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To cite this article: Oscar Espinoza, Luis Eduardo González, Noel McGinn & Dante Castillo (2020): Engaging dropouts with differentiated practices: some evidence from Chile, Research Papers in Education, DOI: [10.1080/02671522.2020.1736615](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2020.1736615)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2020.1736615>



Published online: 05 Mar 2020.



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Engaging dropouts with differentiated practices: some evidence from Chile

Oscar Espinoza^a, Luis Eduardo González^b, Noel McGinn^c and Dante Castillo^b

^aCenter of Advanced Research, Universidad de Playa Ancha and Researcher at the Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación (PIIE), Santiago, Chile; ^bResearcher at the Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación (PIIE), Santiago, Chile; ^cSchool of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to identify those activities that re-engage out-of-school youth who enrol in the so-called 'recovery' schools now operating in Chile. Recovery schools can offer different kinds of activities in order to engage their students; are some activities more effective than others? Is their effect moderated by the type of dropouts who participate? Chile recently opened a national programme of Second Opportunity Schools (Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad). Their mission is to provide primary and high school dropouts between 14 and 18 years of age an opportunity to complete their studies. Latent Class analysis, based on conventional demographic and current activity data, was used to classify these students into four distinct groups. The groups varied in their level of satisfaction (or engagement) with the Second Opportunity School in which they were studying. Within each School, the groups' satisfaction varied according to the activities in which students participated. That is, variation in satisfaction was more a result of student characteristics than differences between Schools. Some activities were more effective than others in engaging or satisfying some types of students. Further research is required to assess the impact of more highly differentiated programmes with more activities.

ARTICLE HISTORY



Received 2 July 2019
Accepted 15 February 2020

KEYWORDS

Dropout recovery; student dropouts; satisfaction; educational engagement; latent class analysis; persistence to graduation

Introduction

Almost immediately after the re-establishment of democracy in 1990, governments in Chile began efforts to improve access to and the quality of education. Important changes included increased salaries for teachers and subsidies to low-income families and to both public and private schools offering remedial programmes (Espinoza et al. 2014). Universal enrolment and completion of basic schooling (grades 1–8) was achieved first. With new legislation requiring attendance until age 18 or completion of the secondary level, high school (in Chile 'Media') enrolments (grades 9–12) grew rapidly, in both the academic and vocational tracks of upper media. The proportion of the 20 to 24-year-old

CONTACT Oscar Espinoza  pirata14@hotmail.com; oespinoza@academia.cl  18 de Septiembre 2222, Arica, Chile
Present affiliation of Oscar Espinoza is Researcher at the Facultad de Educación y Humanidades, Universidad de Tarapacá and researcher at the Instituto Interuniversitario de Investigación Educativa (IESED)

age group that graduated from secondary education increased from 54 per cent in 1990 to 81 per cent in 2013. At both points in time, rates for girls were slightly higher than those for boys (all public and most private schools in Chile are co-educational) (Josephson, Francis, and Jayara 2018)

If anything, the increased graduation rate intensified concern about dropouts. Chile's dropout rate (in 2008 about 15%) was lower than that in other countries (for example, the United States), but a worry for a progressive government and religious organisations promoting greater social equality (Sepulveda and Opazo 2009; Osorio 2013; Hogar de Cristo 2019). Private groups acted first, opening a few schools for out-of-school youth in order to reintegrate them back into regular schools (Alvarado et al. 2014).

In 2016 the Chilean congress passed legislation that mandated the establishment of a national system of schools that would enrol out-of-school youth between 14 and 18 years of age (Ministerio de Educación 2016). The new institution, known variously as a Second Opportunity School or a School for Educational Re-Integration, forms part of the Office of Education for Youth and Adults (EPJA), in the division of Centres of Integrated Education for Adults (CEIA). The new schools offer out-of-school youth morning, afternoon or evening classes that can lead to a primary or secondary school certificate. The programmes comply with the official regular school curriculum but are intensive, and progress is accelerated; in one calendar year students can complete two grades of high school (Espinoza et al. 2016). In addition to offering an enthusiastic welcome to the new students, the Second Opportunity schools have provided a set of non-academic activities modelled after those used in the non-government recovery schools. These include sports and recreation, arts and crafts workshops, job training in entry-level occupations, and workshops to discuss psychological issues. In addition, the schools offer individuals help with their academic work, family problems, and behavioural issues.

The Second Opportunity system differs from dropout recovery programmes in other countries, and therefore we cannot assume that all what has worked elsewhere would be effective in Chile. In the United States, a significant minority of school districts have established 'alternative' schools. Students considered at risk of dropping out are encouraged to transfer from the regular school to one that offers a different programme but can lead to graduation or prepare for a high school equivalency examination. Alternative schools were once seen as an effective way to increase completion rates (Raywid 1994). With further expansion, however, they became more variable in structure, operation, and effectiveness. Now some schools graduate about the same proportion of students as do regular schools, while others have completion rates below 50 per cent (Gilson 2006; Moger 2010; Hahn and Wang 2015; Sullivan 2015; Wilkerson et al. 2016).

