

Précis

WORLD BANK OPERATIONS EVALUATION DEPARTMENT

FALL 2001

NUMBER 212

Chile's Model for Educating Poor Children

Chilean schools benefited from the country's economic success (1997 per capita income, US\$4,820), universal primary education, political stability, and few natural and other physical disasters. Chile's municipalities have the means and authority to supervise teachers, maintain schools, and adequately pay teachers. The country has also given a great deal of attention to the students' affective and cognitive domains of learning.

Background

Chilean education reform in the 1980s attracted worldwide attention. It decentralized school management to provinces and municipalities. Parents could obtain vouchers and send children to eligible nongovernment schools if they could gain admission and afford the additional tuition.

This experiment produced social segmentation, because its beneficiaries tended to be children of higher socioeconomic status or those with very motivated parents. Children from rural areas, from very poor families, or with behavioral or learning problems tended to remain in government schools. And with decentralization, the better teachers were recruited by the wealthier municipalities, which could offer salary bonuses to attract them.

The democratic government that took over in 1989 decided to leave the voucher system intact. But Chile has a strong tradition of social conscience, and in 1996 the government announced a poverty alleviation initiative that would focus more resources and reforms on the students in government (municipal and rural) schools,

where many poor children were enrolled. The government was interested in social equity, educational quality, national standards for educational attainment, and adequate teachers' salaries. The Ministry of Education approached the Bank for assistance. The Primary Education Improvement Project was the first Bank lending for Chilean education in nearly 20 years.

The Project Takes Hold

The government was highly motivated to succeed. Implementation proceeded quickly and was generally highly successful. Projects in secondary and higher education followed. Chile's collaboration with the Bank, starting in 1990, became noted for its closeness, trust, and mutual appreciation and understanding. An important element in fostering this relationship was the low level of corruption in Chile's education sector. Government and Bank staff knew that money would probably be spent for the intended purposes. Almost all project targets were met or surpassed and the government was able to negotiate better prices than expected



on some items, which allowed US\$40 million of the loan to be cancelled.

The primary education project started as a focused effort to improve conditions in government schools, but subsidized private schools also became eligible for most benefits targeted to the poor. Although cost-recovery was initially considered, textbooks were given free to students.

Attention to the Affective Domain of Learning

Much has been written about the impressive implementation record of this project, including evaluations by the government and documents on various aspects and components by Bank staff (for example, Michael Potashnik: *Computers in the Schools*; Françoise Delannoy: *Education Reforms in Chile*; Christian Cox: “International Cooperation and Donor Assistance in the Development and Implementation of Educational Programs”). The operation reportedly had a significant impact on classroom-level instructional delivery through the provision of enrichment materials, teacher and supervisor training in participatory methods, quality improvement projects, teacher and supervisor employment, investments in the assessment system, and an expansion of the preschool program that prepares poor children to enter primary school. The achievement scores of rural schools increased significantly. Teacher questionnaires and classroom observations showed that 71 percent of the teachers trained in the new instructional methods used them at least some of the time. Training was most successful with previously isolated rural teachers.

School Improvement Projects

To reduce the dropout rate and behavioral problems and to improve students’ future opportunities, reformers tried to make school environments and academic material more appealing and to develop students’ social skills and self-esteem. Groups of teachers submitted proposals and competed for funds to improve instruction. Initiatives included the purchase of a small radio transmitter for a rural school, theater training and equipment for a subsidized private school, and the financing of parent-oriented activities that brought adults in to teach various skills to children during school hours. As students became more interested in school, the level of absenteeism declined. The joyful environment, personalized care, and structured tasks of discovery learning bolstered the limited social capital of children from poor homes.

Enlaces Computer Literacy

About half the municipal and rural schools received three to nine computers with Internet connections through this program. Classes take turns in the computer room, where groups of children explore the evolving software available in *Enlaces*, do educational puzzles, or learn word processing. A notable program includes a plaza of a typical small town, where children open doors and explore subjects such as history, biology, and folklore. With a

limited number of computers, the program is still used only for exploration and familiarization, but software will eventually be produced that corresponds to instructional objectives.

Valuing Student Environments

Selected segments of the curricula include activities designed to help students recognize the value of their homes and culture. For example, they are asked to interview parents and relatives about their professions or show why it is better to live in the country than in the city. The 900 lowest-scoring schools have funds to hire monitors— young, well-regarded graduates of local institutions—who work part-time. Monitors receive short-term training in how to develop children’s social skills and interaction patterns with games, dances, handicrafts, discussions about learning to value their environment and family, and cultural appreciation activities.

