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**Excelencia Quarterly Report**  
**January 1, 2007 – March 31, 2007**



submitted by:

**American Institutes for Research**

With:

**Academy for Educational Development**  
**Save the Children Federation, USA**

**U.S. Agency for International Development**  
**Cooperative Agreement No. GDG-A-00-03-00006-00**

## PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Title: Expansion of Excelencia Centers in Nicaragua with Emphasis on the APA Methodology (Excelencia)

Main Contractor: American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Partners: Academy for Educational Development (AED)  
Save the Children Federation USA

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Contractors Official Contact Person:

Markus Broer  
Project Manager  
1000 Thomas Jefferson St. NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
Tel. 202 403-5728  
Fax 202 403-5979  
Email: [mbroer@air.org](mailto:mbroer@air.org)

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## ACRONYMS

<b>AED</b>	Academy for Educational Development
<b>AIR</b>	American Institutes for Research
<b>APA</b>	Learn, Practice, Apply (Aprendo, Pratico, Aplico)
<b>BASE</b>	Basic Education and Training Program II
<b>COP</b>	Chief of Party
<b>CTO</b>	Cognizant Technical Officer
<b>EQUIP</b>	Education Quality Improvement Program
<b>EXCELENCIA</b>	Expansion of the Excellence Centers in Nicaragua with Emphasis on the APA (Learn, Practice and Apply) Methodology
<b>MINED</b>	Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports
<b>PRONICASS</b>	Nicaraguan Support to the Social Sector Program
<b>SO</b>	Strategic Objective
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>RAAN</b>	Autonomous Region of the North Atlantic
<b>RAAS</b>	Autonomous Region of the South Atlantic
<b>EIB</b>	Bilingual Intercultural Education
<b>FADCANIC</b>	Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During this quarter, the authorities from the government and the Ministry of Education changed, and Dr. Miguel de Castilla was named Minister of Education. Thus, one of the main activities this period has been to present to the new authorities of the Ministry of Education on Nicaragua (MINED) what the project has been doing to this date and get their respective approval in order to continue the project work.

Since changes in the political landscape can slow down activities, the project team decided that the best strategy to take during this period was not to wait for instructions or guidelines from the new authorities but rather continue with the activities as set forth in the work plan. One of the first decisions for Result No. 1, Expansion of the APA Methodology, was to convene meetings for departmental and municipal delegates and pedagogical advisors in Managua to evaluate the last school year and plan activities for the current year. After that, the plan was to hold meetings for directors of the EXCELENCIA schools to do the same thing, and then repeat the same strategy by holding meetings at the local level. The effect of this strategy allowed us to keep the trust of local authorities and directors on the project and to show the new authorities at the Ministry an image of strength, acceptance and our ability to rally local stake holders. Local education authorities and directors worked with the facilitators to identify the new schools to which the project will expand the methodology as mentor schools.

Under Result No. 2, a New Curriculum Validated and Submitted to the Ministry, the project decided to accelerate the process of incorporating the changes resulting from the validation and to have the new materials ready as soon as possible for delivery to the new authorities, thus limiting the potential for substantial modification needs at a later time. The effect of this strategy was that the new authorities accepted the materials and that the Minister formally requested, through an official letter, that EXCELENCIA continue providing its technical assistance for the validation process. The project delivered more than 1,000 copies of CDs containing all student and teacher materials to the MINED to be distributed to 90 civil society organizations that the MINED decided would participate in the expanded consultation for the new curriculum. The project also sent the official request from the Minister of Education to continue providing technical assistance to this process to USAID.

Under Result No. 3, the project completed editing the report on the Annual Study 2006 and it is ready for publication in the next quarter. In addition, the project started planning the Annual Study 2007 in conjunction with the MINED authorities. This study will deal with the evaluation of student performance within the framework of the new curriculum. Through this study the MINED will be able to have not only the means to validate the new curriculum, but also an instrument to evaluate student performance for other purposes.

EXCELENCIA set up five new Resource Centers during this quarter and they are now ready for inauguration. In addition, it delivered fungible materials with an approximate value of US\$ 370,000.00 to network mentor schools.

FADCANIC continued to successfully carry out its activities in the 91 schools on the Caribbean Coast and made progress on the production of EIB materials for the first quarter of the third and fourth years of multi-grade schools.

In addition, Save the Children prepared the “Education Action Plan for the Transition” for validation and printed a summary of the study titled “*La Transición Exitosa al Primer Grado, un Factor Clave para el Desarrollo Infantil Temprano*” [The Successful Transition to First Grade, a Key Factor for Early Childhood Development] that addresses measures to be taken at home, school, the community and the State to ensure a successful transition from pre-school education to primary school.

In the area of evaluation, EXCELENCIA is implementing an information system to: a) monitor its indicators based on the progress of the results achieved in the expansion to new schools and their contribution to USAID’s education indicators, and b) prepare studies to evaluate the effects of variables that have an effect on the quality of education in network schools.

