ACTIVE SCHOOLS

Our Convictions for Improving the Quality of Education

Professor Oscar Mogollón and Marina Solano
Editor: Ana Flórez

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Oscar Mogollón Jaimes

Educator and creator of the Escuela Nueva model and the Active School approach. Professor Mogollón studied Psychopedagogy at the University of Pamplona, Colombia. He started his career in 1964 as teacher and later school principal of a one-teacher school in his native Colombia. His success as a teacher led him to the development of 120 Escuela Nueva model schools, establishing the Pamplona region as a national model and serving as the basis for subsequent program implementation in other regions of Colombia. Professor Mogollón directed the Normal School in Pamplona and worked with the Rural Education Institute at the University of Pamplona. In 1979, he left the Pamplona region to focus on scaling up the Escuela Nueva model to include all regions of Colombia. While working at the Ministry of Education in Colombia, he coordinated the organization, training, and deployment of local teacher-community teams in support of the national-scale implementation of Escuela Nueva. Professor Mogollón also directed the planning and development of materials and the design and implementation of a system of local teams to promote Escuela Nueva in Colombia. In 1992, he joined AED's education team to work on the design and implementation of the Active School approach in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru and Equatorial Guinea. Professor Mogollón passed away in 2010.

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2011

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Acronyms

AED	Academy for Educational Development
AprenDes	USAID's Education Program in Peru
BASE	USAID's Basic Education Strengthening Program in Nicaragua
BEST	USAID's Basic Education Strengthening Program in Guatemala
CONEI	School-based councils in Peru
EU	One-single classroom school (Escuela Unitaria)
GRADE	Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo Perú, Consulting firm
ILC	Inter-learning teacher circles
LPA	Learn, Practice, Apply methodology
LRCs	Learning Resource Centers
MOE	Ministry of Education
NEU	New Unitary Schools of Guatemala
PRODEGE	Educational Development Program for Equatorial Guinea (Programa de Desarrollo Educativo de Guinea Ecuatorial)
TTT	Teachers Training Teachers
TOT	Training of Trainers
UGELs	Decentralized local units of the Ministry of Education (Unidades de Gestión Local Peru)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Oscar Mogollón visiting with students from Equatorial Guinea

Acknowledgments

This book explains the principles and driving forces behind the creation of the Active School (*Escuela Activa*) model. The Active School is the result of the lifelong journey of Professor Oscar Mogollón Jaimes and his wife, Marina Solano, that began with starting the *Escuela Nueva* in a small school in rural Colombia. Over a 40-year career, Professor Mogollón adapted, innovated, and refined the Active School model in local versions throughout Latin America and Africa. The twelve convictions detailed in this book are the legacy of Professor Mogollón and Marina Solano, reflecting their foundational beliefs about education, teachers, students, families and schools that informed and empowered the expansion and practical application of this powerful and influential approach to rural education. Since 1992, Professor Mogollón worked with the Academy for Educational Development (AED) education teams and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to apply his singular focus on improving educational opportunities for rural communities in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, and Equatorial Guinea.

The process of assembling this book began in 2008 when Professor Mogollón met with project teams to discuss the accomplishments of the projects implementing the Active School approach. In those meetings, it was evident that the body of knowledge available on the Active School approach was restricted to the individual accomplishments of each of the projects and that a conceptual framework of the model did not exist. We realized that what was missing was a document written about the model from the unique perspective of Professor Mogollón using his own voice as the lead protagonist rather than the voice of each individual project. Surprisingly, Professor Mogollón had written a myriad of documents about the model but had let them become part of the collective voice of the projects. At that time, his story had still not been documented.

Professor Mogollón, Marina Solano and I began outlining this book during a trip to Peru while visiting some schools under the AprenDes Project.

Subsequent drafts were shared between Professor Mogollón's office in Nicaragua and our headquarters in Washington until Professor Mogollón became seriously ill. His son, Diego Mogollón, helped him write the first outline of the document with the assistance of Kirsten Galisson. The process was lengthy. I engaged in long discussions with Professor Mogollón that allowed me to write some of the sections of this book. Unfortunately, I wrote the final pieces based on our conversations but without him by my side. Professor Mogollón passed away before we finished this document. I kept my promise to him that this book would reflect his deepest convictions about students, parents, and authorities, but, most important, about teachers, whom he always considered not only to be his colleagues but also to be the cornerstone of the entire educational process.

It would not have been possible to share the legacy of Professor Mogollón's lifelong project without the support of the technical team from the Global Education Center, to whom the authors extend our special thanks. We are particularly grateful to John Gillies, Jaime Niño, Carmen Siri, Antonieta Harwood, José Ignacio Mata, Bridget Drury, Kirsten Galisson, Kristin Brady, Francy Hays, and Sergio Ramírez for their valuable comments on and singular fondness for this model. We would also like to express our gratitude in particular for the support from the technical teams, facilitators, materials specialists, content area specialists, managers, and the entire staff of the projects in Peru, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Equatorial Guinea, who worked alongside Professor Mogollón in developing this model. Beryl Levinger, who worked with Professor Mogollón in Colombia, also played a significant role in supporting the development of this book.

Additionally, this book would not have come to fruition without the support of the thousands of teachers who believed in Professor Mogollón and who set themselves the task of observing and listening to the students, as Professor Mogollón would say, to support them in their learning and to make a happy, quality school. We also extend our thanks to the parents, school directors, and local and national authorities, and all of the USAID education officers in Latin

America for respecting the processes, believing in the model, and believing that quality educational opportunities can exist for the children of their nations.

This book is the translation of the original book written in Spanish and closely reflects the original version to avoid losing important concepts of Professors Mogollón's vision in translation. The structure of the document includes three main separated sections. The first section is a foreword written by Dr. Richard Kraft. The second section explains the twelve convictions of Professor Mogollón, which is the backbone of this book. Dr. Ray Chesterfield wrote the last section, as Professor Mogollón requested that Dr. Chesterfield write about his findings from evaluating the model. We would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Richard Kraft and Dr. Ray Chesterfield, educational specialists and friends of the Active School, for sharing their opinions about the model and about Professor Mogollón. Finally, it would not have been possible to publish this book without the support of Erin Monahan, Erik Lundgren, and Jean Bernard, for their editing and production assistance.

This book was a process of learning and accompaniment, just like everything Professor Mogollón did. However, above all, this book is the legacy of a passionate, visionary educator. This is a tribute to a great pioneer.

Ana Flórez, Senior Education Specialist

Foreword

Oscar Mogollón: A Personal Memory

by Richard Kraft
Professor Emeritus of Education, University of Colorado-Boulder

In 1990, I had the privilege of meeting perhaps the best-known man in the world, Nelson Mandela, shortly after he was released from prison. In 1997, I met a man, unknown to most people, but who changed my professional life and directly affected the lives of thousands of teachers and millions of children throughout Latin America and Africa, and whose ideas have been copied throughout the world. Oscar Mogollón was not a world-renowned politician like Mandela, nor an educational superstar author, such as Paulo Freire, but as an educational practitioner and visionary, he possibly changed more lives for the better than any other educator in the late 20th century.

In 1997, after 34 years as an educator in the United States and as an international consultant, I found myself on an evaluation project in the poorest, rural areas of Guatemala. At that time, I was discouraged enough that I had decided this was my last international work. Suddenly, however, I found myself utterly amazed and enchanted by the indigenous, bilingual, and Spanish-speaking schools I visited. I saw in action much of what I, and many others, had been writing and consulting about, with little success, for many decades. It was my first introduction to the New Unitary Schools of Guatemala (NEU), and my first introduction to one of the great educators of our time, Oscar Mogollón. Oscar was one of the founders of the *Escuela Nueva* movement in his home country of Colombia. After this one short evaluation, I became a firm believer that child-centered schools, reflective teaching, constructivist education, active learning, and a host of other wonderful theories from the rich world were not only possible, but that

these poor schools could become exemplars of outstanding education to the richest of nations. It has informed my work in more than 50 countries since that time.

Having served as a long-term evaluator in another Central American country, I wrote a short paper, "*Todo Cambia: Nada Cambia*" (Everything Changes: Nothing Changes). Like many other countries in the region, Nicaragua had been through a Reformed Curriculum, a Revolutionary Curriculum, a Transformed Curriculum, new Standards and Competencies, new textbooks, new teacher's guides, new assessments, and countless other attempts at improving its schools. Almost nothing had changed, that is, until Oscar Mogollón arrived. Oscar is one of the few individuals I have known who could work in the middle of a civil war in Guatemala or in a conflicted country such as Nicaragua and bring about a "whole school" reform, despite political chaos and conflict. When I asked what the greatest contribution of NEU was to Guatemala, teachers immediately replied that it was the creation of a generation of democratically committed young people. Oscar had the deepest faith in democracy I had ever encountered, but he didn't talk much about it. He just went about empowering parents, teachers, and children alike. His democratic schools have undoubtedly done more to bring about democracy than the multi-millions spent on "Democratic Initiatives" by national and multi-national donors.

