

EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



EQ Review is a newsletter published by USAID's EQUIP1 to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate successes, challenges, and lessons learned by USAID Missions.

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Complementary Education

How are the educational needs of historically disadvantaged and underserved populations being met? One effective approach has been community schools established as complementary education delivery modes.

To meet the goals of Education for All (EFA) simply investing in the expansion of the regular public system is not sufficient. It is important to consider how to best organize schools that respond to the particular needs of a country's most disadvantaged families and children. The problem of reaching **all** children—and reaching them with an education that will be effective—cannot be addressed through the continued pursuit of a centralized, uniform administration of schooling.

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Complementary education programs are designed specifically to complement the government education system and are not meant as non-formal alternative programs. Rather, complementary education programs provide different, community-based approaches to help children with limited or no access to government-provided schooling obtain educational outcomes equivalent to students in regular public schools.

Complementary education programs use community-managed schools to more consistently assure basic opportunities to learn. Complementary education programming employs community-based approaches to schooling, which by design meet the needs of the communities they are set up to serve, overcoming the unresponsive administration typically created by formal systems of public schools. In the complementary education programs that have been researched, locally-recruited, under-qualified, and minimally compensated teachers produce education outcomes that meet or exceed what regular public schools are able to obtain.

A growing body of experience and research is demonstrating that quality basic education can be provided to the world's most disadvantaged populations. The poorest, most vulnerable children in a country can enroll in school, complete a primary education, and learn to read, write, and do math. All this can be done in ways that are cost-effective. For example:

- Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) primary schools help rural children complete sixth grade three times more cost-effectively than regular public schools in Bangladesh, and BRAC students outperform public school students in reading, writing, and math.
- Community schools in the rural hamlets of Upper Egypt produce fifth graders able to pass the national examination twice as cost-effectively as regular public schools.
- Community-based schools serving HIV/AIDS orphans in Zambia are twice as cost-effective as regular public schools at producing grade seven completers who meet minimum standards in English and math.

The experience of community-based complementary education programs demonstrates that governments need to reconsider several facets of how they organize the supply of education to reach underserved populations. The prominence of the community's role in setting up and running a school, the use of a network of training and support services that can frequently reach each school and community, and partnerships with nongovernmental actors to establish on-the-ground networks of support providers all imply an inherently decentralized approach to providing education.

It is not enough to simply replicate a model of complementary community-based schools used elsewhere. Governments and their partners must invest the financial and institutional resources necessary to ensure that the conditions most favorable to the success of those schools can be identified and sustained. Research shows that local governance and control, flexibility in the location, and organization of the school, the use of local language and modified curriculum, and locally recruited but adequately supported teachers are conditions, that acting together, contribute to community school effectiveness. Ongoing partnerships that can support effective community schools require drawing on each actor's appropriate resources and expertise—limiting government institutions to doing what they do well (assuring the availability of public resources and establishing standards for quality and accountability), relying on nongovernmental partners to do what they do best (establishing and efficiently managing networks of community and school support), and allowing communities to assume responsibility for what they can best manage (decisions about how to organize and operate their school on a day-to-day basis).

Education ministries can take advantage of the success of complementary approaches in three ways:

- Provide resources and support for non-governmentally initiated complementary programs;
- Apply lessons from complementary approaches directly to government efforts to more effectively reach underserved areas and populations; and
- Actively seek out and support partnerships with nongovernmental organizations implementing complementary education programs.

The three articles presented in this issue of the EQ Review show how non-governmental actors, working in conjunction with local communities and with the government's education authorities are able to design programs that meet the needs of children who would otherwise be poorly served or unserved by formal public schools. In Ghana, the School for Life program provides local language instruction in nine months equivalent to the first three years of primary school in small, remote villages too distant to be served by the nearest public schools. In Honduras, students of all ages are afforded a second chance at school in settings that suit them and their communities. In Cambodia, lessons learned from a previously-implemented complementary education program are being used in a current program that targets underserved children in the government-funded schools.

Reaching underserved populations with effective education is going to take genuine decentralization. It is not just a movement of administrative functions to lower levels of the education system, but more purposeful partnerships with nongovernmental organizations and local communities. Genuine local control and structured approaches to local decision-making are part of what enable community-based schools to be effective.

In sub-Saharan Africa, EQUIP2 is investigating the presence of complementary education systems in 48 countries. The report of the investigation will facilitate advocacy for wider-spread complementary education policy implementation and reform at the national and sub-national level. It will be presented at the 2006 Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Biennale meeting as a platform for Education for All (EFA). A document summarizing eight case studies on complementary education, as well as the cases themselves, will be available at the end of May 2006 on the EQUIP website: www.equip123.net.

For more information contact Joe DeStefano, Vice President, The Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling, at jdestefano@ccfschooling.org.

Northern Ghana School for Life Program

School for Life, a Ghanaian nongovernmental organization working with local education authorities, provides a nine-month education program for youth eight to 15 years old in rural villages of northern Ghana where there is no or very little access to primary education. School for Life teaches local language literacy, numeracy, and general academics equivalent to three primary school grades in nine months.

From 1996 to 2005, School for Life enrolled 50,000 pupils, half of whom were girls, helping to increase the Ghanaian Northern Region gross enrollment rate for first through third grade from 69 percent to 83 percent. Of those students who enter School for Life, more than 91 percent complete



Two female School for Life students read in Ghana's Northern Region

the program, and 66 percent continue on to fourth grade in public schools. At the end of a nine-month cycle, 81 percent of School for Life students are able to meet the minimum standards for literacy and numeracy at the grade three level. School for Life is over three times more cost-effective at producing a third-grade graduate than public schools (DeStefano, Hartwell, Balwanz and Moore, 2006).