The dominant approach in Europe has been adult education programmes for youth over 18 years old who have not completed secondary school (European Commission 2015). Some countries have established a few 'second chance' schools for younger dropouts (Day et al. 2013). A few countries, for example Australia, have developed similar national programmes (McGregor et al. 2015).

Public sponsorship of schools for dropouts, either potential or actual, is a new phenomenon in Latin America. They have been encouraged in part by UNESCO and the Organisation of Inter American States (OEI) and linked to the international campaign of Education for All (Eroles and Hirmas 2009). Private organisations were first to establish second chance schools, particularly in Brazil, Argentina and Chile (Eroles and

Hirmas 2009; Centro de Estudios de la Niñez 2013). To date, however, there has been little published research on the organisation and activities of these schools.

Some research has been done in Chile on the factors associated with early withdrawal from school (Espinola et al. 2011; Espinoza et al. 2014; Dussailant 2017), but little is known about youth who enrol in dropout recovery programmes (Espinoza et al. 2018). No research has been published on the kinds of activities most likely to engage students so that they can complete their secondary education. To date, there have been no official or unofficial publications that detail programme contents, activities or personnel requirements for the Second Opportunity schools. There has been no systematic assessment of the effectiveness (in terms of learning outcomes or student persistence) of current programme activities. The number of out-of-school youth is estimated at 130,000 (of whom 30,000 are enrolled in the EPJA) but there is no national register nor description of the characteristics of either group.

This study was designed as the first step in developing a highly effective dropout recovery programme for Chile. Its objective is to provide baseline data about the reaction of those youth who have chosen to enrol in Second Opportunity schools. Later research, building on results of this study, will be used to refine the schools' organisation and activities, and to attract a larger portion of those not in school.

Previous research on why students drop out

Early withdrawal from high school is not a new phenomenon in any country. The rise in public concern about dropouts reflects the increased importance of educational attainment, important for society as well as for individual welfare. Concern about the dropout rate in the United States surged in the early 1960s (Dorn 1993), earlier perhaps than in other countries because the compulsory attendance age in the US was several years higher (Strom 1964; De Witte et al. 2013). In a matter of decades, US researchers (McDill, Natriello, and Pallas 1986; Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman 1989; Finn 1989; Rumberger and Lim 2008) had identified more than 100 factors associated with early withdrawal (Bowers 2010; Bowers, Sprott, and Taff 2013; Román 2013). Later research in other regions has reported a similar level of diversity in explanations of early withdrawal (Ananga 2011; Cederberg and Hartsmar 2013; Omirin and Yemisi 2016; Jugović and Doolan 2013). Studies in Chile have produced results similar to those from the United States (Espinola et al. 2011; Espinoza et al. 2014; Dussailant 2017).

In the United States and a few other countries factors associated with early withdrawal are now called 'risk indicators' and are used to identify students still in school likely to withdraw (Beken et al. 2009; Jobs for the Future 2014). Taken individually, the risk indicators are not highly reliable nor, in the terms of one study, are they efficient predictors of dropping out (Dynarski and Gleason 1998). Researchers in the US often find moderate to strong correlations between factors like socio-economic status, ethnic identity or rural residence and dropping out, but these should be seen as measures of association rather than causal relationships. The decision to and the action of leaving school are seen by some researchers as triggered by current events as part of the "life course" (Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani 2001; Needham, Crosnoe, and Muller 2004; Dupéré et al. 2015, 2018). They posit that some events outside school 'pull' the student towards a more attractive life. These include employment and the economic rewards it offers. Other events may serve to 'push' the student to leave. These include family

responsibilities (i.e., child care) and failure in school (Bradley and Renzulli 2011; Doll, Eslami, and Walters 2013; Boylan and Renzulli 2017). One (US) study suggests that contemporary events in the recovery school are the best predictors of eventual graduation (Appleton, Christenson, and Furlong 2008).

Identification of dropout risk factors may, therefore, not be useful in helping students to recover from dropping out. It may be more helpful to identify the situations that either pulled or pushed students out of their regular school. As a complement, it might be more helpful to identify those current factors that students find satisfying, as these would increase their intention to remain in school.

A great deal of research on student satisfaction (and consequent achievement) has been done in regular high schools in countries as varied as the United States, French-speaking Canada, Romania and Israel (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004; Fredricks and McColskey 2012; Janosz et al. 2008; Shefi 2015; Amitay and Rahav 2018). The term 'satisfaction' is often used simultaneously with 'engagement' (Elmore and Huebner 2010). Using international findings of the PISA (Programme of International Student Assessment) surveys, Willms defines engagement as 'the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes and participate in academic and non-academic school activities' (Willms 2003, 8). The activities vary widely across countries. For example, public and most private schools in Latin America and some countries in Europe offer few extra-curricular activities, while they are abundant in the United States. Satisfaction and engagement should therefore be considered as constructs; their operational definitions will vary across cultural contexts.