After my many unsuccessful attempts at bringing about genuine, long-term change in schools throughout the world, I observed "Oscar's Method." Begin with one or two schools and their teachers, and then assist the spread of the vision upward throughout the system. Top-down reform does not work and never has. You can't employ enough supervisors or inspectors to force change, but when teachers see and experience successful change in their own classrooms, nothing can stop change. Everyone talks about teacher empowerment; Oscar put it into practice. His approach was Teachers Training Teachers (TTT), not Training of Trainers (TOT). Teachers were always at the forefront of everything he did, whether writing

teacher's guides or supplementary materials (with their names prominently displayed as co-authors), leading clusters of schools, as coordinators and speaking at regional and national conferences, and working with parents to co-create the best learning environment for the children. The memory I have embedded in my mind is that of Oscar sitting on a tiny chair in the most rural of villages listening to a handful of teachers reflecting on what went well or poorly in their classrooms that day. Rather than pontificating, Oscar knew that truly listening to others was the only path to change.

Oscar was one of those people who "thought outside the box." I will never forget when I asked him how he successfully got teachers to quit copying from books onto the board, and then having the children copy meaningless words into their notebooks. He said, "Its easy; all we did was come in with a saw, cut up the blackboards, and give the small pieces to the children, with a piece of chalk. The children should be doing the writing, not the teachers." To Oscar, nothing was a problem, just a challenge that could be confronted by people of goodwill. Despite coming out of a traditional system, Oscar intuitively recognized that children and teachers co-construct their own learning. I never heard him use the word, "constructivism," in his talks, but he practiced it throughout his life. Like any great leader, Oscar led by example and by recognizing that true leadership is "giving it away," not hoarding it for oneself.

He did not talk much about "child-friendly" schools, but you could not go into one of his transformed schools without the sound of children sharing their excitement about learning. The walls were never covered with "government posters," but rather by the colorful work of children. Parents were always welcome in the school, and when their illiteracy prevented them from reading to their children, the children read to their parents. Instead of the oft-heard excuse, "We have no librarian," Oscar had the children run the school library, and the number of books lost or stolen fell to almost zero. His schools exemplified the lessons that children can be responsible for books, governing the school, coordinating lunch programs with their

mothers, keeping the classroom and school clean without a janitorial staff, and even working with teachers on the academic improvement of their classrooms. In other words, children, like their parents and teachers, can be empowered.

Oscar was a devout Catholic Christian, who took Jesus' words seriously: "To do this unto the least of these" and "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for they are the Children of God." I never heard Oscar preach about his faith, however, and he was accepting of people of all faiths or no faith, but his belief system was deeply embedded, and it transformed those around him.

Oscar knew that you often had to start on the margins, in the poorest, rural areas, rather than among the middle-class, urban elites. So his most revolutionary educational work was often in multi-grade, rural classrooms. I will never forget visiting several of his schools on a difficult-to-visit island. On my return to the capital city, I mentioned these exceptional schools to the Minister of Education, and he immediately said their success must be due to their isolation and the fact that the Ministry of Education could not or did not visit them often. Oscar knew that if you can prove your success in the most backward of areas, without government interference, it can be done anywhere.

We often speak of "sustainability" in educational reform movements, and I will never forget when a government tried to close down one of his successful reform programs, the teachers rose up and declared that this was not a World Bank or U.S. program, despite its having been started with external change agents. This was their own national school and system and the government had no right to kill it. In other words, the new schools, with their many components, had truly become their own national model.

I was privileged to see Oscar a few weeks before his death from cancer, and even though his weight had dropped to well below 100 pounds, and he was losing his voice from the ravages of disease, he wanted to share his latest thoughts and ideas of what could be done in education, and his ongoing vision for children and young people. His mind never stopped, and his influence for good will carry on decades after his death. While the governments of several countries gave him national awards for his work, I had always wanted my university to give him an honorary doctorate. I will regret for the rest of my life not having started early enough on the process, as he died before I could get it done. I had been in the presence of greatness many times for 13 years and had not fully said thank you to a man who revitalized my career and was one of the 20th century's truly great educators.

Oscar Mogollón visiting with students in Equatorial Guinea

Introduction

The Active School is a comprehensive pedagogical approach that uses personalized instruction and the development of strong bonds between school and community to ensure that children learn the skills they need for life outside school. This comprehensive approach has been implemented since 1992, under the leadership of Professor Oscar Mogollón Jaimes in response to the challenges of the rural, one-teacher primary school. The Active School approach grew out of a participatory process of analyzing the complex issues affecting quality education in a multi-grade school, preserving the meaning of the rural school, successfully engaging the community and respecting cultural patterns. Ultimately, it is about giving back to teachers their indispensable place in the transformation of education.

The Active School has broken away from the traditional paradigm of assigning constant, routine, repetitive exercises to students as the only way to learn. The Active School breaks from traditional teaching theory because it defines meaningful learning as an action grounded in the student's context that enables the experience and discovery of knowledge. This concept builds on the theories of key educational innovators as Maria Montessori on the use of the senses, Friedrich Fröebel on play, Célestin Freinet on the importance of expression always tied to activity, and Jacques Delors' "learning by doing." It reengages the school's responsibility to produce the conditions that transform learning into a student-centered activity through manipulation, action, and experimentation. These theories treat children as competent persons, with interests and natural curiosity, with unique skills, with the potential to learn, and with the confidence to make important decisions on their own. This approach develops a whole child—self directed, confident, and capable of interacting with the world.

The Active School focuses its attention on children—their ideas, interests, and activities. However, the Active School goes even further by giving priority to children's interactions with their closest sources of knowledge: their classmates, teachers, families, school, community, and municipality. Because of all of these interactions, the Active School is seen as a *School of Interactions*.

The Active School approach has been implemented in Guatemala (since 1992), Nicaragua (since 1993), Peru (since 2003), and Equatorial Guinea (since 2006) as a comprehensive approach tailored to each of the beneficiary communities in those countries; that is, it is adapted to the specifics of each context and situation. This approach respects the national curriculums, reflects the learning required in each context, and fosters a long-term vision of high quality education, This approach has successfully built local capacity in the school community, in national capacity in the government management and technical teams, and broad awareness in donors and the international community.

The experiences and lessons learned from implementing the Active School have contributed to developing active learning approaches in different projects around the world. This approach has been used in bilingual, indigenous, peri-urban, urban, and rural areas, as well as in both single and multi-teacher schools, and has ranged across regions, provinces, and even continents. As it has evolved, the Active School has expanded from its origins in the multi-grade, rural school to incorporate regular schools as well. Thus, the Active School and its principles are applicable to all schools, without distinction, although it does have a unique impact on the multi-grade school. During this process, the Active School has continuously developed and grown stronger through a cycle of reflection, experimentation, and evaluation to change classroom practice in fundamental ways drawing from experience and focusing on what was really happening in the classroom.

The Active School is not the result of armchair research. Rather, it begins its innovations from what is already present in the schools and develops in a participatory, shared manner with consultation workshops to combine field research with the operational experience. This approach enables the active participation of all members of the educational community through dialogue, listening, team discussion, debate, consensus building, and decision-making on the meaning of the rural school and the teaching methods used by teachers. This can result in deep and lasting changes in the educational process in rural schools.

An Active School to Improve Education Quality

You have to see an Active School in action to believe it!

As soon as a visitor enters a classroom in an Active School, he or she sees children working in small groups. The visitor pauses to watch a group of third graders talking about "life in the countryside and life in the city," an interesting topic. They converse as they review and read a self-instructional guide that helps them through the subject matter and activities for the class. Together they answer questions from the guide, discuss each child's answer, and then write down only their conclusions from the discussion in a workbook. Most interesting, their conversation is about situations that are familiar, simple, and related to their daily lives, this makes their learning meaningful.

The visitor also discovers that the children are animated, yet organized and disciplined. While the teacher works with other groups of children from different grades, the third graders continue working on their own, led by a *monitor*, a girl chosen by her classmates to guide them through the workbook. She encourages the children to pay attention to the exercises in the guide and keeps on going even when the teacher is occupied with students in other grades. The visitor recognizes that the teacher's fundamental role is to be a facilitator of learning whose purpose is to motivate children to discover answers to their questions by themselves and, by doing so, they can learn.

