



# POLICIES, POLITICS AND THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMATIVE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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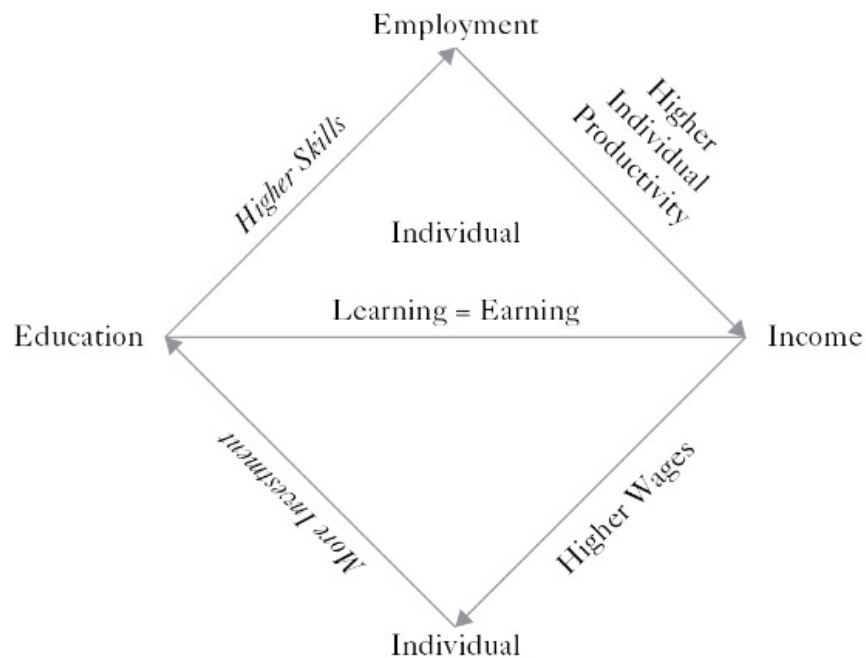
# 1

## A capabilities approach to vocational education

From employability to substantive freedom



# Vocational education's orthodoxy: Human Capital Theory



**Orthodox model for human capital investment**

Brown, Lauder & Cheung (2020, p. 17)

- An economic theory which proposes there is a causal relationship between education, productivity and income.
- It proposes an analogy between skills development and capital accumulation.
- It has gone from descriptive, to normative, to mandatory.

# Beyond vocational education: Human capital and wellbeing



- Economic growth as *the* measure for development (Sen, Fitoussi & Stiglitz, 2008).
- Productivity and economic growth are established as the purpose of education (Buchanan et al, 2020)
- Low quality education as *the* cause for underdevelopment (Buchanan et al, 2020)
- Education (and human capital accumulation) as an individual responsibility (Fleming, 2017).
- Structural conditions for inequality, poverty and other social issues are obscured by the notion of meritocracy (Sandel, 2020).

# A critique to economic growth: Development as freedom



- Amartya Sen (1999) proposes that poverty does not come from a lack of money but from a lack of freedom.
- Concurrently, wellbeing does not depend only on material conditions, but on the choices that are *actually* achievable by a person.
- *Capabilities* as the set of *functionings* available for a person in any given moment. They are directly related to their freedom and wellbeing.
- A person's capabilities vector depends not only on that person's characteristics but also on social structures and arrangements.

# Capabilities and vocational education



- Capabilities have been used by vocational education scholars to challenge orthodox notions of preparation for jobs.
- The approach centers on students' voices, their life experiences and aspirations.
- McGrath et al (2020) identified eight key elements for a critical capabilities approach on vocational education:
  - Personal experiences of multidimensional poverty.
  - A gendered perspective.
  - Interaction with the political economy of skills account.
  - A broad conceptualization of work.
  - A focus on flourishing.
  - The centrality of aspirations.
  - A multiplicity of decision points in vocational learning pathways.
  - An evaluative dimension.