However defined, research in a variety of countries shows that student involvement (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) in school activities is associated with higher levels of academic performance and a greater probability of graduation (Abbing 2013; Konold et al. 2018; Wara, Aloka, and Odongo 2017; Wonglorsaichon, Wongwanich, and Wiratchai 2014). A meta-analysis of 67 international studies provides even more evidence. Students who participate in academic and/or non-academic activities are more likely to report high levels of satisfaction, and less likely to withdraw (Lei, Cui, and Zhou 2018). All this research is based on students in regular schools. We found no research on how satisfaction and engagement contribute to the success of dropout recovery schools.

The research also indicates that other, unmeasured or latent variables can affect the relationship between level of satisfaction and engagement and persistence to graduation. For example, in the US the association of satisfaction and engagement on graduation is moderated by social class, affecting lower-income students more than upper-income students (Lawson and Lawson 2013). While engagement is related to achievement at each stage in school, the size of its effect varies by stage and by subject, e.g., maths versus language (Abbing 2013; Chase et al. 2014). Satisfaction and engagement can be increased by use of connective instruction, setting high expectations for students, and lively teaching (Cooper 2014). Helping students set career plans increases engagement levels of upper class secondary students (Plasman 2018). Giving more attention to the emotional/affective dimension of engagement can be effective (García 2014).

What these studies suggest is that satisfaction and engagement are composite constructs, the product of the many experiences and conditions that an individual has experienced. Once enrolled in a recovery school, the student's behaviour, learning and emotions will be influenced in part by what they currently experience, but also by the

persistent effect of their combined past experiences. Students who in the past have had similar sets of experiences may, if exposed to the same current situation, behave, think and feel alike. Proceeding on that premise, several researchers have attempted to create typologies of dropouts.

Perhaps the first classification of dropouts in the US was that by Voss and others (Voss, Wendling, and Elliott 1966). After observation of students and reading their academic records they identified three distinct groups. More recently researchers in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada have constructed typologies using data from standardised achievement and personality tests, school records and self-report questionnaires (Barrington and Hendricks 1989; Morris, Ehren, and Lenz 1991; Janosz et al. 2000; Jimerson et al. 2000; Fortin et al. 2006; Ananga 2011; Bowers, Sprott, and Taff 2013; Fortin et al. 2013).

The results do not define a universal typology of dropouts. The studies used different universes and samples of students, different variables, and different analytic procedures. Data did not include reasons for withdrawal or expulsion. The terms or labels used to describe the groups the researchers constructed were based on the researchers' inference of what the constituent variables had in common.

There is, however, an important similarity across the studies. In each of the typologies, one group of dropouts is made up of individuals who do not have any unique combination of risk indicators or prior experiences that would explain their withdrawal from school. This is often the most numerous group. This difficult-to-explain set of students is assigned a label like 'Quiet' or 'Uninterested in School'. These students might be considered to be bored in school, but that is true of many US high school students, who do not drop out (Daschmann, Goetzl, and Stupnisky 2011; NAIS 2015; Sulea et al. 2015). Low academic performance is more often a result of poor study skills or emotional instability rather than low cognitive ability (Rumberger 2011). Low engagement, it appears, is for some students a sufficient reason to withdraw from school. Other smaller groups are identified in terms of: high levels of family instability, geographic mobility, illness; by poor attendance, failure to complete assignments; by multiple instances of antisocial and even criminal conduct in and outside of school.

The typologies reported above describe groups of dropouts but provide no information on their pursuit of further education. We found only one typology that compares dropouts who eventually completed secondary school with those who did not (McDermott, Anderson, and Zaff 2018). After an extensive review of earlier research in the United States, McDermott and her colleagues asserted that 'risk' factors are not necessarily good predictors of early school withdrawal. Their effects are mitigated by single 'causes' that can trigger actions and decisions, as well as by multiple conditions and events that mitigate the effects of 'risk'. It follows, therefore, that once a student has withdrawn, other events and conditions could contribute to re-engagement in school. Citing Baldridge, Lamont, and Davis (2011), Iachini et al. (2013) and Boylan and Renzulli (2017), McDermott, Anderson, and Zaff (2018) asked whether, as a function of the variables defining their type or group, dropouts varied in the likelihood of their re-engagement. Given changes in those conditions or factors associated with their disengagement with school, they asked, would students be more likely to re-engage?

McDermott, Anderson, and Zaff (2018) used a procedure called Latent Class Analysis (described in the Methods section below) to identify three groups of dropouts.¹ Quiet Dropouts (58%) were those who enjoyed support from family, peers and teachers, with no push or pull factors; High Adversity students (3%) had support but suffered a variety

of push and pull factors; students in the Instability group (39%) faced poor social relationships, family economic or social difficulties and geographic mobility. The Instability group includes students most likely to suffer emotional disturbances that make compliance with school procedures and discipline difficult.