In this same classroom with the third graders, our visitor finds a group of first graders playing and learning in one of the learning corners, stocked with learning resources made by teachers with active collaboration from parents. One of these resources is the box of loose letters, which the children use to build new words that they then write on their slates. These resources make first grade a "lettered" space, which the girls and boys have decorated with stories, poems, riddles, songs, and other writing samples. The visitor realizes that the letters are part of the children's games.

Our visitor is surprised to see that the first graders do not spend the entire class copying repetitive exercises into notebooks; instead, each one works on solving a problem designed for his or her level and individual pace of learning. The pupils ask, compare, infer, decide, and interact with their readings. When a mistake is made, they correct themselves or their classmates—a form of continuous formative evaluation. The visitor meets the "mayor" of the school government, who participates in school council meetings and voices her opinion. After observing the first- and third-grade groups, our visitor grasps that all of the groups of children are working cooperatively—helping each other out, making the most of their strengths, and learning to work as a true team.

Our Approach

The Active School is a complete education system that uses personalized instruction and the development of strong bonds between school and community. These two pillars are necessary for improving educational quality and ensuring that students have the cognitive and social skills they need to find good jobs, earn an income, and contribute to their community. The comprehensive Active School approach grew from the deeply held personal conviction that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic conditions, can learn and thereby ensure better social and economic opportunities in their lives. Its methodology has been designed to advance two principal, intimately related, objectives:

- To accompany children as they develop their cognitive skills; intellectual, moral, and creative potential; and identity.
- To educate children who contribute to the development of their communities and nations and act as leaders in their communities.

This comprehensive approach accompanies students as they learn and develop their cognitive skills, intellectual and creative potential, and identity. This educational paradigm respects that each child has different abilities and interests and always considers this in giving students the opportunity to learn meaningful life skills: reading, communication, critical thinking, and math. It bears in mind that all children have their own style of learning and that they all need to have a participatory, active role in the learning process.

Likewise, we know students learn at their own pace, which is why there are differences in learning and skill levels among them. The concept of discipline in an Active School is not the "discipline" of children remaining silent throughout class, but rather the discipline of being engaged in learning. The noise one hears is children asking questions and analyzing new situations, and teachers guiding them toward finding their own answers.

Students talk with each other, they debate and investigate what they are learning in the guides, with the teacher and on their own. Students have the right to speak up—they can discuss, decide, evaluate with others, and work in small or large groups, alone or in pairs. In this model, the students believe in themselves, in their own ideas, in their capacities. They expect that they can learn; they are convinced that they will be successful at what they set out to do; they are recognized as being different from adults and are made to feel unique and important.

In this way, the Active School offers a new way of teaching and learning and redefines what is meant by meaningful, relevant learning. By calling this the Active School, we are breaking with the paradigms of what we think of as the traditional school. Most traditional schools are characterized by a reliance on rote methods that have no relevance to the student. In these schools, the primary teaching tool is a teacher lecturing to the class. Children copy passages without uttering a single word in class, discussion and disagreement are discouraged, students almost always work alone but on the same thing at the same time, and they have few opportunities for cooperative work. These schools do not foster participation, interaction, and self- and co-evaluation or consider them important to the teaching and learning process. The Active School is not a traditional school where children sit silently copying down dictation from the teacher. Even if the school has only one teacher teaching six different grades, instruction is still personalized, not homogenous.

The Active School educates children who contribute to the development of their communities and nations and act as leaders in their communities from the time they are in school. Children in an Active School learn from day one the importance of individualized learning and teamwork. They learn to be mutually supportive. Through interactive schooling, all children feel capable of learning. All have the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for learning and, most important, to help their classmates and themselves learn. In this process of developing an identity and learning on their own, they also develop a sense of responsibility and learn from the early grades on to exercise their own freedom. Here, freedom

implies responsibility—important responsibilities for becoming active participants in the lives of their schools, communities and nations. School life is a model for the students' role in society, for their rights and responsibilities, their individuality, leadership, and responsibility in their community.

The Active School offers educational opportunities for all children, without regard to sex, socioeconomic status, race, ethnic origin, social standing, political affiliation, or any other trait unrelated to merit and student ability. It specifically offers opportunities for those who have greater needs. It is a model for quality based on the particular characteristics of the school and of the context in which the children live. Ensuring equitable access to all students means that the Active School is an inclusive approach that is attentive to diversity. The differentiated pedagogical interventions of the Active School ensure that all children, including those who have some type of disability, find a place without discrimination that can offer them optimal, well-rounded development. A school that is responsive to diversity and offers educational opportunities acts as a force for equalizing inequities experienced outside of school.

The Active School takes into account that the girls and boys who attend it are searching for their own identities and want to make their own decisions; therefore, it offers simple strategies for constantly working on gender equity. It breaks with paradigms associated with the concepts of masculinity and femininity, and prevents assignments, actions, or attitudes that discriminate against girls and give certain advantages to boys. The Active School is organized, both inside and outside the classroom, to assign roles and responsibilities that promote gender equity and the participation of boys and girls from all grades.

In the Active School, children from different grades have more opportunities to talk to each other, share experiences, and engage in joint activities. These opportunities serve as recognition of good work and value effort, regardless of the results. Group decision-making fosters

interactions and respectful behavior toward others. It also aids in developing and using a new concept of discipline that creates opportunities for increasing self-esteem, so the children feel respected and valued for what they truly do achieve through their effort and dedication.

This diversity of affective, cognitive, and social interactions has required changes in the learning materials, in the ways of organizing the children, in the activities for the different subjects, in the games, and in the way discussion is encouraged among the children. In particular, it has required a new attitude from teachers and parents that encourages self-esteem in the children, helping them to develop a positive self-image and to be able to reflect this with others.

Our Methodology

Children in the Active School internalize an innovative learning process that improves educational quality: Learn, Practice, Apply (LPA)—"What I learn, I practice, and what I practice, I apply." This learning process starts with what the children know—what they learned and experienced before starting school. To this end, Active School teachers use a three-stage process. First, they present new subject matter through hands-on, self-instructional tools that provide guidance for individual and group work. Second, they ask students to practice the subject individually and in groups. Third, they encourage students to apply the subject matter to situations characteristic of the context in which they live. LPA forces teachers to reorient how they work, their pedagogical practices, and how they plan classes, without resorting to a rigid use of time and sequences. LPA requires mediation of the teacher throughout the process. While the children acquire knowledge by following a logical sequence, teachers are able to provide feedback to them individually and as a group and to conduct continuous formative evaluation that ensures that everyone achieves the expected results. The LPA sequence enables students to ground themselves in a concrete, relevant context and consult their classmates, their teacher, their family, and their community, to achieve highly meaningful learning.

In essence, the LPA method in the Active School puts the children at the center of the learning process, giving them the freedom to learn at their own pace, and is geared to the dynamics of their own interests and potential. The LPA method urges all students to be aware of their own learning processes so that they can use them autonomously throughout their school years.

Seeing students as the protagonists of their own learning process does not mean leaving them alone or with their team working through a self-instructional guide. It means interacting with them and with their team in an environment of dialogue and information sharing, where the teacher, "without delivering a lecture," offers his or her point of view and conceptualizations to help each student and group learn and, above all, be aware of the process he or she is following. It also means working to establish democratic relationships with the children and enable them to develop self-esteem, autonomy, and the capacity to assume leadership roles.

The process by which students are aware of the learning process—that is, they comprehend each mental process they follow and control it to obtain expected results—is known as metacognition. In Active Schools, it is fostered in every grade, starting when students begin learning to read and write in first grade. As they work through the guides, each student, each work team, each grade, is constantly practicing metacognition, which helps these students to discover their strengths and difficulties. This continual engagement in reflection strengthens their mental processes.