## **PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

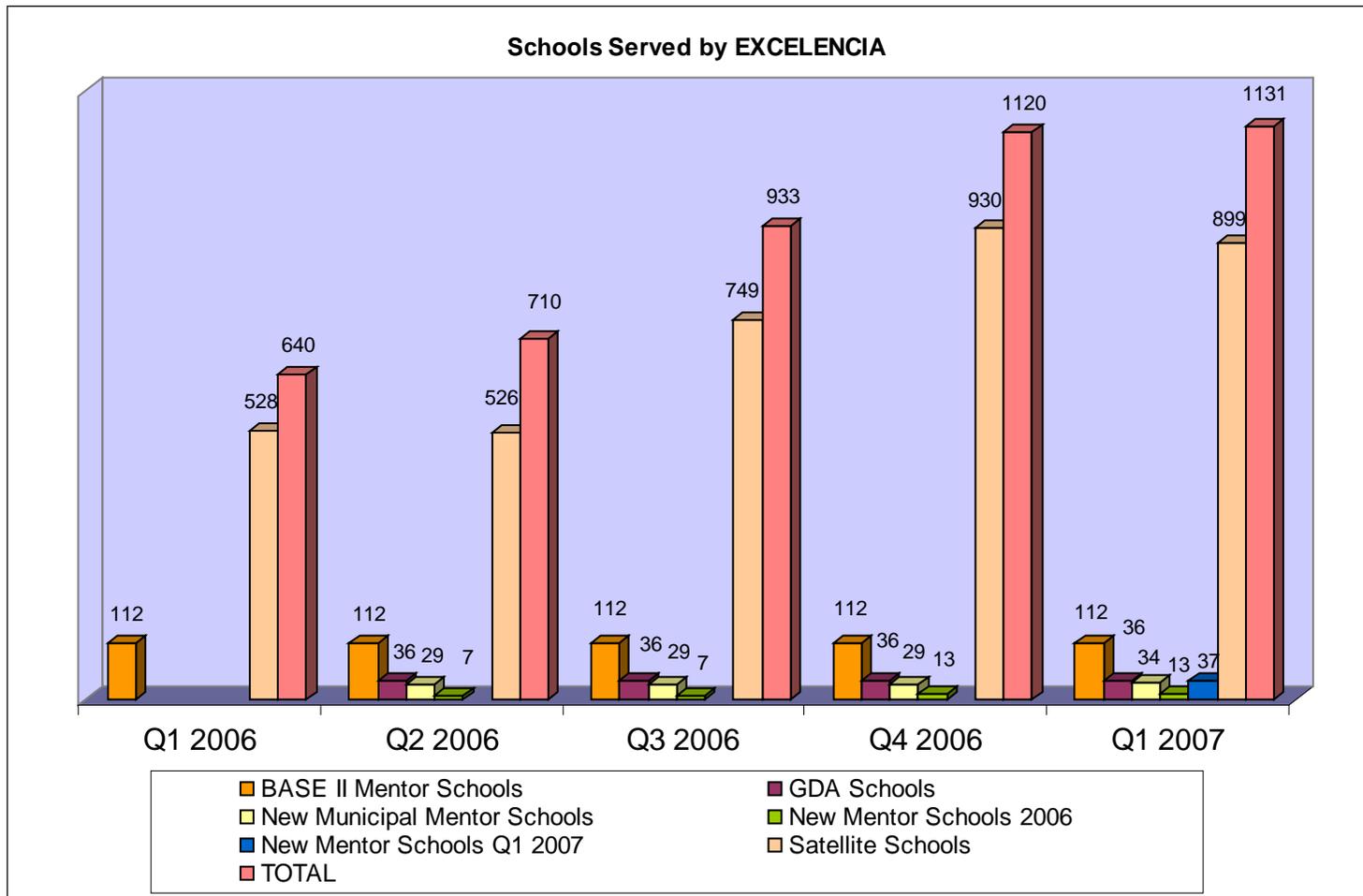
### ***I. RESULT NUMBER 1: EXPANSION OF THE NETWORK OF EXCELENCIA SCHOOLS THAT APPLY THE APA METHODOLOGY***

#### **A) School Network Expansion:**

During this first quarter of 2007, EXCELENCIA facilitators incorporated eleven new schools to the network reaching the current total of 1,131 schools. This represents a 77% increase over the number of schools (640) received at the beginning of the project. Likewise, at the beginning of 2007 the project had a presence in 143 municipalities, and during this quarter it extended its presence to five additional municipalities (a total of 148), increasing the coverage to 97% of the total number of municipalities (152) in the country.

Please refer to the graph and table on the next page for detailed results of the expansion efforts.

Graph and table 1: Schools served by EXCELENCIA, per quarter and category



	Feb-06	Jun-06	Sep-06	Dic-06	Mar-07
Base II Mentor Schools	112	112	112	112	112
GDA Schools		36	36	36	36
Mentor Schools in new municipalities		29	29	29	34
New Mentor Schools 2006		7	7	13	13
New Mentor Schools Q1 2007					37
Satellites Schools	528	526	749	930	899
<b>Total</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>1120</b>	<b>1131</b>

*Source: EXCELENCIA Project. March, 2007*

Table No. 2 below shows the progress made on the coverage of EXCELENCIA using the data updated with the MINED Statistics Directorate. According to those data, at the end of the first quarter of 2007, EXCELENCIA is serving around 13.5% of the public primary schools and 25% of primary school students enrolled in the country.

The data also shows that 25% of primary school teachers in Nicaragua work in the EXCELENCIA network schools.

*Graphs and table 2: Status of the EXCELENCIA expansion as of March 2007*

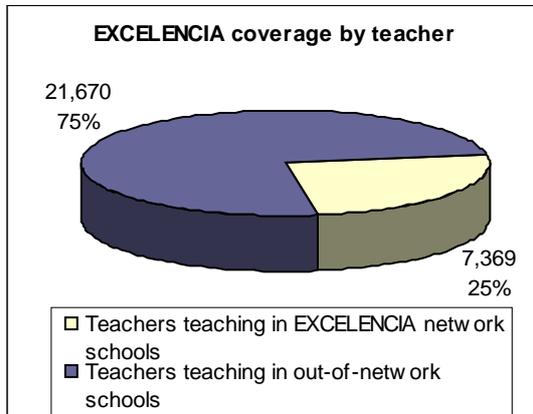
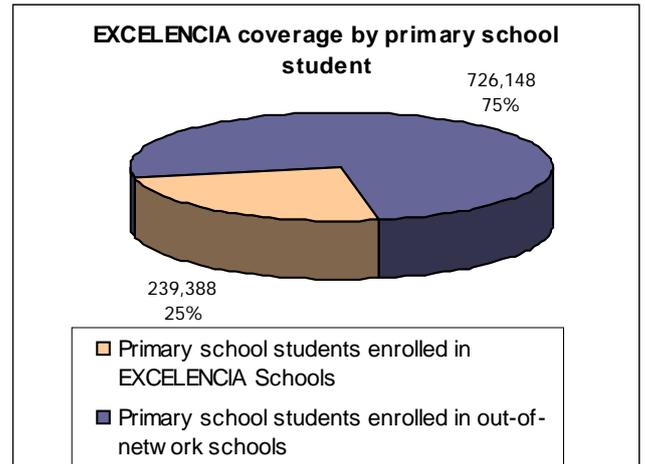
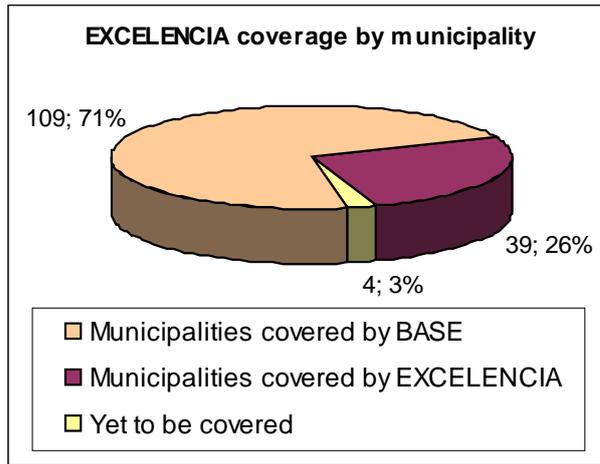