Among the three groups, High Adversity dropouts were most likely to have returned to some form of schooling. Persons in this group saw schooling as essential in order to overcome current problems and ensure a better future. The encouragement of other persons was important for the decision to remain.

Members of the Quiet or Instability groups, who apparently received less encouragement, were significantly less likely to seek any form of further education. Among those that did, the Quiet members were most likely to re-enrol in a school, while the Instability dropouts were more likely to take a certification examination. The Quiet people who re-engaged were more likely to state they did so because they needed more education or training to get a good job. Their Instability counterparts who went back to school were more likely to report that they had been encouraged by someone to do so, usually someone outside their family. The McDermott study did not, however, provide any details about what the dropouts experienced in a recovery school.

None of the typology studies to date have assessed the engagement of the different groups of dropouts in dropout recovery schools. Our review of previous research suggested the following hypotheses about how dropouts re-engage with education.

- (1) The students who enrol in the Second Opportunity Schools of Chile can be grouped into different groups using information about their prior academic achievement, current family responsibilities, employment, and aspirations for the future.
- (2) Student satisfaction with their Second Opportunity School varies according to their dropout group.
- (3) Student satisfaction with their Second Opportunity School varies according to the kinds of school activities in which they participate.
- (4) Student participation in activities has a larger effect on satisfaction than does membership in a particular group.

Research methods

Population and sample

The population for this study was all students enrolled in Second Opportunity schools in Chile in 2016, approximately 30,000 students. The sampling frame was constructed with technical assistance from the Ministry of Education, using 2016 statistical data. Opting for a total sample with a confidence level of at least 95 percent, we first selected several Centres from each region in relation to the region's total CEIA enrolment. This produced a total of 32 Schools.

During the months of November and December 2016 we contacted the schools requesting permission to survey their students. All schools cooperated. The research questionnaire was pilot tested for readability with students in a Second Opportunity school not included in the study. Discussions with participating students revealed no difficulties with the

instrument. Prior to administration of the questionnaire parents or guardians of the students signed a permission form provided by us. All students present on the day of administration were given the anonymous questionnaire by their teachers; there were no refusals to complete the instrument. The final sample included 2199 students.

The questionnaire included 25 questions, all but 3 of which were closed-ended with fixed alternative responses. The questions asked about gender, age, relationship with other persons in the household, education level of guardian, and ethnic identity; whether has children, has repeated one or more grades, is working at present; and what would most like to do/accomplish in the future. The second part of the questionnaire used Likert-style questions to evaluate the staff, the facilities, and the practices of the School attended. This was followed by questions about family support to continuing studying, relationships with classmates, and participation in activities organised by the School.

Description of the sample

Table 1 offers a brief description of the obtained sample. About 57 per cent of the sample are male. The students range in age from 14 to 21, which indicates that some students have remained in the school for at least three years (length of time in school was not asked). Most students are living with one or another parent, but only 34 per cent are living with both. By 2011 more than 60 per cent of children in Chile were born outside of marriage (Salinas 2011). We asked about mother's education as some researchers attribute more importance to the influence of the mother on school performance (Sirin 2005). About 47 per cent of mothers have completed secondary education, which is lower than the 57 per cent reported for mothers 25–54 in 2014 (OECD 2015). Note that some students claimed to have not repeated grades, that is, they withdrew prior to failure.

Table 1. Characteristics of students enrolling in second opportunity school, by gender.

	Male	Female	N	χ^2 p diff
Age in Years				
14	0.6	0.5	12	
15	4.9	4.1	100	
16	14.3	10.2	275	
17	26.2	26.2	576	
18	33.3	24.6	745	
19	9.2	11.3	222	
20	9.9	9.5	214	
21	1.7	3.6	5	
Number	1249	950	100.0%	0.011
Has Children-Yes	7.6%	23.1%	314	0.000
Lives with both parents	34.7%	33.3%	749	0.491
Guardian's Education = No Secondary	27.5%	35.9%	613	0.000
Original People-Yes	16.2%	16.9%	353	0.860
Repeated School-No	12.0%	18.8%	329	0.000
Now Working-Yes	28.4%	19.6%	541	0.000
Family Support- Very Good	61.5%	65.1%	1386	0.443
Hope for Future- Good job, earn money	36.7%	18.4%	633	0.000
Hope for Future- Higher Ed/Degree	37.2%	58.5%	1021	0.000

Variable construction

Factors operating prior to entering secondary opportunity school

We began our analysis using the questionnaire items listed in [Table 1](#). These describe levels of age, mother's education, ethnic group, who student lives with, family support for studying, employment situation, whether student repeated school, and long-term goals. We have compared answers according to students' gender as suggested by international research on gender differences in school performance (Legewie and DiPrete 2012)

Females students are slightly older than male students. One possible explanation is that some young women interrupted their studies during pregnancy; about 23 per cent of women have had one or more child. More women than man dropped out without having failed a grade, some because of their pregnancies. Women are more likely to come from families with less well-educated parents or guardians but note that they more frequently have higher educational aspirations than do the men. They are less likely to be employed, and more motivated to better their life chances through education.