To facilitate putting theory into practice, real-life cases are used to pose problems and to get children to use practical examples to understand abstract concepts. This is a kind of natural learning that is applicable to the children's immediate environment. To complete the process, everything they put into practice they comment on in school with their classmates or the teacher. The idea is to find a practical balance among knowing, knowing how to do, and knowing how to be. Furthermore, in cooperation with their classmates and with the underpinnings provided by the teacher, the children are given the opportunity to discover themselves in relation to everyone else; they learn to analyze, compare, experiment, and reflect constantly. Finally,

The Merits of Learn, Practice, Apply (LPA):

- It creates a cooperative environment in which new concepts are being learned at the same time an active and autonomous way of learning is being taught.
- It goes beyond “activity-based learning” and becomes a meaningful learning experience.
- It is adaptable to any region, locale, or school to make it relevant, but with regard for the national curriculum and universal knowledge.
- It turns the teacher into a “mediator,” a guide who orients the kinds of communication in the school, who “marks out” the development of capacities and the development of knowledge in the children.
- It promotes the creative, functional use of all of the resources the setting has to offer.
- It stimulates the use of varied readings that help the children go beyond mechanical reading practices and activities to find utility in the things they have learned.
- It develops skills and attitudes that enable children to learn in school and to continue learning in the outside world.
- It fosters the development and strengthening of values that lead to a well-rounded education, democratic social interaction, and the autonomy for using freedom responsibly.
- It includes systematic, ongoing evaluation as an aid to ensuring success in learning, reinforcing correct work, correcting errors quickly, and promoting reflection about strategies used in learning.
- It makes it possible to use flexible promotion by respecting students’ pace of learning.

Student reading at an Active School in Nicaragua

they take what they practice and apply it in the community or at home with their families. This is where parents have the opportunity to support the learning process.

Our Resources

The Learn, Practice, Apply method is modeled and used in the classroom and is accompanied by complementary resources that make the Active School a system of interrelated and interdependent pieces. The resources include self-instructional guides, learning corners, purposeful organization of the classroom and students, didactic teaching materials, school libraries, and community organization. Like a jigsaw puzzle, the Active School includes all of the different elements that make learning possible. In the children's individual interactions with learning, the teachers—in their role as facilitators—and the self-instructional guides play leading roles as the students' first sources for information and content. The classroom is organized to boost this interaction and ensure that students have access to other sources of information. Along these lines, the students are organized into small groups and elect monitors among themselves to help them as they

work as a group and study with the guides. The classroom's corners become learning corners (one each for science, language arts, mathematics, and social studies) that can be rearranged depending on the topics the children are studying. These are stocked with theoretical and practical teaching materials that are possible to manipulate: the *math basket* is particularly effective for teaching math, as are the *box of loose letters* and *slates* for teaching reading and writing.

School libraries and learning resource centers (LRCs) are also crucial elements in the children's interaction with learning. Outside the classroom, other elements exist to strengthen the learning processes that occur inside the classroom. These include a student government, in which the students democratically elect a representative who participates in the school council, along with the teachers and parent representatives. The student government is effective at developing students' leadership skills and identity and an example of the school's modeling how society functions. Just as the Active School promotes students' engagement and leadership in their own learning, it also ties parents into actively participating in their children's education. Parents play a leading role as tutors and facilitators and accompany everyday activities. They are active in meetings of parents and of the community council. Parents also participate in Active School Achievement Days, which are special days for the children to share with the community and demonstrate what they have learned, as an exercise in responsibility and formative evaluation.

No discussion of the pieces that make the Active School system work would be complete without dedicating a special chapter to teachers. Research in different countries has shown that the quality of an education system lies in the quality of its teachers. Teachers are the most important variable to improve learning. The Active School supports capacity and skill building in teachers through in-person workshops on subject matter and pedagogy and in inter-learning circles (ILCs) where teachers share their classroom experiences and learn with their peers. The Active School conducts observation visits for teachers to see demonstration projects. In addition, the self-instructional guides require teachers to understand their contents

and be able to facilitate classes using them. For this reason, the guides serve as a strategy for strengthening teachers' subject matter knowledge. Teachers also have a role in developing theoretical and practical teaching materials. Many teachers serve as teacher–authors of the guides and other support materials. A rural schoolteacher conceived the idea of the Active School. His understanding of what teaching in the rural sector entailed, in a context of neglect and isolation, gave rise to pedagogical accompaniment. The possibility that teachers will be visited by other experienced teachers (considered by their peers to be "good teachers") who come to their schools and classrooms encourages them to improve their pedagogical practices.

Even though the Active School acts on one school at a time and has an impact on clusters of schools in municipalities and regions, it also has an impact on the decision-making bodies of the education sector in municipalities, regions, and at the national level in the ministries of education. The Active School offers the educational authorities the possibility of adapting their pedagogical and managerial decisions to the reality of the schools and their actors.

In summary, the Active School—the interactive school—has different kinds of teaching practices and classroom organization and provides instruments that are conducive to the appropriation of knowledge and meaningful learning. The Active School is a "system" of interconnected, interdependent pieces designed to ensure that students interact with learning, inside the classroom and outside of it, in the school, in the community, and in the education sector in general. Its principal elements are:

Learning

- Individualized active learning.
- Collaborative active learning (pairs, small groups, etc.).
- Learning that starts with the reality of local conditions and children's lives.
- Student leadership.

Resources
- Learning guides for students.
- Classrooms designed for small group work.
- Learning corners in the classroom.
- School library.

Teachers and teacher training
- Ongoing evaluation.
- Teachers as facilitators.
- Teachers as authors of teaching materials.
- In-service teacher training and development.
- Teachers who are facilitators and coaches, who accompany other teachers.
- Inter-learning circles.

Continuous pedagogical accompaniment
- Support from technical teams, comprised of content-area specialists, educators, managers, and technical specialists, side-by-side with the technical teams from the ministries of education in each country where this is implemented.

Engagement of the community and other stakeholders
- Empowerment of stakeholders (parents, teachers, directors, students).
- Community involvement for autonomous decision-making.
- Local management.
- Civil society support (private sector, the media).
- School administration
- Commitment from local and regional authorities and from national bodies, such as ministries of education.

The Active School is a School of Interactions

The Active School prioritizes children's interactions with what they know best: their classmates, teachers, families, school, community, and municipality. Because of this set of interactions, the Active School is known as the "school of interactions."

Interactions that activate resources and strategies for learning.
These interactions encourage processes that develop individual and group knowledge. Individually, using the LPA method, students learn to observe, analyze, compare, associate, interpret, express, infer, problem solve, and evaluate. These actions enable them to be aware of what they are learning, how they learn it, and how what they learn is useful to them. The LPA method, used with the self-instructional guides, takes into account students' interests and motivations, builds on their prior experience, and compares it with new learning. Although the guide makes suggestions for activities to carry out alone, in pairs, in the group, or with the teacher's help, there is always room for creating new didactic arrangements. The Active School teacher activates the students' resources for learning by creating new situations to think about based on suggestions from the students, and then comparing and contrasting different points of view, encouraging students to find relationships from which to draw conclusions, and urging students to express what they think orally or in writing.

In the group, the same LPA method invites students to solve problems by interacting with others. These interactions contribute to a fluid exchange among the students, helping them to cooperate and share experiences, ideas, information, and feelings. Sharing helps them organize and present information; ask, respond, and debate; and put strategies for learning to learn into practice. Arranging the school's environment, organizing cooperative group work, using the didactic sequences proposed by the interactive guides, and bringing the family and community into the educational process are all continuous in the Active School.

The interactions between teachers and students in the Active School lead to learning the basic principles of democracy in the school classroom. For example, teachers can establish relationships with the children not only by

lecturing to them about values or by expounding upon a subject, but also by conversing with them about the activities in the guides. Monitoring individual and group work, and asking questions to stimulate the activity and the students' curiosity, boosts their interest in moving to higher levels of comprehension. The interactions of the teacher with each student and with the group provide the stimulus students need to become aware of the processes each step in the guide requires, for knowing what to do and obtaining the anticipated results.

Interactions and identity development. The variety and quality of interactions fostered by the Active School extend beyond the classroom. Children develop their knowledge and personalities through social contact with their classmates in the same grade and other grades; with children of different ages; and teachers, parents, and other community members where they live. This variety of interrelationships promotes values that help students:

- To be cooperative in a way that is effective, by considering others when resolving issues, and by sharing both successes and failures.
- By ensuring that they understand the information and know how to ask questions, investigate, and seek ways to learn better.
- To be assertive, by taking responsibility for the consequences of their decisions and actions.
- To be proactive, feeling sure of their decisions, demonstrating initiative, and proposing appropriate strategies for achieving their own goals and those of the group.
- To be organized in the use of time for each activity, in the use of materials and resources for learning, and in how they present the results of their activities.
- To decide to accept the challenges of beginning to develop their life plan.

Types of Interactions

Students interact with other students in the same grade. Conversation among students in the same grade is vital for them to learn from each other and successfully plan and apportion the tasks of cooperative work. The learning guides encourage children to choose roles tailored to each assignment and to assess their own skills and abilities and those of the others. Once they choose these roles and tasks, they can move on to complete the activity. At the end, they conduct self- and co-evaluations to conclude the activity with a constructive analysis. Throughout this process, there are many interactions among children of the same grade; some occur spontaneously, while others follow from instructions in the learning guides or the student government's workplans.