Table 2: Status of the EXCELENCIA expansion as of March 2007

<b>Coverage by Municipality</b>	
Number of municipalities in the country	152
Number of municipalities covered by BASE II 2005	109
Percentage of municipalities covered by BASE II 2005	72%
Number of municipalities covered by Excelencia 2006	144
<b>% of municipalities covered by Excelencia 2006</b>	<b>95%</b>
Number of municip. covered as of March 2007	148
<b>% of municip. covered as of March 2007</b>	<b>97%</b>
<b>Coverage by schools</b>	
Number of public primary schools (2006)	8350
Number of schools served as of March 2007	1131
<b>% of primary schools served as of March 2007</b>	<b>13.54%</b>
<b>Coverage by student enrollment</b>	
Total initial primary enrollment 2006	965.536
Total of enrollment at EXCELENCIA schools	239.388
<b>% of enrollment at EXCELENCIA schools</b>	<b>25 %</b>
<b>Coverage by teacher</b>	
Total number of primary school teachers	29.039
Number of teachers at EXCELENCIA schools	7369
<b>% of teachers at EXCELENCIA schools</b>	<b>25%</b>

Source: MINED Statistics Directorate and EXCELENCIA records as of March 2007

\* EXCELENCIA constantly updates its data with the MINED Statistics Directorate.

Table No. 3 below shows the distribution of the current EXCELENCIA Network schools by modality and department, as of March 2007.

Table 3. The EXCELENCIA Network Schools by modality and department

Department	Multi-grade	Multi-grade Bilingual	Regular	Regular Bilingual	Total	Mentor Schools	Satellite schools	Total
Boaco	43		18		61	8	53	61
Carazo	28		16		44	11	33	44
Chinandega	56		39		95	19	76	95
Chontales	56		19		75	12	63	75
Estelí	25		18		43	8	35	43
Granada	36		17		53	14	39	53
Jinotega	47		17		64	10	54	64
León	67		23		90	23	67	90
Madriz	52		17		69	11	58	69
Managua	29		48		77	24	53	77
Masaya	11		26		37	12	25	37
Matagalpa	75		30		105	18	87	105
Nueva Segovia	53		21		74	12	62	74
Excelencia RAAN	8		1		9	1	8	9
Fadcanic RAAN	11	18	8	18	55	12	43	55
Excelencia RAAS	22		10		32	5	27	32
Fadcanic RAAS	10	3	12	10	35	10	25	35
Río San Juan	24		12		36	8	28	36
Rivas	48		29		77	14	63	77
<b>Total</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1131</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>899</b>	<b>1131</b>

Source: Excelencia Project, March, 2007

A total of 7,369 teachers (5,910 female and 1,459 male) work in the EXCELENCIA network schools as of March 2007 representing 25% of the total number of teachers registered by the MINED at the primary public schools.

Table No. 4 below shows the distribution of those teachers by gender and department:

*Table 4. Number of teachers in the EXCELENCIA Schools*

<b>Department</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>Total</b>
Boaco	301	41	342
Carazo	266	49	315
Chinandega	558	101	659
Chontales	321	42	363
Estelí	261	52	313
Granada	302	72	374
Jinotega	340	65	405
León	410	49	459
Madriz	257	84	341
Managua	651	193	844
Masaya	365	78	443
Matagalpa	477	134	611
Nueva Segovia	366	49	415
RAAN	235	169	404
RAAS	269	198	467
Rio San Juan	164	29	193
Rivas	367	54	421
<b>Total</b>	<b>5910</b>	<b>1459</b>	<b>7369</b>

## **B. Training**

A total of 9,208 people (7,581 females and 1,627 males) have participated in the different training events organized by EXCELENCIA, both at the national and local levels throughout the first quarter of 2007, for a grand total of 31,314 people who have participated in training courses carried out by EXCELENCIA since the beginning of the Project. Table No. 5 below shows the training activities for the quarter, by gender and duration.

Please refer to the table on the next page.

Table 5: Training Activities January - March 2007, by gender and duration

Type of Event	1 Day		2 Days		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Meeting of directors of regular primary school centers where the new curriculum is being validated	113	36			149
Meeting of directors of multi-grade primary school centers where the new curriculum is being validated.	43	24			67
Technical meeting with departmental directors and advisors.			255	99	354
Workshop on significant expressions strategy for 1st grade.			193	15	208
Workshop on evaluation, training and planning of activities with pedagogical advisors.			97	61	158
Workshop on evaluation, training and planning of activities with departmental delegates	21	15			36
Workshop on evaluation, training and planning of activities with municipal delegates.	86	56			142
Workshop on evaluation, training and planning of activities with mentor schools directors.			131	37	168
Training workshop with new mentor schools directors			30	15	45
Local workshops of mentor schools with their satellite schools	2970	764			3734
Local workshops for first and second grade local teachers			3628	500	4128
Workshop for the technical experts of the MINED Primary School Directorate	14	5			19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3247</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>4334</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>9208</b>

### C) Resource Centers

Five new Resource Centers were set up during this first quarter of 2007, and they are hosted in the following schools:

- Mentor School María Teresa Martínez, in Rivas
- Mentor School Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, in Matagalpa
- Mentor School Hérmenes Gómez, in Nueva Segovia
- Mentor School Tomás Martínez, in Chinandega
- Mentor School Jacinta and Francisco, in León

These resource centers, along with the four ones set up during the last quarter of 2006, are ready to be inaugurated when the MINED and USAID deem it appropriate.

