



## Second opportunity centers in Chile: Are their teachers effective?

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**Abstract** The objective of this exploratory study is to determine whether teachers in the national system of Second Opportunity Centers of Chile have characteristics similar to those of effective teachers in similar schools in other countries. A nationally representative sample of teachers in 40 centers completed a self-administered questionnaire describing their background, training, teaching, and assessment strategies. Answers were compared with reports of effective schools for dropouts in other countries. Second Opportunity teachers in Chile appear to have characteristics and use practices much like those reported for teachers in effective schools elsewhere. More definitive statements await direct observation of teaching practices and information about students. The success of alternative schooling for dropouts varies directly with its differentiation to match the student population it serves. To improve effectiveness, future research must generate close-up, fine-grained data describing individual characteristics, teaching practices, and specific student reactions and outcomes.

**Keywords** Chile · Dropouts · Alternative education · Instructional methods · Teacher training · Dropout re-engagement

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Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica (CONICYT), through FONDECYT Project No. 1161433, financed the research reported here. The authors are solely responsible for the contents of this article.

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The expansion and improvement of education in Chile began in 1990 with the return to a democratic government. With more educated persons seeking work, those without a high school diploma were severely disadvantaged. Prior to 2014, the only one way for “drop-outs” (persons 15 years or older without a high school diploma who were not currently in school) to obtain a high school diploma was by attending a public Center for Integrated Adult Education (CEIA). These Centers were one of the 3 kinds of institutions (a second serves prisoners, and the third offers flexible, non-diploma granting, courses) run by the National Coordination of Education of Youth and Adults (EPJA), a division of the Ministry of Education. Most CEIA students were working adults and attended night classes; there were few adolescent dropouts enrolled (Espinoza et al. 2014).

In order to attract and better serve adolescent dropouts, in 2014 the Ministry of Education established a system of Centers of Second Opportunity (Escobar et al. 2016). Open to out-of-school youth 14–18 years of age, they provide instruction at the basic (grades 1–8) and secondary levels (grades 9–12) in separate morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. The programs are intensive, and progress is accelerated; students can in one calendar year complete two grades of secondary school. The centers prepare students for entrance into the university as well as for immediate employment.

There currently are 452 centers, which, in total, enroll about 30,000 students, most of whom are younger than 18 years of age. They serve between 25 and 30% of the total dropout population. To date, no one has published data on the completion rate of the various centers, nor is there information about the reengagement of students in regular basic and secondary schools (Espinoza et al. 2016).

We base this article on a descriptive study of characteristics of current teachers. Almost all the teachers had prior teaching experience in a regular primary or secondary school, or in adult education programs; very few were recent graduates of teacher training programs. About half the teachers volunteered to teach in the new centers; the others were recruited. To date there has been no systematic assessment of teaching practices of these teachers; no research has yet been done to assess their effectiveness in terms of student learning outcomes. This study is a first step in identifying characteristics of teachers that might contribute to the schools’ effectiveness.

To that end, we first review published research on the effectiveness of schools for dropouts. We ask, what teacher characteristics and school practices have educators and researchers identified that contribute to dropout students’ staying in school until graduation? This information may be helpful in choosing teachers and practices for the new centers in Chile.

## Review of research on teachers and teaching in schools for dropouts

The Second Opportunity centers of Chile are one of a variety of schools known as “alternative” because they deviate, in structure and operation—though not necessarily in curriculum content—from other publicly regulated, or “conventional”, schools (Espinoza et al. 2019a). Schools that are alternative to the “regular” schools of the national system have been classified in several ways. An early review of alternative education in the United States distinguished between “innovative schools” (seen as offering an education of higher quality than that in the conventional systems); last-chance correctional programs (intended to change the behavior of delinquents and miscreants, and largely ineffective); and schools designed for those needing some form of academic remediation (Raywid 1994). This early

assessment concluded that while alternative programs could improve students' behavior and academic achievement, the programs were expensive to operate, and behavioral changes were not permanent.

By 2005, public alternative schools were offered in all 50 states of the United States, most attached to a school district. These schools were not specifically for dropouts but rather to keep in school those "students with multiple needs who are not successful in traditional schools" (Lehr et al. 2009, p. 19). Students diagnosed as "at risk" for academic failure or early withdrawal or expulsion were grouped in two categories: those with physical or intellectual difficulties (no more than 20% of enrolment of alternative programs), and those with a history of substance abuse, violent behavior in school, suicide attempts, pregnancy, abuse within their family, and other "high risk" indicators (Lehr et al. 2009).