# 2

## The 'Chilean Miracle'

From a neoliberal oasis to a contested delusion



# A 'successful' Neoliberal economy



- Chile is one of the few countries to transit from middle- to high-income in recent years (Zancajo & Valiente, 2018).
- Nonetheless, this growth is based in a Hierarchical Market Economy (Schneider, 2009):
  - Public enterprises has been almost completely privatized during the last 40 years.
  - Capital is highly concentrated in family-owned business (grupos económicos) or multinational companies.
  - Low industrial development, with services and retail as the most dynamic economic sectors.
  - Weak unions and workers organizations.
- A neo-market system of skills formation (Sung, Turbin & Ashton, 2010):
  - Economic growth on the basis of low value-added forms of production.
  - Coordination of 'supply' and 'demand' for skills is left to the market.
  - Low-cost labor force as a main competitive advantage for participation in international markets.



# A highly marketized educational system

- One of the most marketized and segregated education systems in the world (Bellei and Vanni, 2015).
  - Mixed provision in compulsory education: public schools, subsidized private schools and fully private schools.
  - Funding based on demand-driven mechanism related to enrollment and attendance.
  - For decades, subsidized private schools could charge an additional fee on students.
- Higher education is characterized by a marked institutional hierarchy and a growing presence of private institutions (Salazar & Leihy, 2013)
  - This is all the more relevant in higher vocational education, where private institutions enroll more than 95% of students.
  - From the late 1980s to 2016 there were no public higher vocational education institutions.



# The politics of uncertainty

- In the last fifteen years, social movements have played a major role in Chilean politics and policies.
- In 2019 this resulted in a major social uprising, demanding (among other issues) a new constitution.
- After a political agreement and a referendum, a mechanism for a new constitution was defined:
  - A proposal for the new constitution would be written by a new body, fully composed of newly elected representatives.
  - This constitutional body had gender parity and secured positions for indigenous nations.
  - A second referendum will validate the proposal.
- The constitutional body was composed mostly by left-wing representatives from outside political parties.
- A leftist government was elected in 2021 (while the proposal was being written), with a far-right candidate as the closest contender.
- On September 4, 2022, the constitutional proposal was rejected by the people at a referendum.



# 3

## The debate on vocational education

From human capital to human right?