## D) Expansion Activities in the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions (FADCANIC)

Through FADCANIC, EXCELENCIA is currently serving a total of 90 schools on the Caribbean Coast. Forty-seven (47) of those have already been working in BASE II and 43 are the new ones incorporated up to date. Table No. 6 below shows the number of schools served by region and school type.

Table 6. Schools served by EXCELENCIA in the Autonomous Regions

Region	Mentor schools	Satellite schools	Total
RAAN	11	44	55
RAAS	9	26	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>90</b>

In the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions, FADCANIC has continued implementing an expansion of the APA methodology in the schools through teacher and student training on the different components. Progress has also been made in the development of bilingual materials for the application of the new curriculum in grades 3 and 4 of multi-grade primary schools.

The tables below show the trainings developed and conducted by FADCANIC during this quarter:

Tables 7a and 7b. Trainings developed and conducted by FADCANIC

### 7a. Autonomous Region of the South Atlantic (RAAS)

Type of Event	Female	Male	Total
Training workshop on teaching practice with the APA Methodology for students of the Rigoberto Cabezas Teachers College	68	40	108
Induction workshops for the application of the APA methodology in four RAAS municipalities	197	53	250
17 Training workshops on student government organization and functions	273	282	555
<b>Total</b>	<b>538</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>913</b>

### 7b. Autonomous Region of the North Atlantic (RAAN)

Type of Event	Female	Male	Total
13 workshops for mentor and satellite school directors	43	50	93
Workshops carried out by trained school directors at their schools	323	357	680
Training workshops for the parents associations and student councils at Mentor Schools	<b>Students</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Total</b>
	170	275	445
<b>Total</b>			<b>1218</b>

In both regions FADCANIC facilitators have also carried out visits to support each of the new schools which have been incorporated into the network. Experience sharing meetings have been organized and carried out among schools that have already worked in the BASE project and the new schools being incorporated. The training events have always been developed and carried out in the participant's mother tongues. This has promoted the motivation of local teachers and technical staff and has ensured better participation of all attendees in those events.

Thus, the project is currently receiving a decisive effort from all regional education authorities.

## **E) Achievements for Result No. 1.**

- *EXCELENCIA did not cease activities during turnover of authorities.*

In spite of being a fairly difficult quarter because of the change of education authorities in the country, EXCELENCIA decided to give an example of strength and continued its field operations without any delays. This decision has made it possible to continue with the goals set forth.

- *EXCELENCIA has significantly increased the amount of people trained.*

Only during this first quarter, EXCELENCIA has reached 11,339 people (9,208 in the Pacific Coast and 2,131 in the Caribbean Coast) through its national and local training sessions.

- *Activities in the Caribbean Coast progress according to plan*

## **II. RESULT NO. 2. NEW CURRICULUM BASED ON COMPETENCIES FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION THAT INCLUDES BILINGUAL INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION VALIDATED AND INCORPORATED INTO THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

### **A) Follow-up to New Curriculum Validation**

In order to follow-up with the validation for the new curriculum, two new National Meetings with school directors and teachers from the sample of schools participating in the validation process were carried out. One hundred forty-nine (149) participants (113 female and 36 male) attended the regular primary school meeting while sixty-seven (67) participants (43 females and 24 males) attended the meeting for multi-grade primary schools, for a total of 216 participants.

In addition, the observation visits made by technical staff hired by the project, in close coordination with the Curriculum Development Directorate, also continued during this quarter. Modifications to and improvement of the validated educational materials were also completed with the information gathered during the meetings and visits.

## **B) Improvement of Curriculum Materials Based on Competencies**

The specialists hired by EXCELENCIA to incorporate the observations resulting from the validation process into the new curriculum materials successfully finished their work and incorporated all adjustments suggested by teachers into the curricular materials.

## **C) Delivery of New Curriculum Materials to the MINED**

EXCELENCIA delivered the materials for the new curriculum to the MINED. All changes suggested during the validation process have been incorporated into the materials and they were delivered to the Curriculum Development Directorate on CDs in PDF format. As a result, the new MINED authorities decided to extend the curriculum consultation process to new civil society organizations, and asked the project for the reproduction of 1,350 copies of the CDs with the materials (630 including the contents of regular primary education and 720 with the contents of multi-grade primary education).

## **D) Expansion of the Validation Process**

The new MINED authorities decided to extend the new curriculum consultation process during the current school year, before starting their definite reproduction and distribution. The Minister of Education sent a formal request to EXCELENCIA to continue providing technical and financial assistance for the process. The Minister's request was sent to USAID to initiate the modification process of the Project's Cooperative Agreement to include this additional commitment. EXCELENCIA supported the Curriculum Development Directorate and assisted in the plan and budget preparation for this second phase of the validation process. As a result, the Project's Technical Coordinator became a member of the Technical Committee created by the MINED for this activity.

## **E) Production of Materials for the Bilingual Intercultural Education**

The production of curriculum materials for bilingual intercultural education continues as planned, but with small modifications, which are due to the dynamics of the work itself (See Annex).

The specialists contracted for preparing the bilingual intercultural education materials in the RAAN decided to work in a collective manner. Even though this modality has some clear advantages when integrating contents, it is also a bit slower. For this reason, the RAAN team has had to reschedule its production calendar. Two meetings for reviewing materials for mathematics and Languages (in native language) were carried out in this region during this quarter. These reviews are leading to improvements in the quality of the materials.

## **F) Achievements for Result No. 2**

*- Final production of materials for the new curriculum was completed.*

The production of materials for the new curriculum has been completed and all the changes stemming from the validation process have been incorporated.

*-The materials for the application of the new curriculum have been delivered to the MINED.*

The materials and sufficient copies for the expansion of the validation process decided by the new education authorities have been delivered to the MINED.

*- The MINED formally requested continuing EXCELENCIA's technical assistance to the validation process.*

The new MINED authorities decided to expand the validation process during this school year and to achieve that goal they formally requested EXCELENCIA's technical assistance, thereby acknowledging the high of the work carried out so far by EXCELENCIA in this regard.

