



Maria Victoria Peralta. Her commitment to kindergarten education in Chile and Latin America¹

María Victoria Peralta. Su compromiso con la educación parvularia en Chile y Latinoamérica

Maria Victoria Peralta. Seu compromisso com a educação pré-escolar no Chile e na América Latina

Maria Victoria Peralta. Son engagement en faveur de l'enseignement maternel au Chili et en Amérique latine

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Abstract

Chile has coverage of its entire school system -basic and a half- but not so of kindergarten, reaching only 50%. The state founded the first public kindergarten only in 1906. Its greatest development, however, has been in the last 50 years, thanks to the creation of two public bodies: JUNJI and INTEGRA. In the last time, Maria Victoria Peralta Espinosa has played an important role in the pursuit of kindergarten education, becoming an important figure at this educational level, both in Chile and Latin America. It is intended to reconstitute her biography and describe her educational action in the way of the rights that female mother has with her children with regard to her teaching from the earliest childhood, in order to achieve full coverage of this educational sector.

Keywords: Kindergarten. Infant education formation. Public Policy. Early childhood coverage.

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Resumen

Chile posee la cobertura de todo su sistema escolar -básico y medio- pero no así de la educación parvularia, alcanzando solo el 50%. El estado funda el primer kindergarten público solo en 1906. Su mayor desarrollo, sin embargo, ha sido en los últimos 50 años, gracias a la creación de dos organismos públicos: JUNJI e INTEGRA. En este último tiempo, María Victoria Peralta Espinosa ha jugado un importante rol en pro de la educación parvularia, transformándose en una figura señera en este nivel educacional, tanto en Chile como en Latinoamérica. Se pretende reconstituir su biografía y describir su acción educativa en pro de los derechos que la mujer madre tiene con sus hijos respecto a su enseñanza desde la más tierna infancia, a fin de lograr la cobertura total de este sector educacional.

Palabras clave: Educación Parvularia. Formación de educadoras de infantes. Políticas Públicas. Cobertura de la primera infancia.

Resumo

O Chile possui a cobertura de todo o seu sistema escolar básico e médio, mas não tanto na a educação pré-escolar, alcançando apenas os 50%. O Estado funda o primeiro jardim de infância público só em 1906. Seu maior desenvolvimento, no entanto, ocorre nos últimos 50 anos, graças à criação de dois órgãos públicos: JUNJI e INTEGRA. Nesta última vez, Maria Victoria Peralta Espinosa desempenhou um papel importante a favor da educação pré-escolar, transformando-se em uma figura de liderança nesse nível educacional, tanto no Chile quanto na América Latina. O objetivo é reconstituir sua biografia e descrever sua ação educacional em favor dos direitos que a mulher-mãe tem com seus filhos em relação ao ensino desde a primeira infância, a fim de obter uma cobertura completa desse setor educacional.

Palavras-chave: Educação Pré-escolar. Formação de educadores infantis. Políticas Públicas. Cobertura da primeira infância.

Résumé

Le Chili a la couverture de l'ensemble de son système scolaire -de base et moyen- mais pas de l'enseignement maternel, qui n'atteint que 50%. L'État n'a fondé le premier jardin d'enfants public qu'en 1906. Son plus grand développement, cependant, a été au cours des 50 dernières années, grâce à la création de deux organismes publics : JUNJI et INTEGRA. Ces derniers temps, María Victoria Peralta Espinosa a joué un rôle important dans la promotion de l'enseignement maternel, devenant une figure de proue de ce niveau d'enseignement, tant au Chili qu'en Amérique latine. L'objectif est de reconstituer sa biographie et de décrire son action éducative en faveur des droits que les femmes mères ont avec leurs enfants en ce qui concerne leur éducation dès le plus jeune enfance, afin de parvenir à une couverture complète de ce secteur éducatif.

Mots-clés: L'enseignement maternel. La formation des éducatrices infantiles. Les Politiques Publiques. La couverture de la petite enfance.