# A quick picture of Chile's vocational education

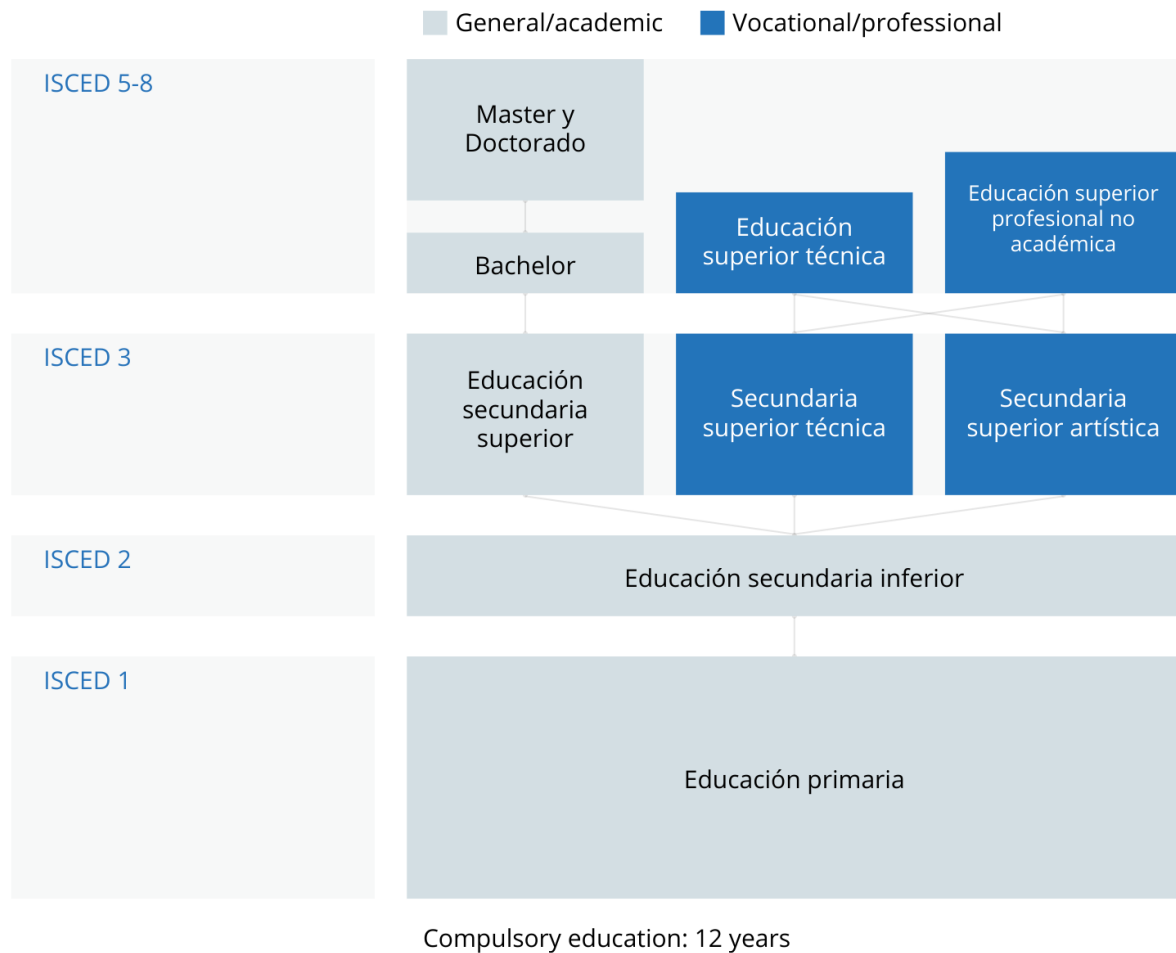
- Tracking starts in upper secondary with two years of vocational or academic education (Mineduc, 2018).
  - Most students in vocational education comes from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
  - The national (mandatory) curriculum is composed of a shared curriculum and a specific curriculum for each track/occupation
  - Both tracks award the high-school diploma, allowing access to higher education. Admission to universities is mediated by a standardized test.
- Higher education is characterized by a marked institutional hierarchy and a growing presence of private institutions (Salazar & Leihy, 2013)
  - This is all the more relevant in higher vocational education, where private institutions enroll more than 95% of students.
  - From the late 1980s to 2016 there were no public higher vocational education institutions.
- Chile's higher education system could be characterized as a hierarchical system (Lincovil Belmar, 2021)



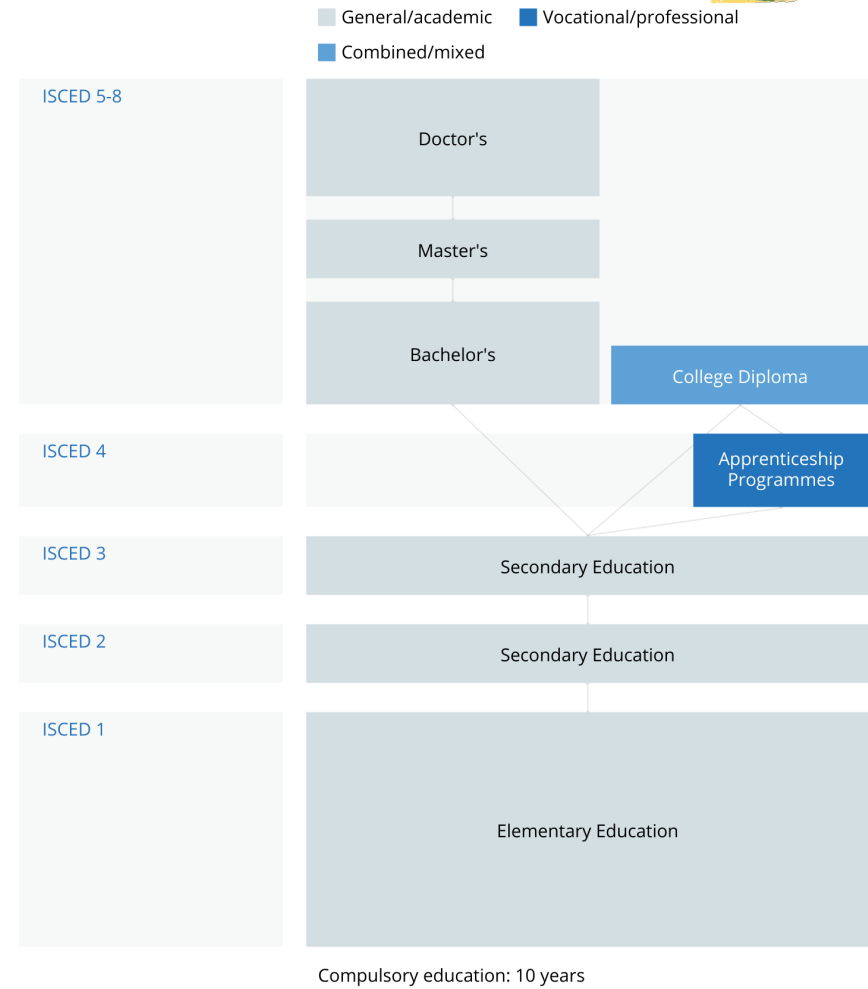
# A quick picture of Chile's vocational education [2]



