At this point of change from one century to another, it would seem to be appropriate to take a retrospective look at education in Chile. To this end we give a sketch map with four principal features, three of which are precedents that are necessary to understand the fourth still in progress. The first is centered on the 19th century; the second groups together the first 70 years of the 20th century; the third deals with the period of military dictatorship; and the last one, in the last decade of the century, shows an ambivalent ethical attitude toward national education. Although all four share common problems, individually they evidence socio-pedagogical and value principles that distinguish them. The critical historiographic review ends with some conclusions about the future of the country.