The Australian response to "at risk" (or disadvantaged) youth has taken the form of "flexible learning programs". Even when housed within regular schools, these programs and the schools in which they are offered explicitly reject conventional curriculum and teaching practices (Mills and McGregor 2010). In addition to sometimes appearing in regular schools, they are established by TAFE (Technical and Further Education), a national agency; as well as on a stand-alone basis (Te Riele 2014). The stand-alone schools are closest to the US public alternative school and to the Second Opportunity centers of Chile, except that a much larger percentage of them are nongovernmental and therefore more diverse than those in the US or Chile.

In recent years, the European Community has begun to provide education to youth who leave school before completion of an upper secondary-level program. Beginning in 1996, 11 member countries established "second chance" schools. These accept pupils up to 25 years of age who are not subject to compulsory school attendance laws (Directorate-General for Education and Culture 2001). Given the age of their students, these programs provide technical training for employment (Salva-Mut et al. 2016; WP-2 Research 2016) as well as academic skills (Jimoyiannis and Gravani 2011).

In Africa, Zambia has created Second Opportunity schools to provide girls or young mothers an opportunity to complete their secondary education (Wedekind and Milingo 2015). Second Opportunity (or chance) centers are not unknown in Latin America but most, following the European model, are organized to provide school and vocational training to youth 18 years of age and older (Corchuelo et al. 2016; Eroles and Hirmas 2009; Salva-Mut et al. 2016).

## Studies of alternative provision of schooling

Supporters of state-sponsored alternative schooling claim high rates of retention and graduation rates from alternative schools (Brown and Kraemer 2006). Critics note that rates are no higher—and in most cases are lower—than those found in conventional schools, including the schools from which the students dropped out. The alternative schools are more expensive, as class sizes are small, raising per-pupil costs of teaching and infrastructure. Studies vary in their estimates of completion rates (Freeman et al. 2015; McFarland et al. 2018).

One of the earliest reviews of research compared 3 systems of alternative schools (Quinn et al. 2007). One system served 84 students referred by 40 different schools. All the students, identified as being at "high risk" for failure, were on Individual Education Programs (IEPs); a local university operated the program. Another program, which a private mental health agency ran, served "troubled and troubling" students (ages 5–18)

with mental and emotional problems, providing psychological and family counseling and other services in 9 day centers. A county Alternative Education Division ran the third program, which the Western Association of Universities (USA) accredited, certifying that its programs were of high quality. This last program, similar in population to the one that the Second Opportunity centers of Chile serves, is regarded by the Western Association of Universities as highly successful.

The report concluded with a list of essential components of a successful alternative program:

1. The program's philosophy emphasizes that the problem (of early withdrawal or school failure) is to be met by changing the program rather than the student; all students can learn.
2. Teachers should be able to give direct attention to each student, therefore low student/teacher ratios are essential.
3. Teachers must have special training in classroom and behavior management, learning styles, and communication with parents.
4. Relationships between teachers and students should be nonauthoritarian, based on trust, mutual care, and respect (Quinn et al. 2007, p. 47).

The report did not list "best practices" or similar recommendations for pedagogical skills.

Citing research that claims that early school leaving is primarily a consequence of "structural and procedural flaws in educational systems", O'Gorman and her colleagues studied how students in alternative schools perceive their prior and current education (O'Gorman et al. 2015). The 24 published studies they included (most from the US, 2 each from Canada and the UK) generated the following conclusions: Alternative schools that, according to students, provided a sanctuary and a place that accepted them as they are resulted in student identification with, or engagement in, the school (McGee and Lin 2017). Students felt protected from physical or psychological bullying and harassment by teachers. They felt they were members of a community, even though their personal idiosyncrasies or identities were acknowledged. The students concluded that the school was interested in helping them to set and achieve their own goals.

A dropout's return to some form of education, and consequent completion of secondary school, is more likely if alternative schooling is easily accessible. Australia has a relatively high rate of early withdrawal from regular school (23%), but, thanks to a variety of second-chance options, 82% of dropouts in 2003 returned to school within 5 years. In comparison, about only 30% of dropouts in Europe returned to some form of schooling (Polidano et al. 2012). A longitudinal study of three Australian cohorts suggested that most dropouts (65%) will return within 1 year of withdrawal but are less likely to do so with each successive year. The most effective alternative programs in Australia were those that encouraged students to develop adult career plans and provided training to support them. The research considered programs that emphasized improvement of academic outcomes, such as numeracy and literacy, to be less effective than those that emphasized preparation for immediate employment (Polidano et al. 2012).