## Formal Education System - Chile



## Formal Education System - Canada



# A quick history of Chile's vocational education



## ~1960 – 1973

- State focus on industrial development.
- Vocational education as a tool for Chile's development.
- A notion of "workers' university"

Import substitution policies

State-led vocational institutions

## 1973 – 1990

- Neoliberalism is installed through civic-military dictatorship.
- Chile's current vocational education system is shaped.
- Vocational education is almost completely privatized.

Marketization and privatization of VET institutions

"Charterization" of vocational schools

'Truncated' parallel higher education topology

## 1990 – 2014

- New public management as the cornerstone of policy.
- Focus on broadening access to education and quality assurance.

Quality Assurance

Competency-based curriculum

Financial Support for VET students

## 2014 – 2018

- A narrative shift from industry needs to students' trajectories.
- Policies via consensus: discursive amalgamation.
- Undisclosed clashes between different theoretical perspectives for policy.

National TVET Strategy (2018)

National Commission for Productivity

Vocational Qualifications Framework

State higher VET institutions

## 2018 – 2022

- Work and education pathways as narrative focus.
- Policies aim for a one-on-one correspondence between education and work.
- Governance is left outside of VET priorities.

National TVET Strategy (2020)

Modular recognition of prior learnings

Workplace learning as key methodology

## 2022 – 2026

- Government focus on .
- Policies aim for a one-on-one correspondence between education and work.
- Governance is left outside of VET priorities.

VET for sustainable human development

# 4

## Where do we go from here?

Thinking vocational education policies from a capabilities approach



# Transformative vocational education

- Vocational education must *'guarantee the development of people's diverse talents and capabilities through their lives, according to economic, social and sustainability needs of the country, contributing to a more equitable Chile, with greater social mobility and decent work'* (Mineduc, 2020)
- Vocational education should strive for *sustainable human development*: the bettering of each and every person's substantive wellbeing, for the current generation and those to come.
- If vocational education is to support people's wellbeing, it should be:
  - Aligned with people's aspirations and desires for wellbeing.
  - An inter-sectorial effort: it is comprised of education, work, and social justice policies.
  - Focused on human flourishing, not just preparation for a job.





# A government agenda for vocational education

- Vocational education for human flourishing
  - A new vocational curriculum based on knowledge over functional competencies.
  - A focus on non-sexist vocational education, through education and labor policies.
  - A focus on collaboration, citizenship and cooperative economy
- Participatory democracy in vocational education
  - Including students, teachers and small and medium enterprises in governance.
  - Understanding students' aspirations, wants and needs beyond labor and education.
- Community and territorial focus for vocational education
  - Fostering community engagement and local ecosystems for vocational education.
  - Strengthening public vocational education: local education services and state training centers.



# Between capabilities and realpolitik

- Structural barriers for transformation
  - In-force legislations and regulations.
  - Constitutional constrains.
  - A highly marketized educational system
  - A low-skills development model
- Culture and practices are hard to change
  - Human capital theory as common sense.
  - Hidden theoretical and ideological debates.
- An uncertain political scenario
  - Polarized public opinion.
  - A leftist government with a right-wing congress.
  - An uncertain constitutional scenario.





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