Introduction

Early childhood education has formally existed in Chile since 1864 (ARANCIBIA ET AL., 2004) and in 1906 the first public kindergarten was founded (PERALTA, 2006). Its greatest development, however, has been in the last 50 years, thanks to the creation of two public bodies: JUNJI² and INTEGRA³. During her professional career, Maria Victoria Peralta Espinosa has played an important role in favor of preschool education. In the previous context, the objective of this presentation is to reconstruct her biography and to publicize the contribution that in recent times, this educator has made to working women by promoting universal early childhood education in Chile and her constant concern for preschool education, both in her country and in Latin America; in this way, it seeks to understand why she was awarded in Chile with the National Prize in Education Sciences 2019.

This study is part of the qualitative paradigm in the context of the epistemology of the social sciences and, in this case, with the methodology of historical studies, resorting to primary and secondary sources; among them interviews with the educator herself and with people who have worked with her; that is, it is a biographical approach with her trajectories (CORNEJO, 2006) and document analysis. In this case, the division that Mario Bunge⁴ makes on the social sciences is assumed, continuing the line of Wilhelm Dilthey who makes the great classification between sciences of nature and sciences of the spirit, privileging the latter as those that comprise phenomena; As there will be description and interpretive analysis of facts and documents, there will be a close episteme to phenomenology and hermeneutics (CAICEO, 2018).

It is necessary to have in mind that the existing public institutions to attend preschool education in Chile are not currently able to cover 50% of the country's needs; it is the deficit that Chilean education has, since the coverage of the school system is almost total, with public financing for all the necessary schools and high schools. For this reason, Dr. Maria Victoria Peralta has been promoting the universal nursery and early childhood education in its entirety so that the state takes responsibility for a social need and fuller development of boys and girls. Indeed, socially, women in today's world work and need a safe and free place to leave their sons and daughters during their working day; psychology, for its part, points out those human beings have their greatest learning capacity before the age of 7⁵. Dr. Peralta is the kindergarten educator who has fought the most in the last four decades, not only in Chile but in other countries of the continent, for the rights that the mother woman has with her children in relation to their education from the earliest childhood. In addition, she has dedicated herself to reconstructing the history of early childhood education in Chile and Latin America. For all the above, she was recently recognized by the Chilean state by awarding her the 2019 National Prize for Educational Sciences because "She has carried out an important job of initial training and teacher training in the country and in Latin America, advising on public politics and

² National Board of Kindergartens.

³ Institution founded in 1990 belonging to the Network of Foundations of the Presidency of the Republic with the aim of integrating the most disadvantaged early childhood children into a playful-educational work.

⁴ Famous Argentine physicist, philosopher and epistemologist recently died in Canada at the age of 100: February 24, 2020.

⁵ "There is broad scientific consensus, for at least half a century, reaffirmed more recently by cognitive sciences and neurosciences, that the first years of life constitute a crucial period in the future development of people. The growing positioning of early childhood in public politics and government agendas has brought a renewal and expansion of this consensus, and new evidence, which refers to how the environment influences the potentialities of children and, how well-being in this early stage generates long-term benefits for economies and societies" (UNDER SECRETARY FOR KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION, 2018, p. 9).

programs for early childhood [...] and works as a consultant for UNICEF⁶, UNESCO⁷, BID⁸, WFP⁹ and OEI¹⁰" (AA, 2019, s / p).

1. - Main Biographical Features of Maria Victoria Peralta Espinosa

a) Her childhood and school training

Maria Victoria was born in Santiago of Chile on October 26, 1949. Her parents were Victoria Espinosa Lillo, a Law graduate from the University of Chile, and Anibal Peralta Fuentes, Army Colonel, expert in Telecommunications. She is an only child (PERALTA, 2020).