*- Progress with the preparation of materials for the Intercultural Bilingual Education in the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions..*

## **III. RESULT NUMBER 3: LONGITUDINAL STUDIES AND OTHER STUDIES TO EVALUATE THE PROJECT'S IMPACT AND FIELD STUDIES TO ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE CHANNELS FOR IMPROVING THE TRANSITION TO PRIMARY EDUCATION**

### **A) First Annual Study 2006**

The First Annual Study 2006 on Mentor Schools has been completed during this quarter and it is ready to be published during next quarter. Its publication will be officially announced and presented during an event where education-related civil society organizations will be invited to participate.

### **B) Annual Study 2007, Student Assessment**

It was agreed with the MINED authorities that the Annual Study for the year 2007 will focus on evaluating student academic achievement within the framework of the new curriculum. In this way, the implementation process of the curriculum will be complemented, providing the MINED with the means to evaluate some of its contents.

It was agreed that the 2007 Annual Study will evaluate the academic achievement in the subject areas Language and Mathematics of third grade students in a sample of schools that have participated in the validation process. At the same time the study aims to determine factors associated with student academic achievement through an analysis of background information.

EXCELENCIA has already prepared the work plan and budget for the study and it has successfully secured additional office space with the MINED. The process of identifying and hiring of the local staff that will participate in the study has been started.

### **C) Follow-up to Data Processing and Consolidation of Project Indicators**

During this quarter we have continued monitoring all Project indicators through the processing and consolidation of updated information on field activities. We currently have an updated database on the number of network schools and their enrollment information as well as the data on participation in Project training sessions.

### **D) Systemizing the New Curriculum Validation Process**

A local consultant was contracted for the systematization and documentation of the validation process for the new curriculum contents and materials, which was carried out in close coordination with the MINED. The consultant has collected the proper information and documents and has presented a report which is currently being analyzed and edited for its subsequent publication this year. EXCELENCIA considers that the preparation and validation process for the validation of materials of the new curriculum has been carried out in very little time and produced work of excellent quality. EXCELENCIA believes that this effort could serve as an example for similar activities in other countries.

### **E) Study on Experiences with Transition to Secondary Education**

EXCELENCIA also hired a consultant to start the process of identification and analysis of experiences with transition to secondary school. The schools to carry out the study have been chosen, the methodology and instruments have been developed and prepared with the consultant, and a preliminary report has already been submitted. The project expects to have a final report ready during the next quarter.

### **F) Study on Experiences with Transition to Primary School (Save the Children)**

Save the Children presented the EXCELENCIA initiative “Education for Transition to Primary School” as well as a study on this topic to the new MINED authorities. This has also been presented to the National Pre-School Education Commission which is a network of 22 education agencies. The initiative and study were well received by the Commission.

During this quarter, the Action Plan on “Education for Transition to Primary School” has been prepared and it will be go through the corresponding validation process. In

order to prepare this Action Plan, three national consultants were contracted by the project. The Plan was presented to the MINED authorities in Chinandega.

In order to start the implementation of the Action Plan, six Chinandega schools (from a cluster of 12) were selected. Four of those schools will be experimental and two will serve as control schools. A kit of materials was delivered to the four experimental schools and activities envisaged by the plan, such as “Enrollment Promotion” and “Welcome to School” events have already been started in coordination with the MINED and the local community. Directors, pedagogical advisors, and teachers of the four schools and their satellite schools were trained on the plan and their feedback on it was requested and received. Information gathering for the purpose establishing a baseline for the six selected schools will be completed next quarter.

Save the Children has published a summary of the study “Successful Transition to First Grade, a Key Factor for Early Childhood Development” and it is in the process of arranging the translation of the document into English.

### **G) Achievements for Result 3**

- *Editing of the report of the First Annual Research Study on mentor schools.*

The report of the First Annual Study has been edited and it is ready for publication.

- *Planning of the Second Annual Evaluation Study on student achievement evaluation.*

The theme for the second study has been agreed with the MINED and its execution has already started

- *Initial study on Transition to Secondary School*

The comparative study on Experiences with Transition to Secondary School has been started.

- *Education Action Plan for Transition to Primary School*

Save the Children has started the implementation of its Action Plan for the Transition to Primary School in six Chinandega schools.

- *Database updating for follow-up of Project indicators.*

The database that allows monitoring the project indicators and the corresponding USAID Strategic Objective is systematically updated.

### **IV. Other Activities Developed by the Project during this Quarter**

The EXCELENCIA project, along with the rest of the projects implemented by the USAID Human Investment Office, was formally presented to the new Minister of Education.

All project staff participated in an evaluation and planning retreat where they analyzed the different alternatives in view of the guidelines provided by the new education authorities.

In addition, EXCELENCIA developed a series of planning sessions for this year during this quarter.

In the administrative area, fungible materials were distributed to all mentor schools of the EXCELENCIA network, for an approximate value of US\$ 370,000.00.

## **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER**

The new MINED authorities have recently sent a letter instructing the project to stop all training until the National Education and Training Council for Human Resources of Education is set up. Clearly, this completely changes all work plans for this quarter. However, the project plans to continue the expansion and support to network schools making sure that this measure does not adversely affect the schools' development.

The formal request from the Minister of Education for EXCELENCIA to continue supporting the expansion of the validation process of the new curriculum materials through the "Great National Consultation Process with Government Agencies, Civil Society and Population to Participate in the National Basic Curriculum" has been sent to USAID, however a formal response has not been received yet. If we receive a positive response from USAID for the participation of EXCELENCIA in the consultation, the project will immediately commence work according to the work plan prepared by the Curriculum Development Directorate.

The 2006 Annual Study on the EXCELENCIA mentor schools will be published and all outcomes will be presented at a forum. Moreover, a report on the systematization of the validation process for the new curriculum based on competencies will be published.

EXCELENCIA will begin the 2007 Annual Study on student assessment and to that end will hire the necessary national consulting staff and place its technical team in the offices provided by the MINED.

In addition, the project will organize the inauguration of the nine resource centers set up during the past two quarters.