A "snapshot" study in the United Kingdom, of 17 sites that provide alternative education, confirmed the Australian recommendations (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014). The best alternative education

is relevant and connected to young people's experiences, needs, aspirations and interests; has clear goals tailored to each individual; combines experiential learning with opportunities to catch up and accelerate learning; builds knowledge, skills and habits of mind; offers challenging tasks with real world applications; and uses feedback and authentic forms of assessment to build belief in the capacity to learn. There is flexibility, choice and routine; adult learning principles are used rather than didactic instructional methods. Students' learning is carefully monitored and progress is celebrated (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014, p. 23).

Like most other studies, however, the authors based their conclusions primarily on short observations (1–3 days) and testimonies of teachers and administrators in the schools studied. They offered limited descriptions of teaching practices: teachers should provide students with immediate feedback and adjust their lessons according to their progress; and they should take time to relax with students in informal settings.

The report stated that in the UK it is difficult to attract qualified teachers to alternative schools, which pay less and offer only short-term contracts. The researchers reported that, unlike good regular schools, the alternative teachers spent little time working with students on how to learn. The curriculum offered was an incomplete and less rigorous version of that provided in regular schools, lacking challenge for students (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014).

Another review of alternative schools in Australia emphasized Thomson and Pennacchia's insistence on the importance of teacher quality: that is, that alternative educators must provide a safe and supportive environment and simultaneously challenge "at-risk" students to meet the demands, and opportunities, offered in today's world. Otherwise, alternative schools will reproduce social and economic inequality (Plows 2017).

Plows reviewed an extensive literature that criticizes the tendency of mainstream education to train teachers as highly skilled technicians who can faithfully apply predetermined strategies and practices. In effect, mainstream education defines professionalism as conformity to prescribed practices rather than as the exercise of judgment in response to diverse conditions. She, in contrast, gives priority to professional learning, described as "critically reflective, sustained over time, collaborative, embedded in everyday practice, responsive to student needs and/or focused on student outcomes" (Plows 2017, p. 74). Collaboration with other teachers, as well as attention to student reactions, facilitates this learning process.

Plows based her own research on a 2014 survey of teachers in 26 flexible learning programs in Victoria, Australia. More than 70% of the 103 teachers interviewed had had some form of training in the immediately preceding 12 months. The teachers found most helpful cross-program workshops organized around issues common to 2 or more of these learning programs. Careful selection of courses, using information about presenters and other participants, increased their value to the teachers. Internal courses responded more closely to specific situations in their program, facilitated cooperative learning among the teachers, and reinforced a sense of community within the program. Plows (2017) noted, however, that these internal courses posed a risk of developing an "echo chamber" approach to practice by ignoring developments in mainstream education.

Interviews with 36 students in a "successful" school in Israel provides a different view of important characteristics of alternative teachers (Amitay and Rahav 2018). In this view, alternative schools are considered successful to the extent they retain (or engage) their students long enough for the latter to complete their education. The most important quality of teachers is, therefore, their ability to enhance students' attachment to the school and to

teach in ways that respond to all the factors that led to a student's early withdrawal from regular school.

Amitay and Rahav (2018) note that the interviewed students described engagement as a process that began with the welcome extended on their first day. Students were greeted with affection, accepted as they were, and made to feel they belonged. Teachers talked with students with interest and understanding and acceptance. They listened to students talk about their problems and, where appropriate, intervened in support of the student. They treated students as if they were beloved family members, doing favors for them and sharing gifts. Teachers also indicated that they had high levels of confidence in students' ability to learn, in effect setting high goals. As students' engagement in the school expanded, so too did their willingness and capacity to think about alternative futures, and to understand their role in shaping their future.

Student engagement in the school increased as a direct function of the combination of nurturing and stimulating activities. While teachers in the regular school established a distance between students and themselves, those in the alternative school reduced or eliminated that difference, enabling alienated youth to recognize themselves as belonging to a larger community. The authors concluded that less important than specific practices are "teacher attention to students' needs and resolute confidence in their abilities" (Amitay and Rahav 2018).

In a search for experimental-based intervention studies in the United States before 2014, Schwab and colleagues (2016) initially identified a total of 4310 studies on alternative education. Most of these were not empirically based, and most were correlational rather than experimental. The review provides no information on teachers' characteristics or qualifications that are associated with engagement and completion (Schwab et al. 2016).