At the age of 2 he entered a kindergarten full-time, because her mother worked; it was located on Sazie Street in the capital. Then she entered the school system at Cambridge College, where she completed primary education and the humanities until the 5th year, because for health reasons, she had to pass the 6th year of humanities¹¹ as a free student with exams at the Lyceum No. 1 of Girls, located in the center of the city. She remembers to Guillermina, a Biology teacher from that time, "for her attention to the personal aspects of her students and also a good teacher in her subject"; the same opinion holds her History teacher; also to the directors of the School: "Luisa Vicentini, later I learned that she had been a communist feminist leader" and to "Mireya Latorre Vicentini, her daughter, who was warm in her direction" (PERALTA, 2020, p. 1).

b) Her university education

Due to her delicate health and for medical advice, when applying to university, she had to choose "a not very extensive career, which did not demand much of me. I analyzed those that had these characteristics and chose: Early Childhood Education, Library Science and Textile Design Technician" (PERALTA, 2020, p. 1). However, her vocation for early childhood appeared quickly, becoming the work that has most developed her as a person, from the individual point of view, and committed by the little ones throughout her professional existence, from a social perspective: "Once I entered to Early Childhood Education, and listened to my teachers, I had no doubt that it was one of the most important careers for the country and very interesting because of the personal growth it provided" (PERALTA, 2020, p. 1).

She applied to the University of Chile¹² because there was given the Infant Educator degree, which was her first option, because, that university "was better known [...] and, besides that I lived in Santiago, and it was near my house, in Eleodoro Yanez almost arriving at Jose Miguel Infante" (PERALTA, 2020, p. 2). From that time, she remembers the academics that most marked her:

Rebeca Soltanovich, intelligent Director, warm, up-to-date, studious, committed, very complete as a person. Linda Volosky, a committed, sweet, cheerful, responsible teacher. Pilar Mira and Ingeborg de Banderas, teachers

⁶ United Nations Children's Fund.

⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

⁸ Inter-American Development Bank.

⁹ World Food Program.

¹⁰ Organization of Ibero-American States.

¹¹ She studied before the 1965 reform came into effect, in which 6 years primary education was raised to 8 under the name of basic education and 6 years secondary education was lowered as secondary education to 4.

¹² Career dependent on the Faculty of Philosophy and Education founded on November 22, 1951 by University Decree N° 1,238, promoted by the great educator Amanda Labarca, who was her first Director (CAICEO, 2015). The other university that at that time dictated this degree was the University of Concepcion located 500 kilometers south of the capital, place of residence of the young Maria Victoria.

of Music and Manual Works, good and warm teachers. Dina Alarcon, up-to-date teacher, rigorous in her work, open to the new. All of them had a tremendous commitment to early childhood education, they mobilized us for its defense and development, and they instilled in us to be very good students (PERALTA, 2020, p. 2).

Thus, she graduated from Early Childhood Educator in 1970, with the first score of her generation. In the first five years of her work as an educator, she became aware that music was very important in her pedagogical action and “I realized that what I had learned in school was not enough to work with children” (PERALTA, 2020, p. 2); For this reason, she entered to study at the same University of Chile, Pedagogy in Musical Education, graduating in 1979. Later, in her desire to perfect herself and specialize in curriculum, she did a Master's Degree in Education, Curriculum Mention at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, graduating in 1984; her thesis was supervised by another National Award and Curriculum specialist, Dr. Abraham Madgenzo (PERALTA 2019a, p. 1). However, this Master, in her own words:

he made me a curriculumist, and there I discovered together with the Chilean Association of Educational Curriculum and my great teacher Viola Soto, that the curriculum is not neutral and that it implies a selection of culture¹³, and I felt weak in my knowledge of Socio-Cultural Anthropology, and I started doing the Master in Social Sciences, Socio-Cultural Anthropology Mention. A world was opened to me that continue to the present (PERALTA, 2020, p. 2).