Education through Art and Play (*educación lúdica*), and Reading

Students spend several hours a week drawing and making handicrafts, either during artistic education class or as part of their courses. To develop interests and help students enjoy and value reading, the project flooded the public schools with class libraries and book collections. These materials are for recreation and not necessarily related to the curriculum. Students reportedly do use them, and visitors have observed that the books did look worn.

Attention to the Cognitive Domain

A great deal of emphasis was placed on the acquisition of higher-order skills, such as synthesizing knowledge, rather than on simply memorizing and recalling information. Teachers began shifting their role from lecturer to facilitator of learning, directing groups of children to explore and carry out activities with considerable independence. Teachers need to learn how to keep students on task in group work and how to focus more solidly on basic competencies—in reading, writing, math, and science—especially in rural multigrade classrooms, where the disadvantages of the less-structured new system are exacerbated.

Remaining Weaknesses of the System

Limited Time on Task

Group work is a prominent feature of the reform. But time actually spent on task in group projects seemed to be less than 50 percent. The remaining time was spent on unfocused activity, accompanied by considerable noise. Since many activities are not well-structured, students tend to misbehave. Some university observations indicated that in low-income classes, 10 of 45 class minutes may be spent on discipline. By contrast, classes at a Catholic subsidized school, although larger, were much more orderly. Yet the mission often observed the qualities that make group work

Providing Health Care with Minimal Disruption of Learning

In Cerro Navia, a low-income suburb of Santiago, many primary schools send whole classes to a German clinic for medical checkups and treatment. Class is conducted in a classroom attached to the clinic while students are examined one by one. No class time is wasted and students are kept busy with their peers, rather than waiting and worrying about painful procedures. Students are systematically diagnosed and treated on alternate visits.

a desirable instructional method. When tasks were complex, students shared information, and the more advanced students explained procedures to the others without interrupting the teacher. But when tasks were simple, or actually individual, students completed them and then chatted. Possibly to maximize time on task, group activities are seen much less frequently in private schools and in the higher grades.

Unclear Linkages between Objectives and Activities

Given the need to match the achievement of private schools, one would expect public schools to give much greater emphasis to basic skills. Instead, OED observed several classes involved in cooperative and individual handicrafts (for example, students gluing pieces of clothespins over tin cans). Even after teacher explanations, the instructional objectives of some activities were unclear. Such activities can focus student attention on various mathematical properties or mnemonics for grammatical rules, but the handicrafts seemed an end in themselves, without such cognitive linkages. Furthermore, they were coupled with a limited emphasis on math and science. Classes and activities emphasizing communication and language were much more frequent.

Relatively Unstructured Class Time

To store information and later retrieve it, students must clearly understand where to categorize it. This is why objectives and their rationale, applications of knowledge, evaluation, and conclusion are important in all classes, in all areas, and at all levels. The classes observed in Chile often had no clear beginning and did not sum up the material learned. Children continued activities started earlier, and when the bell rang, they left. To some extent, this can be attributed to the Chilean philosophy that the teacher is merely a facilitator helping children to find answers and explore. The skill of working with little guidance is valuable, but the time it takes may not compensate for the added value.

The relative lack of structure and low achievement scores may be one reason that parents send their children to private subsidized schools if they can afford it. Although some municipal schools in populous periurban areas have classes of 40 students, most of those visited by the mission had

classes of 15–20 students. In contrast, nearby subsidized private schools that required no extra tuition were overflowing, with 45 students to a class and multiple sections.

Performance

The gap in achievement between low-income schools and the national average shrank from 30 percentage points to about 10 points in the 1990s. But the gap between government and private schools remains large, and on the international level, achievement has not met expectations. Chile scored at the level of Colombia and Brazil in mathematics, just behind Argentina and Cuba.

Lessons Learned: Educating Low-Income Students

Chilean education is a model other countries may aspire to, but what can a country learn from Chile's experience if it does not have relatively high per capita income, low levels of corruption, capacity for sustained learning assessments, cultural sensitivity about the poor, and affectionate behavior toward children? Students from countries as diverse as South Africa, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan, when asked what makes a good school, agreed on three things: good teacher-pupil relationships, support for overcoming learning difficulties, and good communications with parents. The following ingredients from Chile's successful recipe for education may be useful.

Develop the affective domain. Doing things that satisfy students' interests, values, and needs—including the need to move around rather than sit and listen passively—makes students more receptive to learning. One reason for high absenteeism and drop-out rates is that schools are unattractive and students are unhappy in them.