Dropout classification

The research cited above supports the assumption that dropouts can be grouped according to the factors that contributed to their early withdrawal from school. We used the statistical procedure Latent Class Analysis (Vermunt and Magidson 2016) to identify groups on the basis of their similarity of responses to questionnaire items. This procedure is different from factor analysis, which looks for groups of variables. The Latent Class technique has been used in research in medicine, engineering, manufacturing and the social sciences (Collins and Lanza 2009; Palardy and Vermunt 2010; Vermunt 2010; Kongsted and Nielsen 2017). In education it has helped to distinguish types of dropouts (Lawson and Lawson 2013; Denson and Ing 2014).

For purposes of classification we relied on Latent Gold 5.1. The software presents a range of criteria for the selection among models of different groups. We began the analysis using the 10 variables listed in [Table 1](#). A first step is to eliminate variables that are not independent of others. Their inclusion make interpretation more difficult (Nylund-Gibson and Masyn 2016).

The software generated a series of models that included from 2 to 10 groups of students. We examined each model removing variables with bivariate residuals larger than 2.0. Previous studies have recommended three criteria to assess reliability and coherence: the BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion), classification error, and entropy (R^2) (Schreiber et al. 2006). The criteria were used to identify the best-fit model; we chose to work with a model of 4 groups.

The result is shown in [Table 2](#), which presents for each group the proportion of the sample scoring in a given category. Other variables (not included in the final model) are linked with class membership in [Table 3](#). The table lists the proportion of each group who chose a value of the covariate.

Student satisfaction with their school

We asked the students to evaluate their Second Opportunity school. The questions covered the physical facilities (classrooms, labs), the director, the professors and other professionals

Table 2. Latent class analysis: Distribution of sample across variables defining groups (Indicators are dummy variables. Cell entries are % of group scored as 1).

	Group				Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4		
Per Cent of Total Indicators	56.0	19.3	15.3	9.4		
RepeatedSchool	87.8	94.2	77.1	62.9	85.0	.36
Has Children	3.9	1.0	28.5	80.5	14.3	.35
Now Working	23.2	11.2	41.2	33.5	24.6	.43
GoodJob/Money	0	89.8	74.8	0	28.8	.50
HigherEd/Degree	68.6	0	0	85.0	46.4	.45

Table 3. Comparison of groups on covariates.

	Group				Total	Difference	
	1	2	3	4			
Per Cent Female	44.3	26.1	38.0	79.5	43.2	$\chi^2 = 153.3$	$p < .000$
Average Age in Years	17.6	17.4	17.9	18.6	17.7	$F = 39.6$	$p < .000$
Percent Parents Who Did Not Complete Secondary	28.6	32.5	35.8	38.8	31.1	$\chi^2 = 17.7$	$p = .007$
Per Cent Original People (Indigenous)	14.5	16.3	18.0	23.7	16.1	$\chi^2 = 11.4$	$p = .010$
Not Living with Either Parent	16.8	15.3	29.6	41.1	20.3	$\chi^2 = 81.8$	$p < .000$
N	1326	379	284	190	2179		

and support staff, and the operating practices (schedule, content, level of work, methods of evaluation). A five-point rating scale was used for each item, ranging from 'Very good' to 'Very bad'. A small percentage (less than 2%) of students did not answer one or more of the items. We assigned a value of 3 (Neither good nor bad) to each of the missing values. We interpret good evaluations as satisfaction, and as a proxy for engagement.

The average ratings were relatively high (above 3.6), with classrooms and laboratories receiving the lowest ratings (3.66 and 3.69), and professors and aides, relationships with professors and hours of class receiving the highest ratings (4.01, 4.01 and 4.26).

A principal components analysis yielded one component with significant loadings (above 0.500) that explained 42 per cent of the common variance, and another that explained 8 per cent of variance, with only one item – rating of Other Professionals (social worker, psychologists) above 0.500. We then carried out an oblique factor analysis (SPSS Direct Oblimin) that split the principal component (Overall Satisfaction) into two factors, one that included the 7 items that describe instructional practices (Process Satisfaction), the other loaded on the 4 items that referring to categories of staff (People Satisfaction). The two factors are correlated 0.646. The two scales are moderately reliable as indicated by Alpha coefficients of 0.864 for the Process scale and 0.746 for the People scale.

Student participation in school activities

The questionnaire included two questions that referred to School activities in which students could participate. Table 4 presents the distribution of student responses to the two questions.