This is how, at her alma mater, she obtained the corresponding degree in 1993; Dr. Esther Grebe directed her thesis. Finally, in 2005 she obtained her Doctor of Education degree from the Academy of Humanism Christian University; her thesis was directed by Dr. Rolando Pinto and was entitled "Model of the analysis of quality in early childhood education". At the same time, she has carried out several courses and internships on "Anthropological Approach to Women", "Strategic Planning", "Reggio Emilia Center and Preschools", Early Childhood Education Modalities” and “Emy Pikler's Early Childhood Proposal”, both in Chile and in Italy, Spain and Hungary (PERALTA, 2019a, pp. 1-2).

c) Characteristics of the personality of Maria Victoria Peralta

Throughout her fruitful existence, the National Prize developed a personality with a lot of leadership; this is reported by several people with whom she had to share her work. The Undersecretary of Education of the first government of the post-military dictatorship transition (1990-1994) -with whom Maria Victoria Peralta worked in the Ministry of Education-, Raul Allard, points out: "Victoria has enormous intellectual and academic capacities related to education, but what is fundamental is her simplicity of life and social sensitivity that makes her vibrate with the children she serves and the educators she supports" (ALLARD, 2020, p. 3). Dr. Manuel Silva, an academic at the University of Chile -who has known her since 1984 as a member of the Chilean Curriculum Association (ACHCED)-, limits in this regard:

¹³ On January 4 and 5, 1989, UNESCO held a Seminar in Santiago, directed by Viola Soto Guzman, also a National Prize for Educational Sciences, entitled “Identity of Latin America and its Cultural Bases”. The author of this article -a professor of philosophy- had to participate in a Panel, with Dr. Humberto Maturana and the then Master Maria Victoria Peralta, where each one presented their point of view from their area of interest, philosophy, neuroscience and curriculum, respectively. Who writes and Victoria Peralta had known each other since 1976, they both worked at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

A person very committed to the ideas that she generates and professes. She has a spirit of initiative, proactivity, fraternity. She has the ability to organize and promote collaborative work in transdisciplinary teams. Enthusiastic and good at playing guitar and singing in a group [...] she always carried the musical tambourine, and we all formed a choir where we shared moments that we always remember with affection (SILVA, 2020, p. 2).

Her former student and academic at the University of Chile, who has known her since 1981, Dr. Monica Manhey, emphasize:

She is a very studious, organized and persevering person to reach her goals. For example, in the case of searching for material for her historical research. It should be noted that she is very generous with her knowledge and that is why she has published and given so many lectures and talks (most of them free). By working with Victoria, she generates good relationships in the team, is cheerful, friendly and trusts in each other [...]. Great person and teacher of teachers (MANHEY, 2020, pp. 1 and 3).

Her partner since the university (1968) and who have worked in several institutions together, Master Ester Hernandez, emphasizes about the National Prize in Educational Sciences:

Intelligent, awake, extraordinarily curious, good at making associations, thoughtful, tireless worker, determined to reach the goal even if it impairs her well-being or health. Leader, correct, firm. Safe, serene, friendly. Good friend of friends, loyal and kind. She gives suggestions in the tribulations of others if one asks her. With love for nature and animals. With a certain youthful candor in the face of art. And with a great sense of humor in privacy (HERNANDEZ, 2020, p. 4).

2.- Educational action of Maria Victoria Peralta

a) Her educational work in kindergartens and universities

When she was not yet titled, she was the creator, director and educator of the Penalolen Community Garden in the Arrieta Population (1969); educator in the transition level in the Penalolen Kindergarten (1970); mid-level educator at the Bambi Garden (1971-1972); transition level educator at the Montahue Kindergarten for ENAP¹⁴ workers (1973), among other institutions (PERALTA, 2019, pp. 3-4).

In the academic field, she began as an Assistant (1972) and then as a teacher (1976) at the University of Chile, practicing until 1981, the date on which she was disassociated when the Pedagogical Institute broke away from the university and became the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences¹⁵. In turn, in 1976 she entered the Pontifical Catholic of Chile University -PUC-, under difficult circumstances due to the military dictatorship and the presence of a Delegate Rector, Admiral Jorge Swett Madge; about it, remembers:

¹⁴ National Petroleum Company, public entity.

¹⁵ Measure taken by the military dictatorship to dismember the main public university in the country; it mainly cut off the regional headquarters and the Pedagogical Institute.