Affection and acceptance. Culturally appropriate demonstrations of affection are more effective than the mistreatment, beatings, and “pushout” common in lower-income countries, especially where teachers are higher in socioeconomic status than students.

School appearance counts. Spending a little extra to make a school more attractive could affect attendance and dropout rates.

The importance and selective utility of group work. Group work and peer tutoring may be effective (more research is needed in this area), but teachers rarely practice them, partly because they find it easier to control classes when all the students face them. Square tables that can be rearranged are useful for group work.

Searching for answers. Searching for answers individually or in groups helps students develop important research skills, so extra instructional materials and suitable direction are important. In countries where enrichment materials are not woven into the curriculum, they may lie unused or be stolen.

Empowering group activities for teachers. Creating competitions that require group diagnosis and problem-solving by teachers from different areas might be a way to

empower and stimulate teacher interest in group activities, which many teachers find unappealing. Projects to improve educational quality might be awarded by local authorities, to relieve burdens on central authorities.

Keeping students in school longer. Ways must be found to make school days longer (and to make fuller use of school buildings). One possibility: hire school *monitors* (rather than higher-paid teachers) to provide academic and enrichment support.

The value of early and continuing cognitive stimulation. In poor countries, NGOs and civil society may provide the enrichment materials that are essential learning tools for early childhood education.

Special education. Some special education—at least for children with mild disabilities such as dyslexia—might be feasible if low-paid aides can be trained in basic techniques for working with children who fall behind.

School vouchers targeted to the very poor. Subsidies for school vouchers are often not targeted to the poor and are independent of achievement levels. Governments might make better use of funds by basing subsidies on the number of poor parents willing to send children to schools and on children's achievement.

Robust educational research must accompany interventions so the effects of confounding variables can be identified and evaluated.

Recent OED Précis

- 211 Strengthening Tunisian Municipalities to Foster Local Urban Development
- 210 Connecting with the Information Revolution
- 209 Participation in Development Assistance
- 208 India: Improving the Development Effectiveness of Assistance
- 207 Adapting Transport Institutions to Romania's Transition Needs
- 206 Reforming India's Energy Sector (1978–99)
- 205 Progress in Java's Villages
- 204 ARDE 2001: From Strategy to Results
- 203 World Bank Forest Strategy: Striking the Right Balance
- 202 Poverty Reduction in the 1990s: The World Bank Strategy
- 201 The Drive to Partnership: Aid Coordination and the World Bank
- 200 Evaluating Gender and Development at the World Bank
- 199 Ghana: Building a Stronger Transportation System
- 198 Agricultural Extension: The Kenya Experience
- 197 Toward a Comprehensive Development Strategy
- 196 Evaluation and the Development Challenge
- 195 Poverty Assessments: Maximizing Impacts
- 194 Involuntary Resettlement: The Large Dam Experience
- 193 Partnership for Education in Jordan
- 192 Reforming Bolivia's Power Sector
- 191 Bangladesh: Progress Through Partnership
- 190 Transport in Indonesia
- 189 Health Care in Brazil: Addressing Complexity



Director-General, Operations Evaluation: *Robert Picciotto*
 Director, Operations Evaluation Department: *Gregory Ingram*
 Manager, Sector and Thematic Evaluation: *Alain Barbu*
 Task Manager: *Helen Abadzi*

► This *Précis* is based on the evaluation work of Helen Abadzi, Senior Evaluation Officer, Sector and Thematic Evaluation Group, OED.

► *Précis* are available to Bank Executive Directors and staff from the Internal Documents Unit and from regional information service centers, and to the public from the World Bank InfoShop. *Précis* are also available at no charge by contacting the OED Help Desk: eline@worldbank.org or calling 1-202/458-4497.

Précis

Manager, Partnerships and Knowledge: *Oswaldo Feinstein* •
 Editor-in-Chief: *Elizabeth Campbell-Pagé* • Series Editor:
Caroline McEuen • Dissemination: *Juicy Qureshi-Huq*

DISCLAIMER: OED *Précis* are produced by the World Bank Operations Evaluation Department, Partnerships and Knowledge Group (OEDPK), Outreach and Dissemination Unit. The views in this paper are those of the Operations Evaluation staff and editors and should not be attributed to the World Bank, its affiliated organizations, or its Executive Directors.

Précis aussi disponible en français
 @ <http://www.worldbank.org/html/oed>

Précis en español también disponible
 @ <http://www.worldbank.org/html/oed>