## SUCCESS STORIES

### ***Pedagogical advisors testimonies on success of EXCELENCIA***

<p><b>Edwin Ernesto Rodríguez</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for the Municipalities of Juigalpa and Cuapa</b></p> <p><b>5 years of experience as a Teacher and 2 years of experience as a Pedagogical Advisor</b></p>	
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### **Open Mind**

“When the EXCELENCIA Program started in Chontales, some of us (teachers) were somewhat skeptical because we thought it would mean more work for us. Now, it is very true it keeps us busy for longer periods of time, but all that is well worth it because we see that the students of EXCELENCIA schools are much more motivated to learn.

I also see that the EXCELENCIA schools demand as much work from the students as from the teachers. According to the EXCELENCIA method, the students are the ones who build their own learning and skills.

Parental participation at schools has also increased with EXCELENCIA. Before it was very difficult to get the parents to participate in the education of their children; they all thought that their children’s education was the sole responsibility of the school and teacher. Now, parents are much more interested in their children’s learning and they even prepare educational materials with the teachers for the resource centers.

There have been many achievements obtained with EXCELENCIA. Last year we witnessed excellent participation of our students and teachers in municipal and national events where they demonstrated education quality. The best elementary school teacher at the department level is from one of our EXCELENCIA schools.

We believe that the EXCELENCIA schools are just as all schools should be in the future and we hope to strengthen them so that they start expanding the model to others as well. As a result of my visits to these schools I can say that there the quality of education has improved greatly, and that our teachers have grown in all aspects due to this experience. To me, it is a fact that in the future all schools will work using the same method. We hope this vision starts being introduced to the secondary school as well”.

<p><b>Isabel Haydeé González</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for the</b></p> <p><b>Department of Jinotega</b></p> <p><b>10 years of experience as a Teacher</b></p>	
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### **Students lose their fear to communicate and to express their opinions**

“When EXCELENCIA arrived some teachers resisted accepting it. They believed that it would be as many other projects that use teachers just to experiment their own ideas about education. But all of them changed their minds when they saw that it offered an effective method to improve the quality in the classrooms and that teachers’ experiences and opinions were taken into account.

I can see the change in the way teachers work with children since EXCELENCIA arrived in Jinotega. At the mentor and satellite schools academic performance has greatly improved and children participate actively and creatively in the classroom processes. There has even been certain level of competition among schools and some satellite schools have surpassed their mentor school.

There is a good relationship between teachers and parents at the EXCELENCIA schools because they see their children’s progress. They say *“My children never asked direct questions before, now I have to be prepared to answer them, they wouldn’t join other children and now they do and work in groups, in teams and it has been very effective for them.”* I have seen some parents who do not know how to read or write but nonetheless they show great interest for their children’s education, they bring them to school and pick them up, it is noticeable they are making a great sacrifice so that their children can learn and improve themselves.

With the EXCELENCIA method students learn to investigate and to express themselves, their self-esteem increases, and they lose their fear to communicate with others. In Pantasma people tell the story that once the Minister of Education came to visit and a boy sang a song he had composed himself and asked the Minister for his phone number because he wanted to talk with him. A few days later the boy called the Minister to talk about the problems his school was experiencing. They also say that after that experience the boy always wanted to call the Minister of Education for everything.”

<p><b>Marta Eudomilia Alvir Soza</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for the</b></p> <p><b>Department of Nueva Segovia</b></p> <p><b>18 years of experience as a Pedagogical</b></p> <p><b>Advisor</b></p>	
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**With EXCELENCIA Student Achievement has Increased Dramatically**

“It is easy to talk about what we have achieved with EXCELENCIA. At the departmental level every year we had problems with the percentage of children passing first grade. In 2005, we only achieved a 59% passing rate. This past year 2006, using the *Significant Expressions* method promoted by EXCELENCIA for that grade, we achieved a 70% passing rate average for the whole department. In the EXCELENCIA mentor schools we surpassed that goal, reaching an 80% passing rate average.

In my department, we try to improve the quality of education in all schools, taking as a reference what is done in the EXCELENCIA mentor and satellite schools. At this time, we have 69 EXCELENCIA schools in the department, but in the case of the first grade we could say that all schools in the department are working with the EXCELENCIA *Significant Expressions* Method. At the experience-sharing events we hear statements such as: ‘*With these Significant Expressions I can assure you that your children will learn to read and write but not in a mechanical manner or by memorization, but rather they will know how to do create, read and write understanding what they are doing.*’ Teachers value this strategy and consider it very successful. They realize their students learn to read and write quickly. They are amazed at the flexibility it provides, and they have the opportunity to create activities and to get together and share their experiences.

EXCELENCIA also strengthened the parents’ and students’ participation in the decision-making at their schools. Parents have organized and set up grade level commissions, they have academic performance commissions, material development commissions, school cleaning commissions and food preparation commissions. We now have very high participation levels (85%) of first and second grade parents. The same happens with the student councils and a new movement of monitor students is being created to support schools which are not yet part of the project.”

<p><b>Bismarck González Pavón</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for Muelle de los Bueyes</b></p> <p><b>22 years of experience as a Pedagogical Advisor</b></p>	
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### **Teachers become great innovators**

“The most noticeable thing has been the attitude change in the teachers since the EXCELENCIA Project began. Before EXCELENCIA our teachers were traditionalists and now they are more innovative and creative and have become knowledge builders.

I think that the method spread by the EXCELENCIA Project is interesting and novel. In practical terms, it is a completely new vision of education where the students participate and build their own learning in a more practical, reflexive and innovative manner and that participation in the process allows students to develop their own oral expression and artistic skills.

The EXCELENCIA schools are quickly gaining a lot of prestige; parents realize that the teaching is of high quality and that they generate more student enthusiasm as well as trust in them. In addition, parents organize themselves through school associations and create work, academic, cultural, and health commissions, and that when they are organized the schools train them to actively participate in school activities.

I feel very proud that EXCELENCIA is working in my department. This project is the future of the new education in Nicaragua because we [pedagogical advisors] have seen positive results with it.”

<p><b>Jilma Urbina Rosales</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for the</b></p> <p><b>Department of Boaco</b></p> <p><b>11 years of experience as a Pedagogical</b></p> <p><b>Advisor and 2 and a half years as a</b></p> <p><b>Teacher</b></p>	
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### **We are building knowledge**

“I see that in my department all teachers are very aware of the support EXCELENCIA brings to achieve quality education in our schools.