Adriana Masses, who was the coordinator of the program for the years 76, invited me to be part of the academic body and I entered to teach a few hours, since I had a full working day at the University of Chile. I was there until 1989, where I asked permission for a year to assume the Vice-presidency of JUNJI (1990) and when I talked again about the possibilities of taking classes, I found that I had been taken off the payroll. Actually, all the years that I was in the PUC¹⁶, I never had a contract for more than 6 months, so I did not know what paid vacations were [...]. In addition, I met with colleagues who were not with the dictatorship and participated in different political and academic activities outside the PUC, in the CPU¹⁷, for example. Those years were not easy at the PUC (PERALTA, 2020, p. 3).

Precisely for the reasons already stated, the academic work was quite difficult for the National Prize and when she ceased her duties at her alma mater, she had to practice partial teaching in various higher education institutions in different cities of the country: The Frontera's University in Temuco (1982); The Serena's University in the same city (1983-1984); Blas Canas Professional Institute, Providencia Professional Institute and Pacific Professional Institute (1983-1989), all three in Santiago and private¹⁸; Magallanes's University in Punta Arenas (1987-1989). This situation reveals the vicissitudes they had to go through several academics in Chile who did not adhere to the military dictatorship: they became "itinerant" and could only practice for a few hours in different institutions. In her workplaces she dictated different chairs: Methodology of Early Childhood Education, Methodology of Musical Education in Kindergarten, Child Psych pedagogy and Personalized Education (PERALTA, 2019a).

With the return to democracy (1990), she rejoined her former pedagogical, now called Metropolitan University of Education Sciences -UMCE-; there she created,

together with Mireya Galvez, the Master in Education, mention in Early Childhood Education (the first in Chile), in the postgraduate course coordinated by Professor Viola Soto, in 1994, 50 years after the university career was created in Chile. When they asked her for her position, which I considered was an injustice because of her dedication and academic quality; I resigned to continue working at the UMCE at that time¹⁹ (PERALTA, 2020, p. 4).

Finally, due to her contact with public work for along 16 years, she realized the need for more early childhood educators with postgraduate degrees so that they would be able to research and innovate about early childhood education. Thus,

I did a project improving some aspects that we had evaluated at the UMCE, and I took it to the Dean of the Faculty of Education (Central's University²⁰), Selma Simonstein, who with a group of teachers had emigrated from the University of Chile, forming the career there, and that she was OMEP's²¹ World President, too. It was the best place where

¹⁶ Pontifical Catholic of Chile University.

¹⁷ University Promotion Corporation; NGO dedicated to the research study and dissemination of educational proposals preferably at the university level, but also at the school system and early childhood.

¹⁸ The three universities at which she worked as a part-time during this period, were public.

¹⁹ This happened in 2000.

²⁰ Private university existing since 1982 in Chile. It was the institution that sponsored her application for the 2019 National Prize in Educational Sciences.

²¹ It is the World Organization for Early Childhood Education.

kindergarten education could be considered seriously, and in the spirit of the University of Chile. The project was approved by the Faculty and the Board of Directors, and the Magister in Early Childhood Education began, later creating the International Institute of Early Childhood Education, which I direct until now [...]. I remain at this university because I have had the freedom to promote all kinds of interesting projects and contributors to the country (PERALTA, 2020, p. 5).

Dr. Peralta continues working academically at the Universidad Central. Another important event in the life of this educator was her active participation in the Chilean Curriculum Association -ACHCED-, an entity founded by important academics during the military dictatorship in the 70s of the last century; some of its Presidents have been, among others, Dr. Gilberto Calvo and the National Awards Abraham Magendzo and Viola Soto Guzman. This last educator held events and brought her associates together permanently. For this reason, Dr. Manuel Silva remembers that “[...] ACHCED, with the intellectual and emotional leadership of Prof. Viola Soto, brought us together permanently. She was the nexus that brought us together in the friendship, academic activity and sociability as a source of meeting and personal and intellectual growth” (SILVA, 2020, p. 1).