In summary, similarly to the fact that no rigorous syntheses of dropout-prevention strategies exist to help identify the most successful features of such efforts, relatively little systematic and comprehensive research is extant on the operation and effectiveness of second-chance alternative schools (Chappell et al. 2015). We have found no studies based on representative samples of schools in a system, or studies that attempted to cover the range of alternative student populations and educational strategies. Most of the published studies are based on single cases. Most involve small numbers of students and teachers (in part because, in fact, most alternative schools have small populations). Most report qualitative data; few are based on systematic observation. Very few of the studies report on observations over a significant period; none involve systematic observation of the effect of different interventions, teaching practices, curricular content, or administrative practices.

What we know is that students abandon regular education for a variety of reasons, which we can use to identify distinct categories of "dropouts". Dropouts differ in intellectual ability, in emotional stability and personality, and in the family and community contexts in which they live (Dupéré et al. 2015; Espinoza et al. 2019b; Fortin et al. 2006; McDermott et al. 2018; Rumberger 2011). It is unreasonable to expect that there is a small, fixed set of instructional practices that will work with all out-of-school youth. As the research we reviewed above indicates, rather than a specific set of skills, teaching in an alternative setting requires a disposition to alter practices in response to individual students. The range of skills is large and best learned in actual practice.

This latter finding—of the importance of teachers learning through hands-on experience—is not unique to alternative education. There is ample evidence that, in regular schools as well as in alternative schools, teacher effectiveness improves significantly with years of experience (Kini and Podolsky 2016; Papay and Kraft 2015; Rice 2013). Effectiveness (measured as effect on student learning) may decline in the first year or two of

teaching, only to increase rapidly for about 5–7 years, levelling off at 15–20 years of experience. Over time, teachers learn additional instructional practices and increase their ability to determine which will be most effective with a given student in each situation. Willingness to learn would seem to be an important requirement for teachers working in an alternative setting.

What is available (and communicated by the studies described above) is a consistency of terms used to describe effective alternative schools; that is, schools that enable a significant proportion of their students to complete an academic cycle. In the analysis that follows, we attempt to identify characteristics and attitudes of Chilean teachers that appear to be consistent with what those terms describe.

## Methodology

The present study is descriptive and exploratory (nonexperimental), in the sense that it proposes to identify and characterize the background, training, teaching, and assessment strategies of teachers working at second-opportunity schools.

We used cluster sampling to select participants in this study. There currently are 452 Second Opportunity Centers (CEIA) located in the 15 regions of Chile. We chose a total of 40 centers, considering their proportion of total enrolment and geographic location. Using Ministry of Education data, we identified 1155 teachers in the 40 centers. We then employed simple random sampling to select 617 teachers altogether. The final sample has a 3.8% sampling error at a 95% level of confidence.

We tested a draft version of the questionnaire with teachers in a center not participating in the study and reviewed by two colleagues not members of the research team. In the months of December 2018 and January 2019, research staff visited each center to administer the final version of the questionnaire. Participants required about 45 min to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained 49 questions, presented in 7 major sections: demographic information of respondent; questions about work history and training; attitudinal questions and perception of students; ambitions with respect to work in CEIA; knowledge and opinion of official curriculum; teaching methods or strategies; and satisfaction with facilities of center, teaching materials, relationships with colleagues and students, and quality of teaching and learning in the center. We used Likert scales where appropriate. This study focuses only on questions related to characteristics, practices, and attitudes of the individual teachers.

We used SPSS Statistics 26 to analyze the data, applying factor analysis, analysis of variance, and nonparametric correlation procedures.

## Results

Of the 617 respondents, 309 identified themselves as male and 302 as female; 6 persons did not indicate their gender. The teachers ranged in age from 23 to 80; the average age was 47.1 years for men and 42.2 years for women.

About 25% of the teachers were younger than 33; and 25%, older than 55. Almost 91% of the men had a university degree (or title) in teaching, compared to almost 97% of the

women (significance of mean difference,  $p = .003$ ). Those with more years of teaching experience were more likely to have a teaching degree ( $p = .017$ ).

On average, men had been working as teachers almost 19 years; women, almost 14. About one-fourth had worked less than 5 years as teachers, while another fourth, more than 25. About half of the respondents, men and women alike, began teaching immediately or soon after finishing their academic preparation; that is, before age 27. (We lack information on the prior employment of those who took up teaching at an older age). Most of the teachers (81.5%) taught (one or more years) in a regular school before working in one of the EPJA institutions.

