beginning of the Republic, and following the context in the Colonial period, students were mainly expected to read. Writing was not compulsory. But, almost at the end of the first century of the Republic, the nineteenth century, reading and writing were seen as complementary in the process of teaching and learning. Also, if not related - it was still really helpful for students’ learning process-, physical punishment was forbidden in 1883 by the Primary Instruction Society (Sociedad de Instrucción Primaria) and students’ physical involvement was highly encouraged both for lessons and for types of punishment in the form of physical exercises. However, even though this thankfully erased a terrible way of punishing students for misbehavior, it also reinforced the army-like way of conceiving education. As Orellana points out (2010, p. 126):

[…] in the last decades of the XIX century, with the influence of the educational German method, physical education gained great importance in the study programs of primary and secondary education because, it was thought that physical activity helped to discipline bodies and create healthy habits.

Education is key to understanding these changes. On the one hand, students during the Colonial period were just passive learners and expected to develop mainly receptive skills because they had to be good citizens who followed rules without questioning them. However, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the Republic of Chile needed students to be more active in the process of teaching and learning not because they were to break rules, it was just more skillful workers were required, technically speaking, to produce different products in factories. This was evident during the government of Juan Antonio Ríos, in which “to govern was to produce” as opposed to Pedro Aguirre Cerda’s government, in which the motto was “to govern was to educate”. It was a clear change of direction of having citizens who were literate to
citizens who were literate and were able to do something with that knowledge, that is, to produce something for the sake of the economy of the Republic. That is why obedience was never left during the times of Public Education, and that was evident in the teaching materials, whose implicit messages were beyond helping students to read and write; students were always required to follow rules and to be good citizens. Only at the end of the twentieth century, students started to be considered as active participants in the process of teaching/learning and experiential learning began to be valued as an asset in Education.

**Reforms, counter-reforms and the role of women**

Reforms in Education in the Republic of Chile were mainly about providing students with access to education. It was a matter of coverage rather than quality. That is a topic which Orellana (2010) decides not to deal with when she believes everything is all right in contrast to what happened in the XIX and XX centuries. Actually, she does not criticize the Educational Reform of the government of Frei Ruiz Tagle as she does with former reforms. She only favors the philosophical framework of that reform, which, although considers students as active participants of their own learning, once applied, it does not solve the main issue in today’s education, that is, the excessive involvement of the private sector without State regulation. In addition, even though she does criticize the LOCE law created at the end of the Dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, she expresses that situation gets solved with the LGE’s approval during Michelle Bachelet’s government. Nevertheless, that is far from being correct as, nowadays, during the second government of President Michelle Bachelet, Education and, particularly Public Education, is still a matter of concern among students and the President herself promised Public State Education for everybody would return in Chile during her campaign.

We must, however, acknowledge Orellana’s contribution to stating the discrimination suffered by women, who, for a long time, were, if educated, students only in the belief of their having some sort of instruction to be used at home. Nevertheless, two facts must be said regarding an author chosen by her to refer to inequality of gender in Education and her vision of the integration of both men and women as citizens -only in discourse- during the XIX century. First thing, Amanda Labarca defended women rights although they were only for women from high socioeconomic groups (Castillo, 2014, p. 59). Even Gabriela Mistral criticizes, in her
article The Organization of Women (Del Pozo, 2015, p.39), the inclusion of only rich women in Feminism in Chile, which left aside poor women. Secondly, The State in Chile never included both men and women when citizens were referred to in the Republic of Chile. This is evident in the Elections law of 1884 (Castillo, 2014, p. 30), in which it is made clear to everybody that Chilean citizens were not men and women but just men were. They were the only citizens capable of voting, the only real citizens during the Republic of Chile in the XIX century and the majority of the first half of the XX century.

References


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