b) Her work for children at the private and public, national and international levels

During the military dictatorship, Maria Victoria, together with two partners, Ester Hernández and Gerda Schmid²² -Early childhood Educators just like her-, founded the Center for Improvement, Research and Curricular Development, known by the acronym PARVUS; this happened in the first days of August 1981 and on the 14th of the same month, training activities for kindergarten educators began, since in 1980 pedagogy careers were eliminated from the universities and became dependent on the Professional Institutes; Dr. Peralta

brought together a group of educators and raised the need to found a center where Early Childhood Educators could meet to reflect and, in addition, impart updated knowledge on the education of young children, a task that universities used to do” (HERNANDEZ, 2020, p. 1).

This important institution was maintained until 1993. According to a protagonist of the time, “[...] they worked tirelessly to enable the space in Salvador Avenue, later it was moved into a rented house in Roman Diaz in the corner of Eleodoro Yanez” (MANHEY, 2020, p. 3). The operation of the institution is described by one of the partners:

In sensible work meetings [...] always led by Victoria, who led the way, she was the one of the new ideas and organization of places and times. We had postgraduate studies and university teaching years. Later, other academics taught courses in her specialty paid for by PARVUS. The hours of operation were from 6 to 9 p.m. and the Educator-students were expected with a coffee and cookies because they came from work. We had a secretary to type the documents that supported the new knowledge, original of our authorship. Subsequently, a paid library science student classified and ordered the library with our own books (HERNANDEZ, 2020, pp. 1-2).

²² After a few years, she retires and is replaced by the Early childhood Educator Jazmin Miranda.

There was a library and the students²³ were given material prepared by the teachers who taught the courses; tuition was charged to cover the expenses and courses were biannual, once a week and with duration of 40 hours, certified for the teaching career²⁴. There was diffusion through a diptych that

specified that PARVUS was an educational center with a humanistic orientation, open to all educational ideas and positions that considered the child as the center of their action. Its objective was to offer a meeting place, dialogue and reflection on the problem of early childhood education, and the various purposes it pursued were specified (HERNANDEZ, 2020, p. 2).

In short, PARVUS was (i) a training center with courses in Santiago and regions²⁵, with distance courses with personalized methodology which gave open talks to all public who wanted to know about kindergarten education; (ii) a Research Center that carried out and published research on the area; (iii) a Curriculum Development Center that prepared infant care programs with different methodologies and management and evaluation systems; it carried out methodological consultancies to institutions that required it; didactic material for kindergartens was produced and publications were made, including the PARVUS Bulletin²⁶ (HERNANDEZ, 2020). On the other hand,

a model Kindergarten was also organized to put into practice the principles, methods and postulates of PARVUS²⁷ what was in charge of the young educator Monica Manhey, who was an outstanding disciple in her undergraduate training of Victoria and Ester. This kindergarten received 2 years old children with a work plan that the parents knew in advance and consistent with the new innovative work modality. The family received a daily report from their son and daughter [...] it was an open door kindergarten. The Educator, when time allowed, took the children out to get to know the community and, later, they talked about what they had seen and carried out activities related to the topic which covered a complete Unit (HERNANDEZ, 2020, p. 4).

²³ The students were educators from Kindergartens, schools, educational centers and others, who cared for young children, university students in the last years of the career or related careers, young university teachers, all contributed something in relation to the subject that was being discussed (HERNANDEZ, 2020).

²⁴ This meant that they were recognized by the Center for Improvement, Experimentation and Pedagogical Research -CPEIP- of the Ministry of Education.

²⁵ Agreements were signed with the Regional Management of Provincial Education of the First Region in Arica, La Serena University, Talca' University, University Jose Santos Ossa of Antofagasta, Magallanes' University in Punta Arenas, the Association of Early Childhood Educators from Calama and with a private school in Rancagua (HERNANDEZ, 2020)

²⁶ Maria Victoria Peralta Espinosa served as Coordinator of the improvement courses and the library. As Coordinator of publications and research line, Ester Hernandez Castillo. Gerda Schmid Spilker, later replaced by Jazmin Miranda, as administrative, consultancy and teaching material coordinator. "All these roles were assigned by Victoria, who always exercised public relations for PARVUS, dedicating longer working hours and assuming the leadership of the same" (HERNANDEZ, 2020, p. 3).