More than half of the teachers (60.6%) were on fixed-term contracts, 38% were on indefinite term (permanent) appointments, and only 6% were working for honoraria. Given their longer periods of service, men were more likely to have indefinite time appointments (44.6%), and women were more likely to have fixed-term contracts (67.1%). Men also were more likely than women (42.1–23.7%) to work in two or more schools. Some 23% of the teachers, at the time of the survey or in the past, had administrative responsibilities in an EPJA institution. Having held such a position was not, however, related either to the teacher's gender or type of contract.

### In-service training

In addition to their university preparation, the teachers had taken a variety of in-service training courses. There is a strong correlation between a teacher's number of years of service and his or her number of training courses taken ( $r = .318$ ). On average, teachers take one course every three years, usually beginning after five years of experience. Those most likely to have taken a course recently were those with fewer years of teaching experience.

The courses were provided by five different kinds of agencies: OTEC (organizations registered with the the National Center of Training and Employment [SENCE]) to provide technical training; technical training centers (CFT) and professional institutes (IP) associated with universities; the Center for Pedagogical Improvement, Experimentation, and Research of the Ministry of Education (CPEIP); universities; and a variety of independent agencies. Table 1 (below) lists the courses and the number of teachers sampled who reported having taken them. Half the teachers took courses offered by a university; the ministry's teacher training center (CPEIP) attracted another 20%; and about 15% took courses from various other sources.

We carried out a factor analysis with Varimax rotation to identify the combinations of courses that the teachers took. Table 2, below, presents the results of that analysis. The first factor, accounting for 24% of the common variance, included courses referring to planning and management. The second, accounting for 11% of common variance, included three courses linked to instruction: subject content, practices, and use of information technologies. The "Education in EPJA" category defined the third factor (these courses teach instructional practices for teaching young and adults with different academic content). Although teachers could take courses from more than one source, this was not common. Those taking CPEIP courses were less likely to have taken any other courses; the other courses were not associated with likelihood of taking or not taking more courses.

There were no differences between teachers in the three sessions with respect to number of courses in planning and management. Teachers who had administrative responsibilities were more likely to have taken courses in planning and management. They also were more likely to have fixed-term contracts. Men were more likely to take courses in instruction and



**Table 1** Distribution of training courses taken by agency offering course

Course	Agency					Total
	OTEC	CFT/IP	CPEIP	Universities	Others	
Education	18	4	58	85	29	194
Specialization in subject	5	6	47	135	38	231
Teaching practices	21	11	68	92	30	222
Information technologies	11	13	19	59	19	121
Special education	13	3	8	34	15	73
School climate	16	9	14	50	23	112
Educational or curricular plan	11	4	25	72	18	130
Evaluation strategies	13	6	29	82	19	149
Educational management	3	3	7	85	15	113
Technical specialty courses	2	8	7	15	5	37
Total of training courses	113	67	282	709	211	1382

**Table 2** Varimax rotation of participation in training courses

Course	Rotated component matrix <sup>a</sup>		
	Component		
	Planning and management	Instruction	EPJA
Education for EPJA			.629
Academic subject		.792	
Instructional practices		.585	
Information technologies		.508	
Special education	.409		
School climate	.446		.498
Curriculum planning	.704		
Assessment strategies	.676		
Technical specialties			-.561

<sup>a</sup>Extraction method: principal component analysis. For ease of interpretation, we do not include loadings below .400.

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

to teach in the evening session. For both genders, however, those who taught in the evening session had significantly more years of service (and were more likely to have a degree) than those who taught in the afternoon session; and those with least years of service taught in the morning session.

### Reasons for joining EPJA

We asked teachers to list the principal reasons why they had come to the EPJA; they could choose up to 6. The most common combination pointed to a service motive, such as “by vocation”, “in order to contribute to the development of youth and adults”, and “to improve

the quality of education". A second, less frequent, combination referred to better pay and working conditions. A small number (2%) claimed they were forced out of a regular teaching position. Men and women did not differ in their reasons for joining EPJA, nor were their reasons linked to having children of their own and were only marginally related to whether they had taught in a regular school.

Teachers who claimed a service motive tended to have taken more training courses than those who did not have that motive ( $r=0.130, p=.000$ ), but there is no difference in number of courses associated with level of interest in earnings or working hours. Teachers who took more training in teaching had higher scores on both motives (service and earnings) and working conditions ( $r=0.106, p=0.008; p=0.122, p=0.002$ ), respectively. There is, however, no association between the number of management and planning courses they had taken and either of the types of reasons offered for joining the EPJA.