Students in the same grade must meet to plan activities and investigations, and each time one of them says what is on his or her mind, the others learn to listen and to be heard. In this way, children become accustomed to understanding other points of view and expressing their own, something that will be very useful to them when they face the diversity of ideas that exists in all societies. Likewise, they learn to respect people who have difficulties or who are different. Low-achieving students work together with high or average achievers to find the same answers, where every individual has his or her own function in the team and follows his or her own style and pace of learning.

Students interact with students in other grades. One of the great benefits of the Active School is that children in one grade can learn alongside students in other grades while each grade is learning the subjects assigned to it, according to that grade's level. This happens because students are also developing their identities and learning from things their senses and intellect absorb from their surroundings. In other words, if a second-grade girl has to do a project with help from a third- or fourth grade boy, both students will learn from each other, because each one knows different things and has his or her own unique way of thinking and communicating.

This type of interaction does not occur only in a multi-grade school. If the school has one classroom and one teacher per grade, it is also possible to plan activities where the children leave the classroom when appropriate to interact with students from other grades. Children from one grade can ask for help from those of the other grade when planning projects or organizing activities, such as the student government, regardless of whether the school is multi-grade or multi-teacher. Active School students benefit from this type of interaction because they share varied experiences regarding culture, age, and gender, and a wide variety of knowledge.

Each student interacts with his or her teacher. Student-teacher interactions are not the passive communication we might see in a traditional school. Active School teachers are aided by the LPA method and by Active School resources, particularly the self-instructional guides that help students study their subjects and help teachers refresh their knowledge. Additionally, teacher training and accompaniment helps them learn to interact meaningfully with students, as facilitators of learning. In general, this involves establishing relationships with the children in a trusting environment, where they can feel secure that they are heard and that they will receive appropriate feedback. If the children are seen as the principal actors in the process, and if they take the lead in their own learning, the true interaction is talking with the child, not talking to the child. Students also interact with their teachers to get help in using the Active School's learning materials, including the library, learning corners, and different didactic materials.

The quality and variety of the interactions in each grade enable the teacher to verify that the group's output is the result of learning by individuals, and to recognize that in the one-teacher, multi-grade school, the teacher's work is not reduced to teaching all the children the same thing the same way.

By carefully observing the work of teachers, we find that interactions and participation among the different members of the educational community increases when classrooms are arranged so that children can work in small groups, without necessarily facing forward with the teacher up front. The teacher as the facilitator of learning circulates freely in the classroom

observing and giving advice to students, while they converse and work on their identities. The idea is to create the conditions for conversing, for seeing gestures, looks, and expressions that create opportunities for the acknowledgement, value, and respect for who each child is as a person and for what he or she represents to the group.

We find that interaction and participation among the different actors increase when classrooms are arranged so that children can work in small groups. The teacher circulates freely in the classroom observing and giving advice to students. The idea is to create the conditions for conversing and for seeing gestures, looks, and expressions that create opportunities for the acknowledgement, value, and respect for who each child is as a person and for what he or she represents to the group.

Students interact with their parents and community members. The positive effect of these interactions on the children's education occurs not only in the classroom. Students begin learning where they live with their families, their neighbors, and other community members who might interact with them. The community's customs and traditions help the children to strengthen their identity; for this reason, the guides they use and the activities they are assigned encourage communication with family and community members.

Students turn to their parents to clear up their doubts, and parents and other community members convey knowledge to them that is not written in books. Once they have received answers and information through these interactions, the children can then transmit what they have learned and engage in activities that enable them to appreciate their achievements and their capacity to apply their learning to their immediate context. The Active School promotes interactions with adults to ensure a high quality, equitable education, strengthen students' self-esteem, and develop their self-confidence and ability to work together with others.

The Active School exerts a positive and timely influence on the family and community regarding the development of skills for peaceful social interaction. Interacting with adults prepares children for assuming their future roles in society responsibly. In these relationships, they take important steps toward developing autonomy, which prepares them for sustaining a high level of communication with adults in which they are heard and respected.

Teachers interact with parents and community members. Teachers in the Active School and in multi-grade schools feel they are not alone working in the school. The Active School promotes parental engagement to help teachers with learning activities. Likewise, parents feel that teachers can develop closer relationships with their children because they have the opportunity to learn more about the children's style and pace of learning. Parents perceive that teachers are more in touch with the reality of home and family life. Thus, a circle of trust and teamwork grows.

Twelve Active School Convictions for Quality Education

The 12 Active School convictions reflect our most deeply held beliefs and guiding principles for achieving quality education for all children, especially those with greater needs, while recognizing the potential for learning that all children have in all of the countries where Active School projects have been implemented. As educators, based on our possibilities and dreams, we are deeply dedicated to the improvement of the rural school.

We decided to call these guiding principles "convictions" (apuestas in Spanish). Convictions are different from principles, in that they can drive personal motivation and persistence, helping to overcome the discouragement of pessimism and cynicism that undermines education reform. Convictions are needed because this is a complex task. These convictions grew from experiences to concepts, and from concepts back to reinforcing actions.

In the almost two decades that we have been using the Active School approach in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, and Equatorial Guinea, these convictions for quality education have marked out the road to follow. They have helped to organize the subject matter for in-service training, aided in defining all Active School members' capacity to develop, and informed development of innovative methodological strategies and defining expected performance. In essence, these elements have opened the doors to a new pedagogical culture with an integrated perspective that includes all members of the active community, one that favors successful learning by children and enables them to be the true protagonists in building an Active School in a globalized, constantly changing world.

The Twelve Active School Convictions

Conviction 1: Every traditional school can be transformed into an Active School.

Conviction 2: Teacher training is a process of reflection, sharing, and interaction.

Conviction 3: Students go to school to succeed, not fail!

Conviction 4: Pedagogical accompaniment improves teacher performance.

Conviction 5: Engaged parents and students will learn better.

Conviction 6: Children are the artisans of their own education.

Conviction 7: Interactive learning guides to develop life skills.

Conviction 8: Many limitations can be overcome by making rural teachers visible.

Conviction 9: Curriculum, values, democracy, and technology foster educational quality and equity in schools.

Conviction 10: Teaching and learning to read and write can be fun, natural, and meaningful.

Conviction 11: Moving beyond the traditional concept of education requires transforming space, time, and resources.

Conviction 12: A fresh outlook on the rural school can inspire new practices for initial teacher training.

Conviction 1

Every traditional school can be transformed into an Active School.

Being fully ready and willing to embark on change plays an incredibly important role in the success or failure of an enterprise. Having the assurance that our ideas will be taken seriously is crucial to our trusting in ourselves and believing we are capable of achieving things no matter how difficult they seem. Knowing there are things that only teachers and communities can change about education, each Active School and its members must have confidence and take the risk of participating in the change from a traditional school to an active school.

Transforming a traditional school into an Active School involves a profound change in the perceptions and beliefs of students, teachers, parents, and educational authorities about education in general, and about the role that each one can and should play in ensuring that the transformation is a success.

The traditional rural school is perceived as a poor school for poor people. This perception has different nuances for each of the actors in the educational community. The rural school in many countries faces enormous challenges caused by insufficient coverage and a lack of quality and relevance in an inequitable educational system that is unresponsive to society's needs and is not an agent of transformation. This is reflected in the poverty, unemployment, and even violence of rural life in many areas. Isolation, the use of child labor to earn money for the household, and the low educational level of the parents, all have a negative impact on children's access to school. Dropout and grade repetition levels are high among these children. Rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas, as is the number of children who have never gone to school. Added to this is government's poor institutional capacity to serve remote regions.

For teachers, working in rural schools is often perceived to be a punishment rather than an opportunity to learn from action research, diversity, and local wisdom. Nor is it considered an opportunity for giving more to those who have less. In many cases, teachers do not believe that rural schools can change—that quality is not possible in a school of the poor and of poorly paid teachers. This pessimism is fed by the reality of teaching in rural schools,

how hard it is for teachers to do their work, the low expectations of the poorest students and their families, the isolation, and the lack of opportunities for interacting with their colleagues. There is also a tendency among teachers to believe that the teaching practices they have used for years are correct and legitimate, both personally and professionally, that they do not need to be modernized, and that their students have learned using these practices.

Parents in rural areas often have low expectations for their children's education. In most families, it is more important for children to help with farm and household chores than to spend time attending school. In other cases, parents want their children to learn things related to their interests and needs, which the school does not offer. If the parents are unschooled, they may feel that the teacher does not value what they have to offer, and they end up distancing themselves from the school, thereby missing out on opportunities to stand up for their rights and those of their children. For many families, the good school is in the city.