The APA Methodology that EXCELENCIA promotes is very effective: the students build their own knowledge; they learn, practice, and apply in their daily life what they have learned at school.

I am thankful that they have taken into consideration the Ministry of Education to implement methodologies such as these and that they have trained us on their use and application; and I can assure you that we will continue it because we are sure that it will only bring success for education.”

**Glezzy Auxiliadora García**

**Pedagogical Advisor for Carazo**

**11 years of experience as a Pedagogical Advisor, and 14 years of experience as a Teacher**



### **This is the time to learn**

“The EXCELENCIA Project support is a determining factor for teachers to be able to learn and grow in many senses, especially in the education quality we provide in our schools.

The methodology of EXCELENCIA started in the multi-grade schools and was taken to regular schools. With this methodology it is not necessary to have sophisticated educational materials or textbooks fully updated to carry out each one of the activities.

Parental participation in support of the schools has always been something very difficult to achieve. However, with EXCELENCIA we have all seen how parents have responded positively and have shown their interest to learn more about how to help their children in their education. In some schools now I can see more parental participation not only in the activities that are ordinarily organized and carried out by the school, but also working on commissions in charge of preparing educational materials and supporting teachers in the classroom. If parents are aware of what their kids are doing in the classroom, at home they can provide better answers to them and their children can achieve better academic results at school.”

<p><b>Rosa Margarita Castrillo</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for Corinto</b></p> <p><b>19 years of experience as a Pedagogical Advisor and 7 years of experience as a Teacher</b></p>	
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### **Pioneer School**

“Working with teachers we have been able to prove that the APA Methodology works well because what students learn in the classrooms is then practiced and applied in their homes.

In the schools where EXCELENCIA works there is a lot of participation from parents who organize themselves to carry out many activities, such as preparing food for the students, cleaning the school, and doing small repair projects. In addition, companies and representatives from the private sectors visit the schools to sponsor and reward good students and to give them school materials and uniforms. Some parents become members of academic commissions and support and encourage students to learn. Even when teachers cannot go to class one day, a father or a mother substitutes the teacher and teaches the class using the work plan left by the teacher.

EXCELENCIA has opened many doors to teachers to improve ourselves professionally: it keeps us up-to-date, trained, and motivated. I feel proud about the experience we have with the project.”

<p><b>Eleonora Urbina</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for Nandaime</b></p> <p><b>6 years of experience as a Pedagogical Advisor and 22 years of experience as a Teacher</b></p>	
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**With EXCELENCIA parental participation improves greatly**

“I feel that with the education and training I’ve received through EXCELENCIA, my work, and the work of many of my colleagues, has improved greatly. I can also see that in the schools where EXCELENCIA works parental participation in the classroom and the student councils has improved a great deal. Parents have become more closely integrated in those schools. In the San Caralampio School, for example, there is always a parent supporting the teacher’s work. While the teacher takes care of first grade, the parent stays with the second grade to maintain discipline.

Teachers from many schools from the rest of the municipality come to the San Caralampio School to observe classes and to see how the EXCELENCIA methodology is applied, how the learning corners work, and also how we work at different times in the classroom.

EXCELENCIA benefits us as teachers because it updates our knowledge. I think that the APA Methodology is excellent because makes the students independent, and it develops their autonomy because they learn by doing and build their own knowledge. Now we are not teaching children as if knowledge was a cooking recipe to be memorized, but are using this methodology to allow students to discover knowledge on their own and at their own pace. I feel that with this methodology, students learn a lot more.”

<p><b>Joaquín Carmona Ramírez</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor in the RAAS: El Rama, Muelle de los Bueyes and Nueva Guinea</b></p> <p><b>1 year of experience as a Pedagogical Advisor and 4 years of experience as a Teacher</b></p>	
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**With EXCELENCIA students are applying what they learn**

“To me, the EXCELENCIA Project means that we are improving the quality of education, and strengthening not only the organization of schools, student councils and school management, but also teachers’ organization.

Teachers in my department have told me that working with the EXCELENCIA methodology makes classroom processes planning and evaluation much easier. For that reason teachers have positively embraced this methodology.

I have also learned a lot with the EXCELENCIA Project. When I go to EXCELENCIA schools I see students preparing materials with the teacher and that is something I had never seen before in our schools. Now, as a pedagogical advisor I feel more motivated to work with teachers and to be involved in our schools.

On the other hand, I also see how students learn practical things that they can apply in their daily lives. Parents have also seen this because now their children help them at home using and applying what they have learned at school. For the first time ever parents feel that what their children are learning at school will help them achieve concrete things in life in the future.

Teachers from schools where EXCELENCIA is not working yet are realizing what is happening and they want to be a part of this experience. In my department, the demand of schools to be a part of the EXCELENCIA network is increasingly higher.”

<p><b>José Rafael Hernández</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogical Advisor for Matagalpa</b></p> <p><b>14 years of experience as a Pedagogical Advisor and 8 years of experience as a Teacher</b></p>	
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### **Now the students are really learning**

“EXCELENCIA has come to give us guidelines for establishing good communication between parents, students, and teachers. The method that EXCELENCIA offers helps students build their own knowledge. It also helps them to learn things to apply in their own life and to be the authors of their own learning. The APA methodology is strengthening their competencies in language and mathematics. I have seen many changes not only in the teachers’ attitudes but also the parents’ attitudes as well. They say: *“children are really learning now.”*”