SPSS Standard 22 linear mixed model analysis (similar to a hierarchical linear model) was used to estimate the relative impact on satisfaction of school-level variables as compared to student-level variables.

Table 4. School activities in which students participate.

What does School do so students will not abandon their studies?	N*	%
Help with family problems	636	28.9
Help students with low grades	600	27.3
Talk with students' guardians	290	13.2
Help students who have bad conduct	235	10.7
Doesn't do anything	253	11.5
Activities in Which Student Participated During Year	N**	
Sports and Recreation	520	23.6
Workshops on psychological and social issues	268	12.2
Arts and crafts workshops	243	11.1
Workshops to learn a trade or skill	190	8.6
Other workshops	134	6.1
Only goes to class	1315	59.8

*Not all students answered **Question permitted multiple responses

Results

Slightly more than half of the sample is included in the first Group (Table 2). Most students in this group repeated school and do not have children. About half are not currently working. More than two-thirds chose studying in higher education or getting a technical or professional degree as the future options they would most like. As Table 2 shows, they fall slightly below the sample average of response on each of the covariates. They are like the Quiet or Uninterested in School dropouts found in other studies. The variables offer little indication as to why this group of students dropped out of school.

The second Group, which includes 19 per cent of the students, is similar except that these students opt for getting a job and earning money. Note that they have the highest percentage of repeaters and are lowest in the proportion now working. They are more frequently male and living with one or both parents. They overwhelmingly indicate that getting a good job or earning money would please them more than progress in their schooling. Perhaps these students have a low desire to spend much more time in school because of previous academic failure. For convenience we label them the Disaffected from School Group.

Group 3, slightly smaller in number, includes a sizeable minority who have not repeated grades but left their regular school either because they were pushed out for bad conduct (we do not have that information) or because they were bored or disillusioned with school, or perhaps because an attractive employment beckoned them. More likely they were 'pulled' out of school. Almost two-thirds of them are male; about half the males have children (while two-thirds of the women in this group have children). A higher proportion than in Groups 1 and 2 are working; men (and women too) with children are twice as likely to be working than those students who have no children. They are more likely to not be living with one or both parents (some are housed with grandparents or aunts or uncles). They would be most pleased to secure stable employment that pays well. This group appears to have accepted their situation; we could refer to them as the Facing Up group (Table 3).

Group 4 includes a high proportion of women (and some men) who left school not necessarily because of poor academic performance, but because of having children. Despite their difficult situation (living away from their family, having to work) this

group aspires to more education. Most come from less educated families, and they include the largest percentage of indigenous students. Yet, they aspire to go on to post-secondary education and to earn a technical or professional degree (Table 3). We will refer to them as the Seeking a Better Option Group. The analysis does not indicate why these students seek higher education while those in Group 3 seek employment.

The groups differ in terms of their level of Satisfaction with the school's programme. Table 5 presents the average Satisfaction score for each group, and the significance, p , of the difference between that average and the average for all students. Group 4 is the most satisfied, followed by Group 1. In addition, there are differences between some of the groups in terms of what aspect of the School is most satisfying. The average scores of Groups 2 and 3 are lower, and almost identical to each other. Students in Group 1 score higher on People Satisfaction, while those in Group 4 score higher on Process Satisfaction (Table 5).

These differences are, however, not large; the results in Table 5 would suggest that Group membership does not have a large effect on either Process or People Satisfaction in general. This is misleading. The relationship between Group and Satisfaction is mediated by other variables.

One of these variables is School. Across the 32 Schools, Average Process Satisfaction scores ranged between 4.40 and 3.63, and those for People Satisfaction between 4.35 and 3.63. Both of these differences are highly significant ($p < .000$). The difference between Schools in average Satisfaction levels may be the result of variations in the mix of students from different Groups. For example, 44.7 per cent of the students are included in Group 1 in one School but in another School, they are 76.3 per cent. A similar range of differences in member presence occurs for the other three groups as well. Using SPSS linear mixed model analysis, we estimated that School membership accounts for about 10 per cent of total variance in Satisfaction scores. The remainder is accounted for by individual variables.

Subtracting out the influence of the School variable, there is a significant relationship between Group membership and each measure of Satisfaction ($p = .003$ and $.004$ respectively). In effect, there is an interaction between Schools and Groups with respect to Satisfaction.

We assessed whether variations in Satisfaction scores by Group are a function of how members of each Group react to different aspects of their School. In other words, is the effect of a particular characteristic of a School moderated by the Group membership of students? We look first at differences in Satisfaction of students attending different times of day.

There is no relationship between student age and preference for session. For the entire sample, independent of which group to which they belong, students are more satisfied with the afternoon session. There are, however, significant differences in Satisfaction

Table 5. Process and People Satisfaction Scores by Group, Mean Score and Significance of Difference from Total Sample.