Even when children start school with the conviction that they want to and can learn, the wrong school environment will undermine them. If the school does not help children to learn from their own experiences, to express their thoughts and feelings, and to recognize their individual potential and challenges, children tend to end up feeling insecure, sad, and incapable of accomplishing anything. If the school does not believe in them, children concentrate their efforts and dreams on what they cannot do and end up leaving school without having had the opportunity to demonstrate what they can do.

Even when education authorities are well versed in the modern discourse of the new education, many have not moved away in practice from that old conception of education. It is unusual for the authorities to encourage teachers in rural schools to reinvent their school critically and innovatively, to approach theory through practice, and to demonstrate that it is possible to transform the rural school if it is done with love, passion, and commitment. Even though there have been significant changes in some regions, the notion persists that a new education grounded in quality, equity,

Students working in small groups in Peru

and peaceful social interaction is only possible in the prestigious, elite private schools, which are believed to be the only ones that can offer better-quality educational services.

The Active School assumes the challenge of transforming the traditional school and changing the mind-set and beliefs of educational actors through an organic, bottom-up process that promotes opportunities for dialogue in which parents, teachers, students, and authorities participate. It gives a significant role to each active member of the school and promotes an attitude of positive change.

Opportunities for discussion are important for transmitting new perceptions and positive beliefs about education and its potential for change. Discussion can be used to share tangible examples and lessons learned from where

change has been possible. These positive beliefs, seen from the perspective of different examples, also have the same Pygmalion effect on students, teachers, parents, and educational authorities. The feeling of believing that you can change, that anything is possible if I want it, help in having an open, bright mind and a positive attitude toward making dreams come true. In this context, this means transforming the school in the rural milieu. The conviction that education can be improved is practiced by "engaging all active members of the school" as a strategy for overcoming not only resistance to change, but also for making changes in attitudes and mentality. This means directing all active members of the educational community to developing an educational approach with a local point of view in each country.

Creating an Active School starts with acknowledging that each active member is important to the school to share wisdom and the quest for improvement. Engaging everyone in building the Active School requires that the concepts of community, interaction, and respect for each individual and for different opinions, cultures, beliefs, and plans are honored and made operational. Acknowledging the existence of unique students in distinctive communities has been the foundation to implement the Active School approach in each of the countries. This is what makes it adaptable. This is the "recipe."

Conviction 2

Teacher training is a process of reflection, sharing, and interaction.

To transform the conventional school into an Active School, we seek out teacher- researchers committed to their work, who accept that educational practice is based on theory; who can create an environment where theory and practice come together; who can engage parents, community, and local organizations; and most of all, who are convinced that ALL children go to school because they should, want to, and can learn.

We believe that transforming a conventional school into an Active School requires a type of teacher that teacher training institutes do not produce. However, the Active School lives by the motto, "Start with what you have, to end up where you should be." This adage emphasizes our need to commit to transforming teachers (whether empirical, graduate, or licensed). We must start with their prior knowledge and experience to motivate and engage them in change. We must equip them with the tools and materials necessary for improving their work, and foster dialogue, interaction, reflection, and experience sharing where teachers learn from one another and prepare to revamp the ways they interact with their students in the classroom. The Active School involves redesigning the teacher training curriculum, something that cannot be accomplished in traditional training workshops using lecture hall seating and lectures on teaching theory and practice.

Strategies for training teachers to be successful in the Active School place particular emphasis on comprehensive in-service training. These strategies include in-person workshops, discussions in teacher Inter-learning Circles (ILCs), observation trips, and pedagogical accompaniment. They seek to develop basic competencies in teachers to improve student learning, stressing teamwork for planning, decision-making, reflecting, and creating in collaboration and co-participation. They teach teachers not to see children as problems but to conduct research based on their own practice, to

understand why grade repetition is prejudicial to students, to improve their ability to be a guide in the learning process, to learn to be supportive, and to guide students to learn—that is, to recognize that the true protagonist in education is the student.

In-service training in the Active School is also an open debate where no one has the absolute truth and where participants work on restoring meaning to education. This creates confidence that it is possible for teachers to change many things in their school and turn a remote school, with poor children and unschooled parents, into an Active School. The tone of the training is one of remaking the identity of the rural teacher. For this reason, the content of the workshops and topics discussed in the ILCs are not prepackaged, ready to be transmitted, but rather presented as capacities that enable teachers to learn experientially the same strategies for learning to learn they will apply later with their students in the classroom. As part of this process of in-service transformation, teachers work on different strategies that prepare them for exercising a profession that demands creative, flexible people who are open to change. Following are some of the strategies that have been designed and implemented in different countries.

In-person workshops. These are training events where teachers from a region, department, or province interact with facilitator teachers, content-area specialists, and technical specialists to analyze technical-pedagogical and administrative issues and subject matter. These workshops use the same LPA methodology that is used in the classroom. Their purpose is to offer the tools necessary for learning why we do what we do and how to do it appropriately for the students' frame of reference. This requires emphasizing the role of teacher as guide and mediator, which assumes changes in attitude, mentality, and teaching and learning methods. These in-person workshops are not only designed to present subject matter, but also to develop, along with the teachers, strategies for analysis and reflection about their own work, about how they teach, about how they relate to their students and the parents, and how they can resolve similar problems in different settings. The in-person workshops present the national curricula, regional or municipal guidelines, and the reality in the schools. Following

this exchange about what children are expected to learn, a refresher is done for subject-matter areas, pedagogy, and classroom practices. Participants develop and edit the self-instructional guides, create pedagogical support materials, and establish the groundwork for continuous formative evaluation, a mainstay of the Active School. The workshops help teachers get to know their peers, thereby reducing their isolation and promoting collective thinking and the importance of group work.

The guiding principle of the Active School in-person workshops has been to discover with the teachers themselves pedagogical strategies that contribute to making the school a place where reforms can take root. This includes recognizing and valuing other learning acquired outside the school, in daily life, at home, and in society. Many school reform models forget the teacher and try to provide a recipe for what should be done. When this occurs, schools do not really transform, they just change the name of what they do. Engaging teachers in finding pedagogical strategies to transform the school helps them recognize what they already know and what they do not know. Even those who have a university degree in education must continue their training. This does not end with their university studies; it is continuous and is nourished by daily experiences, critical thinking, and a mind open to change and to the possibility for context-based improvement. Teachers' knowledge and experiences are the basis for the development of information, approval, and creation of meaning in the reality of the isolated rural school.

Inter-learning circles. ILCs are opportunities for teachers to learn along with other teachers. They are used to create networks to communicate lessons learned, promote mutual support for problem solving, clear up confusion, share common practices, conduct research, and share theory-practice-reflection experiences, as well as prioritizing didactic strategies for addressing student diversity, among other situations. The ILCs are one of the most solid continuing education strategies in the Active School because teachers voluntarily organize them and make decisions during their free time. They do not require additional pay. Nor do they take learning time away from their students. Yet, they enable teachers to cope meaningfully

Teachers developing learning guides in Nicaraguan ILC

with the isolation of rural life. The ILCs strengthen solidarity and camaraderie and help participants to take seriously a training process that acknowledges each teacher with his or her own history, potential, and weaknesses.

The ILCs have grown into academic communities with an experiential pedagogical discourse where emphasis is given to discussion, respect for what each teacher does or does not know, and constant inquiry into how students learn. The dynamic of the ILCs relies on practice to lay the foundation for theory, which is then tested in practice and used to develop new theories.

The ILCs have enabled the formation of groups of teacher-authors. This has facilitated reactivating the role of teacher-researchers, who approach their texts with a critical and creative eye, comparing them to the reality of their context to preserve knowledge they will then return to the schools. The teachers produce inter-training documents, guides for children, and systematization of teaching and community experiences. The teacher-authors do research in their own schools and in others nearby on progress with the Active School approach. They preserve ideas in context and have the opportunity to express them in writing, guided by area specialists and aided by a technical team that gradually orients them. The texts produced by the teachers, who do not have experience in these kinds of publications, may require careful scientific review, but didactically these texts express teachers' own reality and that of their context, as Freinet proposed.

Observation trips. If we acknowledge that the school is where education reform takes place, then anyone who aspires to develop new ways of teaching

and learning should pay attention to it. In the Active School, one learns from those who do it well and shares what is advantageous for all active members of the school. Visiting teachers can recognize their level of development and the variety of routes they can follow to bring about change.