Slightly more than one-third of the teachers financed their own participation in the courses; the CPEIP financed 17%; and the director/owner of a school in which they were teaching financed another 17%. We found no association between methods of finance and the kinds of courses taken.

*Knowledge and opinion of curriculum.* Referring to recent changes in policies of the Ministry of Education, the questionnaire asked: "How much knowledge do you have of what the current curriculum says about the education of youth and adults?" Teachers indicated their knowledge on a five-point scale ranging from "Nothing" to "A Great Deal". Table 3, below, indicates that more experienced teachers were slightly more likely to claim knowledge of the curriculum than those who had less teaching experience ( $p=0.001$ ). The difference is not large; there is considerable variation in knowledge of the curriculum by this group of teachers, with at least 27% indicating they knew only a little about it.

Also, the more training courses a teacher had taken, the more likely s/he would claim knowledge of the curriculum's contents ( $r=0.221, p<0.000$ ). But, if we correlate years of service with knowledge of curriculum taking number of training courses into account, the relationship goes to 0. In other words, familiarity with the formal curriculum depends principally on exposure to it in formal courses, not on learning about it through teaching. Curriculum knowledge is apparently gained more in university and CPEIP courses than in the classroom, as only the number of courses from those sources is associated with knowledge of the curriculum.

A second question listed five evaluative statements about the curriculum and asked teachers how much they agreed (using a 5-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"). The statements asked teachers to rate the pertinence of the contents for

**Table 3** Teachers' self-report of knowledge of current curriculum, by years of service

Amount knows	Years of service				N %
	1-3	4-7	8-15	> 15	
Nothing	3.6%	9.0%	12.3%	10.8%	50 8.3%
A little	24.4	22.3	20.2	6.9	116 19.2
Not little or much	31.6	24.7	27.2	27.7	169 28.0
Plenty	32.1	39.8	30.7	42.3	218 36.2
Much	8.3	4.2	9.6	12.3	50 8.3
N	193	166	114	130	603 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>14 teachers did not answer the question.

students' needs; whether the specified methodologies are dynamic and attractive to students; whether the curriculum is adequate given the students' ambitions; whether contents vary from youth and adults; and whether all the objectives can be covered.

Overall, the teachers were not enthusiastic about the curriculum; on average, they disagreed with all the positive statements about it. Applying Principal Components Analysis, we found that the responses formed a single factor explaining 66% of the common variance.

There was no linear relationship between years of experience and agreement with the statements; teachers with 4–7 years of experience were the least positive about the curriculum, but only with respect to the dynamism of methods and the likelihood of coverage of all objectives. Teachers with a degree were more critical than those without, but only with respect to the dynamism and attractiveness of the contents ( $p=0.002$ ). Which shift a teacher teaches was not related to their evaluation of the curriculum except with respect to the possibility of coverage: those in the morning shift were more confident that all material could be presented than were those teaching in the afternoon and evening sessions ( $p=0.04$ ).

*Activities used in instruction.* The questionnaire included two questions about nine teaching activities, listed in Table 4 (below). The relative frequency of use of these activities does not vary widely by which school level a participant taught. The activity that teachers used least frequently was dictation to students (45% of professors never used); the most common was group work (24% always used). The distribution suggests that most professors rely on a variety of activities, which vary over time and probably as a function of the material they are teaching.

Except for PowerPoint and blackboards, the more frequently used practices and activities involve relatively higher levels of student participation, in groups or working alone. It may be, of course, that teachers use PowerPoint presentations as the focus for class wide discussion. Blackboards can be used for group work, but most commonly involve individual students.

**Table 4** Use of teaching practices or activities never used, by teachers at different levels

Activity	% Stating never use practice			Median use <sup>a</sup>
	Basic (grades 5–8)	High school (grades 9–12)	Technical and professional (grades 9–12)	
Dictation	35.2	42.9	39.4	1.83
Blackboard	8.3	8.1	5.3	3.59
Group work	6.0	3.4	1.5	3.89
Field trips	40.3	42.5	44.7	1.88
Music videos	13.0	8.5	5.3	3.32
Teaching materials	6.0	6.1	3.8	3.70
Power point	6.0	6.1	3.8	3.37
Textbooks	17.6	16.6	23.5	3.14
Reading books	20.4	26.7	24.2	2.71
N <sup>b</sup>	216	445	132	617

<sup>a</sup>Scoring: never = 1, always = 5.

<sup>b</sup>Some teachers are assigned to more than one level.