²⁷ In 1985 a Kindergarten was formed in order to offer a Personalized Education and to be an Innovation center where practices could be carried out as a result of what was investigated by PARVUS and the professionals who had joined it (MANHEY, 2020).

Maria Victoria Peralta came to the public sector with the return of democracy in 1990 and became Executive Vice President of JUNJI²⁸ (1990-1998)²⁹, an institution in which “[...] administrative and technical modernization began [...], coverage was expanded [...], the quality of kindergartens was improved and most of the non-formal programs were created [...], among them, those of attention to infants of indigenous communities” (PERALTA, 2019, p. 7). Her direct boss in the first three and a half years, Undersecretary Raul Allard, points out that “[...] she was an extraordinary official. Victoria was already in those years the person who led the preschool level in the country, which has been reaffirmed three decades later with the National Education Award” (ALLARD, 2020, p. 1).

The military dictatorship returned the government to democracy with coverage of early childhood education with only 28% of children under 6 years of age; but, in turn, if such percentage was analyzed, it was concluded that the children between 2 and 6 years old who received educational attention according to their age, 60% of them were of medium or medium-high economic status (Ministry of Education, 2001); For the same reason, the contribution made by Dr. Peralta to preschool education and infants from the most disadvantaged families, while she directed the National Board of Kindergartens, was remarkable; her work was projected beyond the institution she directed,

she embodied at the level of the Government of democratic restoration of Patricio Aylwin the need to reinforce the status and importance of preschool education in the lives of children, the importance as a level of education, and the importance of defining a national quality policy and expansion of this level, which naturally included reinforcing the training and working conditions of kindergarten educators. We were able to do that because Victoria was with us in the Government and in the Ministry (ALLARD, 2020, p. 1).

Specifically, the National Award led the policy of the democratic government regarding to JUNJI and INTEGRA³⁰, as well as the improvement and expansion of the initial level, in general. In the beginning, some target populations were identified: infants in a marginalized situation; infants in extreme poverty with bio-medical risk and a serious social situation; infants of mothers who are heads of households who work abroad and especially on their own account and with scarce resources; infants from culturally and socially marginalized ethnic groups. On the other hand, unconventional family kindergartens were implemented to serve children from two to five years old in agreement with municipalities and social and community organizations. As a public policy, Dr. Maria Victoria Peralta determined two important situations: (i) the effect that preschool education has on the population aged 0 to five years, and (ii) the stimulating potential that this type of education causes to mitigate inequalities in infants from the lowest socio-economic strata (ALLARD, 2020).

Despite the effort made, the Educator Victoria Peralta recalls that while she served as the National Coordinator of Preschool Education of the Ministry of Education (1998-2001), she had to confront state officials who thought it was unnecessary to worry about teaching children; verbatim, it states:

²⁸ The National Board of Kindergartens -JUNJI- founded in 1970 through Law No. 17,301 during the government of Eduardo Frei Montalva (CAICEO, 2011).

²⁹ She appointed Ester Hernandez Castillo as National Director of the National Technical Department.

³⁰ Foundation created in 1990, as a non-profit private law institution, in support of the lower income sectors and, especially for the children of working women, which belongs to the Network of Foundations of the Presidency of the Republic; it was one of the first public policy measures with the return of democracy (CAICEO, 2011).

I had to hear comments like ‘but how are they going to make a curriculum for the babies, if that is a matter of diapers and bottles!’ Those things hurt, because the child's right to education was not recognized. But now it is different, we have seen greater support and consideration for our area (PERALTA, 2019b: s/p).