## ANNEXES

**Table 8. Mentor Schools incorporated in the current quarter**

Nr.	Code	Name of the School	Department	Municipality	Type
1	16278	Pedro Joaquin Chamorro School Center.	Boaco	Boaco	Multigrade
2	16459	Alexis Arguello School Center.	Boaco	Camoapa	Multigrade
3	15263	Mario Arana Román	Carazo	Jinotepe	Regular
4	15359	Ruben Dario School Center	Carazo	Santa Teresa	Regular
5	12394	Villa Dolores School Center	Chinandega	Chichigalpa	Multigrade
6	12127	Maria Auxiliadora Autonomous School Center	Chinandega	Chinandega	Regular
7	11687	Remigio Salazar Autonomous School Center	Chinandega	El Viejo	Regular
8	11727	Pantaléon Educational Center (Monte Rosa)	Chinandega	El Viejo	Regular
9	16766	Enrique Tierno Galvan	Chontales	Juigalpa	Regular
10	16955	Maximo Jerez	Chontales	S. Domingo	Regular
11	11260	Bertha Briones School Center	Estelí	Estelí	Regular
12	11027	San Antonio School Center	Estelí	Pueblo Nuevo	Multigrade
13	15438	Padre Misiere	Granada	Granada	Regular
14	15484	Jose Dolores Estrada School	Granada	Granada	Regular
15	15666	Rosa Matilde Romero	Granada	Nandaime	Regular
16	18273	Amanda Lopez Pineda School Center	Jinotega	Jinotega	Multigrade
17	18080	Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra School Center	Jinotega	Pantasma	Regular
18	13245	Ricardo Morales Aviles	León	Nagarote	Regular
19	12760	Hnos de Hamburgo School Center	León	Quezalguaque	Multigrade
20	10635	Cacique Nicarao (Aguas Calientes)	Madriz	Somoto	Multigrade
21	10738	15 de Septiembre School Center	Madriz	Telpaneca	Multigrade
22	13839	Modesto Armijo Lozano	Managua	Managua	Regular
23	14187	Santa Clara School Center	Managua	Managua	Regular
24	14378	14 de Septiembre Autonomous School Center	Managua	Managua	Regular
25	14545	Naciones Unidas Autonomous School Center	Managua	Managua	Regular
26	14985	Maestro Calixto Moya School (Macario Brenes)	Masaya	Masatepe	Regular
27	14837	Carlos Ramirez Velasquez School Center	Masaya	Masaya	Regular
28	18930	Maximo Napoleon Baldelomar	Matagalpa	Matagalpa	Regular
29	18426	Francisca Garcia de Garcia School Center	Matagalpa	San Isidro	Regular
30	10158	Jose Dolores Estrada School Center	Nueva Segovia	Dipilto	Regular
31	10111	Sofia Moncada	Nueva Segovia	Santa Maria	Multigrade
32	22154	Nicarao	Nueva Segovia	Wiwili de N. S	Regular
33	20987	Ivan Sequeira Castro School Center	RAAS	El Rama	Multigrade
34	20683	Julio Lira Gonzalez	RAAS	Paiwas	Regular
35	21712	Juan Pablo II	Río San Juan	El Almendro	Multigrade
36	21674	Esc. 15 de Septiembre (Empalme Palos Raros)	Río San Juan	Morrito	Multigrade
37	21860	San Vicente School Center (La Culebra)	Río San Juan	San Carlos	Multigrade
38	21784	San Cristobal (Never Oporta)	Río San Juan	San Miguelito	Regular
39	16030	Koos Koster	Rivas	Altagracia	Regular
40	15806	Ruben Dario	Rivas	Belen	Regular

**Table 9. New Schools Incorporated into the EXCELENCIA Network in the Current Quarter**

Ner.	Code	Name of the School	Department	Municipality
1	10111	Soffa Moncada School *	Nueva Segovia	Santa María
2	12760	Hermanos de Hamburgo School Center	León	Quezalguaque
3	14378	14 de Septiembre Autonomous School Center	Managua	Managua
4	14545	Naciones Unidas Autonomous School Center	Managua	Managua
5	14985	Maestro Calixto Moya School	Masaya	Masatepe
6	15484	José Dolores Estrada School	Granada	Granada
7	11727	Pantaleón Monterrosa School Center	Chinandega	El Viejo
8	16955	Máximo Jerez School *	Chontales	Santo Domingo
9	18426	Francisca García School Center *	Matagalpa	San Isidro
10	20683	Julio Lira González School *	RAAS	Paiwas
11	22154	Escuela Nicarao*	Nueva Segovia	Wiwili de N. Segovia

\* Schools in new municipalities

**Table 10. Teachers Currently Working in EXCELENCIA schools, by Level of Education**

Education level	Male	Female	Total	%
Secondary	737	228	965	13.10
College graduate (but not in Education)	25	9	34	0.46
Bachelors Degree in Education Sciences	193	52	245	3.32
Special Education Teacher	2	0	2	0.03
Pre-school Teacher	23	9	32	0.43
Primary School Teacher	4540	1073	5613	76.17
Teacher of Musical Arts	67	14	81	1.10
Master in Education Sciences	23	12	35	0.47
Other college degree	28	1	29	0.39
Other college degree not related to education	46	6	52	0.71
Primary School Graduate	61	21	82	1.11
Teacher of Basic Education Cycle	7	2	9	0.12
Teacher of Middle School Education	98	24	122	1.66
Middle level technician but not a teacher	28	4	32	0.43
Superior level technician in Education Sciences	32	4	36	0.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,910</b>	<b>1,459</b>	<b>7,369</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## Tables 11a and 11b. Education Materials given to MINED for the Application of the New Curriculum

### 11a) For Regular Primary School:

Component	Grade	Number of CDs	Contents	Number of Copies
Language and Literature	1 <sup>st</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup>	1	6 SW and 6 DS	80
Mathematics	1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 SW and 3 DS	80
	4 <sup>th</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup>	1	3 SW and 3 DS	90
Communication and Civics	1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 SW and 3 DS	90
	4 <sup>th</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup>	1	3 SW and 3 DS	90
Life and Environment Sciences	3 <sup>rd</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup>	1	4 SW and 4 DS	90
Geography and Social Studies	3 <sup>rd</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup>	1	4 SW and 4 DS	90
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>610</b>

SW: Students Workbook

DS: Didactical Suggestions

### 11b) For Multi-grade Primary School:

Component	Grade	Number of CDs	Contents	Number of Copies
Language and Literature	1 <sup>st</sup>	1	3 Guides	90
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1	3 Guides	90
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 Guides	90
Life and Environment Sciences	4 <sup>th</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup>	1	9 Guides	80
Mathematics	1 <sup>st</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup>	1	6 Guides	90
	4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup>	1	6 Guides	90
Integrated Areas	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1	2 Guides	90
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 Guides	90
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>710</b>

**Total copies given to MINED: 1,320**