In the relationships between pupils and teachers, teachers and schools, and schools and the state, directives flow from the source of authority to the recipient. Yet, learning is supported when learners are respected and nurtured, rather than coerced. This principle is well articulated in the School for Life credo:

The education program aims to develop in the children a sense of critical thinking and activeness, which will reflect in the society at large and promote active participation in democratic processes. This is to generate a harmonic and balanced society with mutual respect and understanding between sexes, ethnic groups, generations and social groups.

Contact William Osafo, School for Life CTO, at wosafo@usaid.gov for more information on the program.

Reference: DeStefano, J., A. Hartwell, D. Balwanz and A. Moore (draft 2006) – Effective Schools for Disadvantage and Underserved Populations, Washington, DC, EQUIP2, Academy for Educational Development.

Honduras Educatodos Program

In the early 1990s, USAID and the Secretary of Education began looking at alternative mechanisms to reach out-of-school youth and ensure that both youth and adults who have dropped out of school complete a sixth grade education. USAID created the Educatodos program through a complementary service delivery model in 1995 to offer youth and adults the opportunity to complete grades one through six in three years. In 2000, the program expanded to include grades seven through nine. Educatodos cost-effectively responds to the demand for basic education in a significantly shorter time frame than the traditional education system. It uses existing country and community infrastructure and an integrated curriculum utilizing audio and printed materials to effectively meet students' needs. Volunteer facilitators with diverse academic backgrounds implement the program from learning centers situated in factories, businesses, schools, and community centers throughout the country.

Guidelines that orient the program follow the official curriculum of the Honduran Secretary of Education and were developed around performance standards in four basic areas: mathematics, communications, science and technology, and social science. Educatodos has a flexible schedule that requires only an average of two and a half hours of group work per day, complemented by homework. Classrooms are multi-grade and multi-age with students ranging from eight to 40 years old. The basic performance standards focus on concepts and content that is pertinent to the daily lives of Educatodos participants. Five cross-cutting themes chosen through discussions with key national education players and reflecting essential issues faced by participants drive the program: population, environment, health, national identity, and citizenship and democracy. Work skills and values are incorporated into each of the cross-cutting themes, and participants develop community projects to integrate classroom learning into daily reality. All learning is student-centered and constructivist-based.

Evaluation of average cost per student and completion rate for Educatodos compared to the public school system shows the program to be considerably more cost-effective than traditional education systems. While Educatodos's completion rates for the three-year program equivalent to public school grades one through six are slightly lower, cost per student is nearly 80 percent lower. For the Educatodos two-year program equivalent to public school grades seven through nine, completion rates were significantly higher, but at a cost 75 to 95 percent lower.

For more information contact Educatodos CTO, Evelyn Rodriguez at erodriguez@usaid.gov.

Cambodia ESCUP Project

Khmer is the official language of instruction in Cambodian schools, however most children in highland minority groups begin school with no prior knowledge of Khmer. To address the educational needs of children from these underserved populations, the Mission's Cambodia Educational Support for Children in Underserved Populations (ESCUP) project is implementing several interventions based on successful complementary education strategies. The ESCUP project is building upon lessons learned from the UNICEF and AusAID funded Highland Children's Education Project (HCEP) in Cambodia, which developed a bilingual and bi-cultural curriculum for the community schools it established in non-Khmer speaking areas.

Adapting interventions from the HCEP Project, ESCUP is working through government primary schools to implement a Supplementary Khmer Language (SKL) program for grade one students in select highland communities. Teachers participating in the SKL program receive training support from ESCUP on teaching Khmer as a second language. This training takes place during the school year, outside of school hours, and lasts approximately four days. Following this training, participating grade one teachers provide their students with extracurricular Supplementary Khmer Language instruction for an intensive two-hour class on a non-school day, and daily 10-15 minute practice sessions during the regular school day. Usually this is done in a way to complement an existing lesson in language or some other subject. Thus, the program tries to work within the framework of the existing curriculum as well as supplementing it.

ESCUP is also piloting a Bilingual Classroom Assistant (BCA) intervention, which has also been developed from the lessons learned in the Highland Children's Education Project. The intervention differs somewhat from the approach used in HCEP in the sense that it is targeted at children studying in a multi-cultural environment (i.e., children speak different languages) whereas HCEP interventions occur in a culturally homogeneous environment. This pilot intervention is designed to address the lack of teachers with skills in minority languages in highland communities. The Bilingual Classroom Assistants (BCAs) are recruited from the local communities and trained to assist ethnic Khmer teachers in their teaching. Local committees recruit the BCAs using criteria established in collaboration with the project. These criteria include speaking Khmer and a local language fluently, a minimum of nine years of basic education, and a willingness to work with schools.

BCAs are trained using a special set of materials designed for the purpose. The initial training is 3.5 days followed by a period of technical support and monitoring. Project staff deliver the training based on a set workshop program. BCAs are remunerated at a rate of \$15 per month through an annual grant provided to the school cluster as part of their yearly planning. Local committees administer and monitor the usage of these funds. The Bilingual Classroom Assistants' main role in the classroom is to offer support to children who are unable to understand teachers' instructions, explanations, or participate in learning experiences. The BCAs also offer advice on language and cultural matters to teachers. This advice is offered as needs arise during class periods, as well as during teacher planning days, which occur once a week. This intervention is fulfilling a need to create student-centered learning environments for children from non-Khmer speaking families entering grade one.

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Hill tribe girls at school in Mondilkiri