The conviction that we can learn from others, from discussion, from interaction, and from shared experiences is demonstrated in observation trips to schools that have achieved encouraging results in all aspects of the process. Although each school is different and has its own project, common Active School principles apply to all of them. The teacher who hosts the visit and the teachers who visit the school accept the challenge to discuss both their achievements and difficulties openly. They are willing to learn and to take advantage of the experience to share, listen, be surprised, and be enriched by different options for developing Active Schools regardless of how disadvantaged and poor they are.

In the visits to different schools in the Active School countries, we learned that the schools and the students needed, in light of their progress, a way to

Oscar Mogollón visiting the Teacher's College in Equatorial Guinea

describe their accomplishments and their difficulties. By developing a simple grading scale, it was possible to have clear evidence of whether schools were at the beginning, in process, or advanced, with regard to the degree of implementation of the Active School approach. These grading scale instruments served to discuss and make timely decisions with the teachers for enacting possible improvements. In any event, each school has particular characteristics that identify it, including teachers' attitudes, student progress, community participation, or creative use of resources, which make it difficult to rate them as good or bad. They are all laboratories for reality-based learning.

Lessons learned from the Active School teacher training process. The constant effort to address the apparent inefficiency and poor quality in rural schools and disadvantaged sectors has borne fruit, especially with regard to the in-service teacher training process. The lessons learned from this process have defined capacities that need to be developed and fostered in teachers to improve educational quality and, thereby, learning opportunities for students. In summary, the following must be developed and nurtured:

- Reinforce teacher identity as professionals to increase self-steam. Teachers need to see teaching as important, to value their profession, and to find special meaning in their commitment to educational quality in rural schools.

- A culture of participation that encourages teachers to share knowledge, experiences, doubts, discoveries, weaknesses, and potential. Closer relationships among teachers in sectors far from the city produce opportunities for pedagogical reflection and the development of didactic knowledge.

- The enjoyment of study. Teachers must develop the capacity for studying curriculum proposals; analyzing approaches to different areas, always relating them to how they teach to get their students to learn; and understanding subject matter to use it as a means for capacity building.

- Maximum use of the Active School's resources. Teachers must develop capacities for transforming the classroom and the school into environments conducive to cooperative work; to interactions among grades; and to researching in learning corners, the library, and the school's environs—all based on what they have and the opportunities the context presents.

- Recognition of the existence and value of inter-culturality, equity, and diversity. Develop in teachers capacities for assuming inter-culturality as a practice that goes beyond recognition of the diversity in their communities, to affirming attitudes and values that enable the rural school to educate for peace, justice, and democracy.

- Partnerships with families. Develop teachers' capacities for establishing open dialogue-based relationships with families, recognizing them as educators, and applying strategies for relating their social practices to school learning.

Conviction 3

Students go to school to succeed, not fail!

Children´s imagination, curiosity and capacity when they come to school are such powerful expectations that not all teachers can respond to them. The equation is simple: teachers with high expectations for their students equal successful students!

The preceding convictions emphasize the Active School's recognition that education can and should improve, and that this change should stem from the school itself, regardless of its social, economic, or cultural situation. This expectation may seem unrealistic given that the Active Schools where we work are schools with few economic resources, where children lack family stimulation, where teachers are the product of traditional training, and where academic success is not valued. At first glance, these situations seem unsalvageable and successful learning impossible. Yet, we put this third conviction into practice by designing
an ongoing plan with a long-range perspective that involves teachers, children, parents, and educational authorities, with all they think, feel, desire, question, know, do not know, and need.

The Active School rejects the idea that poor children are less capable and that multi-grade or single-teacher schools cannot provide quality education. On the contrary, the Active School recognizes children's capacities and the different ways they manifest them. This makes it possible for teachers in charge of several grades to begin to change with a new mentality where they regularly discover that they can do their work better and grow in their personal and professional lives.

The Active School assumes its responsibility for learning and offers appropriate opportunities, strategies, and methods for ensuring integration and success. This means that the pedagogical approach is of equal or greater quality than the approaches of middle- or upper-class schools. This school goes beyond activity-based learning (activismo escolar), and the subject matter becomes the means for developing capacities and values. This is why

the Active School emphasizes all children learning successfully and being seen as persons with full legal rights.

The Active School makes it possible for learning to be relevant to local social, productive, and geographic conditions. In seeking to be conducive to learning cooperatively and democratically, the rural school offers experiences where children from all grades can communicate openly about what they know. The Active School makes it clear that all children want to, should, and can learn, and that, therefore, starting from the first day of classes, children are encouraged to be confident and motivated to learn successfully. Here, there is no room for failing in school; it is assumed that success benefits not only the child, but also the school, the teacher, and the community.

Grade repetition and success in school. In a conventional school, many students repeat a grade. Parents, teachers, and even students accept this as natural. Even more, grade repetition is seen as good and necessary,

Students in an Active School in Peru

because it is interpreted as a second chance to learn. However, studies show that students who repeat grades do not learn more and that many end up dropping out of school. Unfortunately, children from rural and marginal urban sectors repeat the most and are the lowest achievers. The conventional school has still not been able to find ways to ensure that students learn, to ensure high achievement, and to be able to address at last early school leaving.

Repeating a grade not only lowers a child's expectations about learning and being successful in school, but also lowers the expectations of parents who might encourage their children to leave school. Children who repeat a grade end up dropping out or having lower grades than students who are promoted. Furthermore, repeating a grade does not help improve learning or change the attitude of the children and their parents.

Flexible promotion is a strategy for saying no to repetition by focusing on learning outcomes. The impact of flexible promotion on educational efficiency and quality can also be seen when teachers change their teaching methods and assessments by evaluating the progress of the student's education, focusing on successes. This means that promotion from one grade to the next can be done at the end of the school year, or earlier, or later, which makes the concept of repetition or failing a grade meaningless. Early promotion can be given for one or more subjects at any time during the school year. This will happen with children who are exceptional in a particular curricular area and demonstrate that they have developed the skills expected for their current grade.

Children in an Active School can complete each subject at a different pace at any time of the year. This means that the subjects the student is studying do not necessarily correspond to the same grade. For example, some students are better at mathematics and others at language arts; for this reason they will be further ahead in their easy subjects and will have more time to study those that are harder for them. This idea, based on the principle of

individuality and flexible promotion, is one way of respecting differences among students.

To make it easier to manage flexible promotion, the guides are separated by grade and by subject area. Each area in each grade is organized into units that, with the teacher's guidance, help the children to complete them in more or less time in accordance with their interests and possibilities. As the students work through the guides, the teacher notes their progress and difficulties and is aware of how much they are learning, encourages them to engage in self-evaluation and co-evaluation, and conducts feedback activities until all of them have learned what is expected of them.

Finally, it is important to note that the conviction that all students can be successful is, in our judgment, one that requires the most time and effort. This is not due to the technical relationship between teacher training and student achievement, because, as is said, "You cannot expect a pear from a peach tree" and "No one can give that which he does not have." Rather, it is a change in attitude and mental model. It is the long road that teachers must follow to become convinced that their primary job is to focus on expecting success.

Conviction 4

Pedagogical accompaniment improves teacher performance.

A necessary condition for bringing about changes in teacher attitude, mentality, and method is for teachers to have a colleague who is always available to provide technical assistance and accompaniment in the workplace in a patient and friendly manner. More than providing advice or criticism, this colleague should be someone who accompanies them on the job, someone who provides an incentive for successfully improving student performance. Based on this conviction, we have put our efforts into creating a new way to support teachers in meeting their commitment to transform a traditional school into an Active School; that is, to internalize an approach that seeks to build the capacities of all stakeholders in the educational community and improve student learning.

For teachers to be willing to change and accept recommendations and on-going guidance from a colleague, they need to be sensitized, which means prepared for change, for participation, and for individual and group efforts. The first job of pedagogical accompaniment as an in-service training strategy should be to awaken teachers' interest in learning and in persevering with change despite the difficulties. Sensitivity motivates action. We ask teachers to change the way they teach and learn under isolated, precarious conditions. We also need to help them learn to cope with this uncertainty, so they take an interest in questioning and creating, seeking ways to resolve the problems that arise when they are ready to take that step from a passive school to an Active School, one where there are no answers, only constant questions.

The term accompaniment in the classroom (acompañamiento a pie de aula) was chosen to express the meaning of this in-person relationship between the teacher and facilitator. This represents a shift from attention on quality control, through observance of educational standards, to pedagogical accompaniment to improve instructional quality through a support strategy where someone is always by the teacher's side, not ahead or behind. It builds a bond of trust that enables teachers to change at their own pace, without steamrolling them, but instead continuously encouraging them to change. Teachers are accompanied as they transform their schools.