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4	
	Mean	p Diff	Mean	p Diff	Mean	p Diff	Mean	p Diff
Process Engagement	3.97	.485	3.91	-.100	3.91	-.093	3.95	.002
People Engagement	3.93	.012	3.82	-.005	3.84	-.068	4.10	.107

scores for the Schools with respect to session. Scores are significantly higher for the morning session in some Schools, in the afternoon for others, and the evening for others. Each of the three factors – School, session, Group – is correlated with Satisfaction scores.

A second characteristic of Schools as experienced by students is the degree of social cohesion among students. As reported above, students overall vary in the extent to which they enjoy good relationships with their classmates, but this does not vary across groups. Social cohesion does, however, vary significantly across Schools. Students are much happier with each other in some Schools as compared to others. In turn, scores on both Satisfaction scales are significantly higher for students who state that they enjoy good relationships with their classmates. The two variables, School and relationships, each have a significant impact on Satisfaction scores.

Another characteristic of Schools is the extent to which they are seen by students as providing help for various kinds of problems. The Schools do not differ with respect to the frequency they are seen as providing help with Family Problems. They are, however, highly significantly different ($p < .000$) with respect to providing help for students with low grades. They differ slightly ($p = .050$) with respect to help with Bad Conduct or talking with guardians.

Students who report that their School provides help with Family Problems are more likely to have significantly higher Satisfaction scores. Those who report help with low grades have slightly higher Satisfaction scores. There are no differences with respect to talking with guardians and help with bad conduct and Satisfaction. Considering together both School and type of help provided, only School has an impact on Satisfaction scores.

Schools vary significantly in the kinds of activities they offer students. Some of these affect Satisfaction scores. Participation in sports and recreational activities is highly related to People Satisfaction scores, moderately related to Process Satisfaction. Participation in psychological and social relation workshops is related only to People Satisfaction, but students who participate in work-related workshops have higher Process scores. There are no differences in Satisfaction scores between students who do or do not participate in Artistic workshops.

Group membership is not linked with participation in activities, except that Group 4 students are slightly less likely to participate in psychological and social relations workshops. Using a mixed level model (similar to a hierarchical linear model), we can estimate that School membership accounts for about 10 per cent of total variance in satisfaction scores. The remainder is accounted for by individuals.

Discussion

At present, most students in Second Opportunity schools are highly satisfied with their School experience. Physical facilities get a low but still positive rating; personnel get higher praise. The differences in scores of facilities and personnel are not large but achieve statistical significance given the very large sample.

From one perspective, the very high level of Satisfaction found in this study might be cause for surprise, given reports from the United States that most high school students report being bored often in school (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004; Fredricks and McColskey 2012). Boredom results when students are not satisfied with what they are doing (Eastwood et al. 2012). Boredom is often cited as a prime factor in dropping out

(Rumberger 2011). Does the high level of satisfaction of these Second Opportunity students suggest that they find their new educational experience of much greater interest than their previous school?

Unfortunately, the skewed distribution of their scores makes it difficult to isolate the specific factors that they find so satisfying. All of 13 different aspects of the programme received positive ratings. It may be that the survey came too early in the school year for them to have experienced failure, fatigue, or boredom.

Although the dropout students are relatively homogeneous in their rating of their Schools, they are a highly diverse group, almost as heterogeneous as the total population of high school students. As seen in Tables 3 and 4, they differ on a number of dimensions. Several of these differences are related to their level of satisfaction. The Process scale yields a larger number of significant differences than does the People scale, probably because scores on the Process scale are less highly skewed. Alternatively, the differences may be the result of greater coherence in the People scale.

Students score higher on the Process scale if they are female, do not live with both parents, have mothers or guardians with lower educational attainment, and are more likely to have children. Scores on the People scale, on the other hand are unrelated to any of the background variables other than gender; female students have more positive attitudes about School staff than do boys. The implications of these findings for strategies to keep students in the School are not clear.

Perhaps more informative are the relationships between what we have called participation variables and satisfaction (Table 5). The most satisfied students are those who see the School as a means to advance academically, rather than to acquire work-related skills or earn more money. The most satisfied are those who are supported by their families, and those who enjoy good relationships with their classmates. Students enrolled in the morning session are less satisfied than those in afternoon or evening sessions – but not because of the mix of teenage and adult students.

Classification of the students based on some of their characteristics strengthens the argument that dropouts are a diverse group (Table 2). Group 1, the most populated, is a group in which more than half the students had no special characteristics that might account for their dropout status. They are close to the average in terms of repeating, few have children, about one-fifth are working but not full-time. They are average in age (in the larger group), come from slightly better-educated families, are less likely than others to belong to an Original People and are more likely to be living with a parent. This information provides no hints as to how best to ensure that this group will complete their high school education.

The variables defining Group 2 suggest that these students had academic troubles in school (almost all repeated, some more than once), not necessarily because they were distracted by a sexual relationship or employment, but perhaps because of low ability or behavioural problems. They are more likely to be male, younger, and to be living with their parents. Of the four groups these students appear to be those most likely to have difficulty with academic studies and to require special assistance.