The teachers had preferences as to what activities should be used together. A Principal Components factor analysis yielded three factors, explaining 65% of the total variance. We chose to do an oblique rotation of the factors assuming that they were not completely independent of each other. Below, Table 5 presents the pattern matrix loadings of the activities on the three factors. Factor 1, with heaviest loading on Music Videos, Power Point and Teaching Materials, might be called a “collaborative learning” strategy. The second factor points toward a strategy in which instruction is primarily “teacher-directed”. The third factor may represent an “individual study” approach.

Men and women did not differ in their varied combinations of teaching activities. Teachers with minor children at home were slightly more likely to use Individual Study activities than not, but did not differ in their use of Collaborative and Teacher-Directed learning. Whether the respondent previously taught in a regular secondary school was unrelated to the type of activities s/he used in the EPJA. Those with a teaching certificate used the same methods as those who did not have a certificate. Teachers with more years of service in the profession used Teacher-Directed activities more frequently than those with fewer years but did not differ in use of other combinations.

We see no significant difference in teachers’ frequency of use of Collaborative Learning and Individual Study activities in the three shifts (morning, afternoon, and evening). There is, however, a significant difference in the frequency with which teachers employed Teacher-Directed activities; these activities were more common in classes in the evening session than in the morning or afternoon. The evening session, it will be recalled, had a higher percentage of students older than 18 years of age.

Teachers who scored higher on the Service Motive factor for joining EPJA more frequently used Collaborative Learning Methods ( $r=0.131$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and Individual Study methods ( $r=0.152$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) than those whose principal motive was better earnings and hours of work. With more courses of any kind, teachers were more likely to use Collaborative Learning activities ( $r=0.137$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). The number of Teaching courses taken had a significant relationship with use of Collaborative Learning activities ( $r=0.127$ ,  $p=.002$ )

**Table 5** Pattern matrix loadings of teaching activities

Activity	Factor		
	Collaborative learning	Teacher directed	Individual study
Dictation		.718	
Blackboard		.788	
Group work	.473	.407	
Field trips	.496		
Music videos	.889		
Teaching materials	.796		
Power point	.824		
Text books			-.878
Reading books			-.876
% Variance explained	39.2	13.6	11.8

Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy .784.

Bartlett test of sphericity  $p<.000$ .

**Table 6** Frequency of use of four methods of evaluation of student performance

	Oral tests	Expositions	Participation in class	Projects in class
Mean	2.32	3.26	3.66	4.34
SD	1.027	.900	1.028	.732
% Always	2.1	7.8	21.4	45.1
N	560	574	572	584

Scale (1 = never, 5 = always).

**Table 7** Correlations between report use of types of instructional activities and methods of evaluation of students

Instructional activities	Methods of evaluation			
	Oral tests	Expositions	Participation in class	Projects in class
Collaborative learning	.089*	.340**	.128**	.177**
Teacher-centered	.235**	.245**	.087*	.015
Individual study	.049	.052	.068	.182**

\* $p=0.05$ ; \*\* $p=0.01$ .

but was unrelated to frequency of use of the other activities. On the other hand, the number of Management courses taken had a small but significant correlation with frequency of use of each category of activity ( $r=0.097, 0.088, 0.093$ ;  $p=.05$ ).

Teachers' level of use of instructional activities varied according to the source of training teachers received. With more EPJA courses, teachers made *less* use of Individual Study activities ( $r=-0.106, p=0.008$ ). Those taking more OTEC courses made more use of Collaborative Learning activities ( $r=0.136, p=0.001$ ), and those taking courses offered by universities had higher levels of use for two categories—Collaborative Learning and Teacher Centered ( $r=0.087, p=0.030$ ;  $r=0.082, p=0.082$ )—but lower levels of use of Individual Study activities ( $r=-0.135, p=0.001$ ). The number of courses a teacher took in CFT, CPEIP, and others had no association with the level of different activities that teacher used in instruction.

*Methods used to evaluate students.* We also asked participants which methods of evaluation they used most frequently in assessing students' learning, and registered their frequency of use on a 5-point Likert scale. Table 6, below, reports the mean and standard deviations for four methods of evaluation. Teachers were least likely to use oral examinations (some 26% said they never give oral exams), and most likely to observe and assess students' work in class on specific projects.

There is no association between the teachers' methods of evaluation and their years of service, prior teaching in a regular school, reason for joining an EPJA, number of training courses taken, or the type of courses they took. We found a very small correlation between using student expositions in class for evaluation, and gender (females used more often,  $p=0.042$ ).