When she left the Vice Presidency of JUNJI, she went on to coordinate the team that will establish "the Curricular Bases of Early Childhood Education"³¹, remaining as JUNJI Advisor (1998-2001) and, later, as Coordinator of the Early Childhood Education Unit in the Ministry of Education (2002-2006). In this way, she spent 16 years in public service.

On the other hand, at the international level, Dr. Peralta has carried out consultation work for various international organizations, such as OES³², UNICEF, UNESCO, BID, WFP and OEI, in the field of early childhood education. In addition, she has been a member of the Committee of Experts of the Latin American Partners of the Organization of Ibero-American States -OEI- and, later, she was elected Vice President of the World Organization for Preschool Education -OMEP³³- for Latin America during the period 2008-2010 (UNESCO, n/d). At the same time, in other Latin American countries she has been an advisor on various types of projects: National plans for early childhood, quality improvement, the construction of national curricula in initial education, and has trained specialists (Paraguay, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Panama, Uruguay) (PERALTA, 2019).

c) Dr. Peralta and her role as an educator

Maria Victoria Peralta is a specialist in matters of Curriculum and Culture and History of Education. For Dr. Manuel Silva (2020, p. 2), her work

constitutes a substantive contribution to Chilean and Latin American education. Her pedagogical actions have the stamp of the search for cultural relevance as a mark of the intentional educational action. She has had significant participation in the Early Childhood Education Reforms in Chile, and most of the Latin American countries, where they have recognized her valuable contribution [...]. Also in the labor field, her contribution to the construction of culturally relevant Curricula, generating and accompanying kindergarten education teams, in various communes of the country. This is a sample of Curriculum constructions, developing the capacities present in the educators for the design of plans, programs, materials and activities that bring together the local with the regional and national.

For her former student, Dr. Monica Manhey (2020, p. 4), her teacher

is a 100% educator, not only in the classroom or when working for a fee, in her real and everyday life, on the street, in her relationship with people every day. I've seen that in the years that we've known each other. Of an enormous sensitivity towards children. When she taught us, she taught theory and practice, she carried boxes of instruments for music class and she taught us a lot that we did not

³¹ Which were promulgated in 2001; in 2018 they have been updated due to the theoretical changes existing in these years and due to the new prevailing reality.

³² Organization for Health Excellence.

³³ In Chile, the respective Committee had been created in 1948.

know. All her classes were always unmissable, already in those years she was accompanied by audiovisual media; she showed us photos of curricular modalities, of boys and girls learning, of innovative practices [...] this happened in each of the undergraduate classes that I had with her, as well as in my Master's studies where I was also her student. She 'walked' us through different parts of Chile and other countries, always with a formative sense.

For her fellow student, partner and friend, Ester Hernández (2020, p. 5), Maria Victoria

was and still is an educator, in every sense of the word, extraordinary. Innovative in the presentation of the subject with visual resources that she selected or elaborated {photographs, music, crafts, books, documents} that she brought from her trips to countries, cities, towns and villages as a result of the courses and consultancies that she taught in public and private institutions and universities that required her services. In addition, she presented her own research and suggested new ones, in seminars, symposia and other meetings. However, where her presence was permanently required was to give certified courses for professionals and university students eager to listen to the new approaches in education and receive their portfolio with documents and new curricular approaches that were already being implemented in Chile, putting the child at the center of the process and not the educator.

Conclusions

As can be seen, the Kindergarten Educator, Maria Victoria Peralta has been and continues to be a full teacher who has become the leader in early childhood education in Chile and Latin America. With various recognized awards in several Latin American and even European countries, crowning her important work with the National Prize for Educational Sciences in her country.

Talking about Early Childhood Education in Chile and in Latin America necessarily leads to the figure and vast writings of this distinguished educator with her own thought, which will be analyzed on another occasion.

Recently she has fought for a universal and free nursery for every working woman and father who is in charge of a minor child; In this regard, she has differed from the current project that President Pinera (2018-2021) has presented in Chile, like the Senate Education Commission, because "there is no real universality, a bias in the gender perspective remains, returns to profit in early education" (SENADO DE LA REPUBLICA DE CHILE, 2019: w/p).

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