Group 3 students, on the other hand, repeated less but were more engaged outside of school, with a family and employment. This group also is primarily male, less likely than those in Group 2 to be living with either parent. Whatever explains their dropping out, they are not highly motivated to pursue higher education. They define their future in terms of employment and income.

Group 4 is primarily female. Most of these students have children and therefore perhaps are necessarily employed. The women, as distinct from the men, define their future in terms of further education. On average they are the oldest in the sample, from less-educated families and more often members of an Original People. They are the least likely to be living with a parent, perhaps because they are parents. Perhaps because of their age, perhaps because of the seriousness of their situation, they are the most firmly committed to graduating from high school and obtaining a more advanced degree.

Students classified in Groups 4 and 1 feel they are well-served by current School practices. Students in Groups 2 and 3, on the other hand, are significantly less satisfied. We are not clear as to why. All groups give higher scores to the Process elements of the School programme. The difference is largest for Group 4, although members of this Group give higher Overall ratings to their School. The implication is that relationships with staff members are relatively less important for satisfaction than are the students' experience of learning.

Ratings of satisfaction vary widely across Schools, both for all students and within groups. The Schools vary widely in the mix of different kinds of students, but all Schools use the same curriculum for students under 18 and those who are older. No doubt teachers and other staff vary in their practices in the classroom and elsewhere in the School, but there is no information available on how this is decided. There may be differences between the sessions in the qualifications and practices of staff. Staff skill in achieving a positive social climate clearly is important for maintaining student satisfaction. Among the non-academic practices are those that help students to resolve or work through problems outside the School. Attention to family problems is more critical than academic assistance.

Schools do have a differential impact on students through the kinds of activities (other than classroom) in which the students participate. Sports, recreational activities and psychological workshops raise levels of People satisfaction, work-related workshops are linked with higher Process satisfaction scores. We can hypothesise that matching students with activities based on their classification could increase overall satisfaction scores.

Conclusion

The findings have several implications for policy affecting the objectives and operation of the Second Opportunity Schools, nationally and locally. Our results are consistent with those of other studies (Janosz et al. 2000; McDermott, Anderson, and Zaff 2018) which have demonstrated that a variety of factors contribute to a student's decision to withdraw from school before graduation. Long-standing conditions and characteristics affect predispositions, but decisions can be precipitated by immediate events. Attention to immediate events in students' lives is, therefore, most important to reduce the likelihood of withdrawal before it occurs. By the time a student has enrolled in an alternative such as a Second Opportunity School, the precipitating factors may well have diminished in significance. Retention in the School now depends on what is experienced there.

As noted in the review of previous research, classification of students can help to identify those students most likely to persist in a recovery programme and eventually graduate. The research did not, however, identify the specific elements of a second

opportunity programme that most contribute to persistence. Many kinds of programmes have been mounted, in several countries, but to date we lack systematic, and especially experimental, research on which policies and practices are most effective with each of the various kinds of students who have withdrawn from schools.

The results of this study improve our understanding only slightly, but they offer encouragement that it is possible to observe the differential impact of a school's policies and practices on dropouts who have been sorted into different categories. Using relatively limited, and low-cost information and applying available statistical procedures, it is possible to sort (about half of) dropouts into groups that respond in unique ways to distinct educational practices. By careful classification of what Schools provide their students, and identification of by whom they are received, we will over time learn how to increase the effectiveness of recovery education.

At the same time, if we are successful in matching educational practices and content to individuals (or kinds of individuals), we will learn how to improve the larger educational system as well. The understory in this article, as well as in previous research on alternative education, is that despite diversity, most students are educable. Failure is not primarily a result of the inability of some students to learn, but of schools to be relevant in students' lives. The success of alternative schools such as the Second Opportunity Schools will provide powerful evidence of how schools can become places in which all youth learn.

Note

1. We prefer to use the term 'group' rather than 'class' to avoid confusion with 'social class'.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica [Fondecyt Project N°1161433].

Notes on contributors

Oscar Espinoza, Ed.D. in Policy, Planning and Evaluation in Education, University of Pittsburgh. He is researcher at the Facultad de Educación y Humanidades, Universidad de Tarapacá and researcher at the Instituto Interuniversitario de Investigación Educativa (IESED). His main research areas are higher education, youth and development, equity and quality assurance.

Luis Eduardo González, Ed.D. in Educational Administration and Planning, Harvard University. He is researcher at the Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación (PIIE). His main research areas are higher education, youth and development, and quality assurance.

Noel McGinn, PhD. in Social Psychology, University of Michigan. He is emeritus Professor, Harvard University, School of Education. His main research areas are higher education, social justice and equity, educational planning.

Dante Castillo, sociologist, Universidad Arcis. He is researcher at the Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación (PIIE). His main research areas are dropout prevention, migration and re-education.

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