The only variables that have any strong relationship with use of evaluation methods are those describing the frequency of different instructional activities (Table 7, below, exhibits the correlations between the two). Teachers who more frequently organized activities

involving music videos, PowerPoint presentations, and instructional materials relied more on assessment of presentations made in class, probably by groups of students, but also used all other methods of evaluation. Teachers who more frequently used dictation or black-board presentations were more likely to assess their students based on presentations and teacher-directed oral examinations. Teachers who assigned reading more frequently were more likely to assess their students' progress through the latter's group projects.

## Discussion

The EPJA has successfully attracted a diverse group of teachers, who vary in gender, age, and years of teaching experience. These include teachers with extensive experience in regular schools as well as those who have taught almost exclusively in adult education programs. They include relative newcomers and "old timers" who, in their long years of service, "have seen everything".

These teachers are nearly unanimous in stating that they chose and prefer to teach in EPJA rather than in regular schools. Some explain their enthusiasm in reference to salaries and working conditions; others, to a better opportunity to serve youth and society. The latter find satisfaction in working principally with younger students in the centers; those who appreciate higher salaries are more likely to teach in the sessions that include older students and young adults. In other words, the organization of the centers matches a diverse set of motives for teaching as a career.

A majority of the teachers have taken professional development courses. About one-third of the courses offered to them dealt with curriculum content and teaching practices, but most of the courses covered fundamental aspects of teaching. Course-taking begins soon after a teacher joins the EPJA and continues over the life of a teacher's service, indicating teachers' commitment to continuous improvement. The teachers appear to have selected training courses based on their individual perceptions of what new skills and knowledge they require. Both knowledge of the formal curriculum, and the number of courses taken, increase with years of teaching.

Most teachers were fairly critical of the national secondary curriculum, preferring a greater adjustment of content, pace, and sequence to the interests of individual students (Kuh et al. 2006; Lawson and Lawson 2013; OECD 2013). Differentiated instruction is especially important to reengage students who are likely to be disillusioned with regular education programs (Tomlinson and Imbeau 2010). Teachers in the Second Opportunity Centers appear to endorse the concept of offering a "flexible learning program", relevant to each and all students. Their learning how to teach is influenced more by direct experience and observation and sharing with colleagues than by formal instruction (Plows 2017).

All the above portrays a corps of teachers who appear disposed to provide an education that will attract and engage their students. Is there evidence that this disposition translates into teaching practices proven to be effective with out-of-school youth? The research on dropouts, and on effective alternative schools, indicates that the most effective methods maximize student active engagement in the learning process (Corchuelo et al. 2016; Day et al. 2013; Sullivan 2015). In general, the teachers reported using collaborative learning methods with much greater frequency than they reported using teacher-centered methods of instruction. The Second Opportunity teachers reported that they used "dictation" less than any other method; teachers most frequently used "group work". They also use a variety of methods, both student-centered and teacher-centered, as recommended by other

research (Amitay and Rahav 2018; O’Gorman et al. 2015; Putwain et al. 2016; Zolkoski et al. 2015). We have yet to see if this will translate into a high completion rate for their students.

This study provided few insights into the kinds of teachers whose disposition or affective behavior is most like that of teachers in effective alternative schools. The only factor related to type of teaching method used is the category of training courses taken: those who took more collaborative courses more frequently used collaborative teaching and more frequently used assessment methods that actively engaged students. University courses, apparently, are more likely than others to encourage use of collaborative teaching and assessment. Future research will have to observe how the teachers interact with their students.

## Conclusion

This study offers further evidence that effective education for all is a highly complex endeavor. Most national systems of education have had the same experience as Chile: programs that rely on standardization of inputs and uniformity of process to achieve efficiency work well for only a minority fraction of their student population. The majority learn much less than they could and are held in school only by the immediate rewards of social relationships and threats of failure if they leave “uneducated”. A small number are ejected or flee, seeking meaning elsewhere. Alternative schooling offers not just a haven for these dispossessed but also a model of how society can organize schools to serve all youth.

What this research and other studies demonstrate is that almost all youth are capable of learning, if the process is organized to respect them as unique and competent persons. Teaching has to be seen not as a process of delivering other people’s knowledge to students but of learners constructing their own understanding of the reality they experience. The improvement of alternative schools, and education in general, requires more attention to teaching and learning as dynamic processes in which both inputs and processes change over time. Uncertainty makes all of us uneasy; competition provokes discrimination and repression. Full development of our collective potential requires collaboration in learning how to empower each of us.

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**Publisher’s Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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