

Educating disadvantaged children and the dangers of charter schools

11 July 2014, by Anna Kellett

The similarities in educating disadvantaged children in New Zealand and Chile and the dangers of charter schools are the subjects of a public lecture at the University of Auckland this month.

Professor Ernesto Treviño of the Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago, will speak about language development in disadvantaged communities in Chile and New Zealand in his lecture entitled "A Good Start: Developing early language and literacy in disadvantaged communities". He will discuss his "Good Start" project, a vocabulary focused, large scale intervention study for early literacy among disadvantaged preschoolers attending public schools in Chile, which he is carrying out in collaboration with Professor Catherine Snow at Harvard University.

Professor Treviño is the Executive Director of the Centre for Comparative Education Policies of the Universidad Diego Portales in Chile. He is actively involved in educational research that focuses on the interplay of education policies, [school leadership](#) and [teaching practices](#) and how these interactions create meaningful opportunities for supporting the development of socially marginalised children.

He says there are similarities in the education systems of Chile and New Zealand. Both have the challenge of improving equity, but with different levels of quality.

Professor Treviño is particularly interested in the moves towards charter schools in New Zealand, an issue he discussed with Education Minister Hekia Parata when she visited Santiago in June 2013.

"I would say she was very interested in promoting vehicles for charter schools and competition among schools."

Professor Treviño says [charter schools](#) have been operating in Chile for 30 years and haven't made a positive effect on education.

"From someone that comes from the most socio-economically segregated education system in the OECD, I would say that is not the way to go to improve equity or quality. In fact, competition among schools tends to do the opposite, that is, to widen educational disparities."

"Now we have an education market where schools compete against each other and are trying to gain prestige. Collaboration among schools has almost disappeared, and the logic is that the wins of some schools are at the cost of the losses of many educational institutions. In this context, effective improvement practices tend to be guarded as a secret, instead of shared in order to provide better educational opportunities for the most disadvantaged children."

"The evidence shows us that market style education only provides small gains in quality but creates huge gaps in inequality. That's something we certainly don't want to see in New Zealand, which needs to improve equality."

Professor Treviño is a guest of the University of Auckland's Faculty of Education. While here, he will lead two workshops on research and evaluation of early childhood education programmes, particularly focused on early language development among vulnerable children.

The workshops will assist the University's Woolf Fisher Research Centre and PhD students from the Faculty of Education.

The universities have had a Memorandum of Understanding since 2009. Woolf Fisher Research Director Professor Stuart McNaughton visited the University Diego Portales in 2012. He met with Chilean Ministry of Education officials and advisers,

presented a seminar on schooling improvement initiatives in New Zealand, and visited a number of schools in Santiago.

In 2008, the Preferential School Voucher Law in Chile increased the budget for schools with vulnerable children, in exchange for schools' commitment to improve student achievement. Schools failing to comply with the standards could face closure which is previously unheard of in Chile.

Under Professor Treviño's direction the research programme at the University of Diego Portales has been studying how education policies are translated into school management and teaching practices. The focus of his research is the interplay among policy, school management and teaching practices in order to improve both equity and quality of education in Chile, which is the most unequal country of the OECD.

His programme of research also employs the new intervention models for intervention in schools described as "design based research approaches". Both the methodologies and the instructional designs for literacy will support existing faculty work and the on-going research programme at the Woolf Fisher Research Centre.

Provided by University of Auckland

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