Facilitators supporting teachers in materials development in Nicaragua

"This kind of accompaniment respects teachers' differences and seeks to make all teachers competent while being sensitive to individual differences, as is done with students, without constraining anyone due to his or her limitations."

Pedagogical accompaniment, designed in the Active School to assist and advise teachers personally, is an innovative way of constantly inquiring into the daily job of capacity building to incorporate new information and seek out more information. The person providing the accompaniment (the facilitator) travels to where the teacher is to monitor at the teacher's workplace. The facilitator not only answers teachers' questions, it also presents them with thought-provoking situations and encourages them to be open to other questions that teachers perhaps would never ask, especially those from rural areas.

Who can be a facilitator, and what does a facilitator do? The role of accompanying, as proposed by the Active School, can be done by "a good teacher," recognized by his or her attitudes, who is experienced in working in rural or marginal urban areas and who is knowledgeable about strategies for turning discourse into action inside the school and beyond its walls. The ideal facilitator is also someone who believes that "step by step the longest march can be won," rather than "one swallow does a summer make." From these certitudes, the facilitator takes the risk of acting "as a guardian angel" to teachers who are isolated, pessimistic, insecure, skeptical, or theoretical, to communicate to them the dedication and enthusiasm needed to bring about change. This professional should have, above all, the capacity for learning from the school and for helping teachers to develop their own growth strategies.

The facilitator not only identifies weaknesses in the classroom process but also encourages teachers to address them together to improve classroom work through agreements made together and gradual, meaningful fulfillment of commitments. Facilitators play the role of companions prepared to be their colleagues' guardian angels. They are active everywhere teachers are learning to improve their performance: the ILCs, observation trips, in-person workshops, and other places.

The what to do, how to do it, and for what purpose of providing advice and monitoring in the Active School had no precursors in any of the countries where this approach was used. Being able to approach rural schools to improve teacher performance required changing administrative structures, budgets, the time dedicated to helping each school, information collection instruments, and the language for being convincing even in the midst of vulnerability and lack of perspective among stakeholders, and even more, feeling the weight of these problems. Through the years, accompaniment in the classroom has been carefully honed in each country, creating an inventory of the strengths and weaknesses of the pedagogical and administrative processes of rural and peri-urban schools.

With the conviction that accompaniment in the classroom can be the main course on the menu offered for in-service teacher training, we need to promote changes in district and regional educational bodies to increase the availability of specialized personnel for filling the position of facilitator. At the same time, this gives new meaning to supervision, which in many cases had not made it possible for teachers to learn from their own work or relate student learning to teacher performance.

Each country where we have worked has redesigned how to provide accompaniment and select the colleagues or facilitators who fulfill this role, and all of them have discussed the proper profile for this professional. However, there is now awareness in all of these countries that the ideal facilitator is not found by adding up a list of personal and professional

requirements, but rather by training this human resource from among those who are already working in this setting. The team of facilitators in each country has made a lot of progress in training, in both theory and practice, at the pedagogical, curricular, social, and communications levels. The teams of specialists and facilitators that have worked in each country have helped, based on their own experiences, to develop concrete responses to the following questions:

- What does accompaniment in the classroom consist of?
- Who can provide pedagogical and administrative accompaniment?
- How can accompaniment and follow-up be defined?
- Which priority needs should be addressed in the first phase of accompaniment?
- What might be the most effective accompaniment strategies?
- How many schools and how many teachers can one facilitator accompany effectively?
- How many visits can the facilitator make in light of the distances and the needs of the schools?
- How can schools and teachers be organized for accompaniment?
- How can multi-grade teachers be accompanied? In what ways can they be effectively supported?
- How can the pedagogical and administrative facilitator also be involved in the continuing education process?
- Who assesses the performance of the person providing pedagogical accompaniment?

Oscar Mogollón visiting with students in Equatorial Guinea

- How does the person providing pedagogical accompaniment relate to the supervisor, the education specialist, and the person in charge of monitoring to develop an "effective, critical, and creative model" of accompaniment?

- Which institutional changes require accompaniment?

- How can the information obtained from the school be analyzed, used, and returned as feedback, to recognize strengths, weaknesses, successes, and critical areas and to make practice-based learning possible?

- What is the relationship between ongoing pedagogical assistance and higher levels of student achievement?

- How can accompaniment be nurtured by opportunities, including demonstration visits, achievement days, and ILCs?

Aspects such as these have helped each country to develop, along with the stakeholders themselves, the discourse for talking about the work of pedagogically assisting other teachers in their classrooms, focusing reflection and analysis on their own performance.

The Active School trains facilitators or individuals who accompany teachers in the classroom using the same LPA method and continuing education strategies that are later used with the teachers. Working with educational authorities, we help to design accompaniment strategies and protocols for the focus and frequency of facilitator visits. These plans are specific to each region and country where this comprehensive approach is implemented. Some plans stress intensive accompaniment from the outset of the intervention for teachers who are new to the Active School. Accompaniment diminishes as the continuing education strategies are implemented and the ILCs formed. The plans establish strategies for the graduation or phase-out of facilitators in the schools. Plans for visits are tailored to the geographic location of the schools and the facilitators, the progress already made in the schools with the new approach, and the official strategies for attending to rural schools.

Conviction 5

Engage parents and students will learn better.

Schools should respond to the interests and expectations of children´s families, who are often forgotten.

The interest rural families have in their children's education should be echoed by a school where everyone can learn. Traditionally, schools, especially in rural areas, have not been open to the involvement of the family, the community, and the local culture. In many cases, their involvement is reduced to utilitarian needs: painting, cleaning, repairs, building, food preparation, and some fundraising support. Their participation in the learning process and in improving student achievement is far from the minds of many teachers, since it is almost impossible for teachers to believe that uneducated parents, who move around from place to place to subsist, and who apparently have low expectations for their children's education, could be part of the educational community.

In developing an Active School responsive to the needs and expectations of each community, we have been committed to helping parents develop capacities that enable them to participate in the school, not only as laborers but also as recognized educational actors who can support students' learning processes. This conviction has required a long process of helping teachers, local-level educational authorities, and parents understand what participation means. For this reason, this issue of family participation in the school is always on the agenda at in-person workshops, in the ILCs, at achievement days, and in the process of accompaniment in the classroom.

Generally, children learn their first lessons with their families. At home, they hear for the first time the words of a language they do not yet understand but that they internalize little by little with each interaction between themselves and their family members. It does not matter if their parents do not know how to read or write, since they possess skills and knowledge that they transmit to their children consciously or unconsciously. The Active School builds on this early learning at home and integrates it into the unknown, the things children have not yet learned at home, and in this way achieves continuity and a seamless connection in a constructive learning process.

The relationship between parents and the Active School has required rethinking the traditional collaboration and mutual aid between school and community. This has involved moving beyond the traditional participation of parents, which usually was limited to improving the physical environment of their children's school or volunteering time for school or productive projects. The traditional areas of involvement are not eliminated, but rather expanded so that parents also take an active part in decisions about the education their children should be receiving and about administration, evaluation, supervision, and monitoring. Monitoring the quality of student learning in the Active School also involves the family and community; it requires the true participation of these stakeholders in the educational work of the school. Parents must become directly involved in the learning of their children and ask questions such as "How do I help my son? How does my daughter study? How can I learn from what they are learning?" In short, we hope Active School parents will internalize the following premises:

- All children should learn to read and write in first grade.
- What is learned at school should be applied in the family and/or community.
- Girls should participate on an equal footing with boys in academic, social, and cultural activities.
- Parents should develop skills for administration, organization, and leadership through continuing education activities.

With this relationship between parents and the active process in the school, the tradition of blaming the teacher for the students' failures, or the consolation that their children do not learn because it is a rural school, tend to disappear. A collateral benefit of stronger, closer relationships between school and community has been to value once again the teacher who works with the diversity and heterogeneity of the single-teacher,

multi-grade classroom. Most important, this closer relationship has led to an optimistic belief that students do have opportunities to develop life skills in the rural school.

Rebuilding a sense of identity with the school. In the process of developing community participation, the idea has evolved that the school does not belong to the Ministry of Education, or to the teachers, or to the local authorities; instead, it belongs to the community. This fosters a sense of belonging, reflected in decisions being made jointly by the director, teacher, students, and other community and local entities, and a democratic climate that has enabled rural communities to cultivate new hope about their children's school.

> *Working shoulder to shoulder with teachers and parents has been indispensable—making them both feel important, rebuilding their sense of identity with the school, and teachers' sense of identity with the family and the community.*

Teachers have had to unlearn erroneous concepts about the supposed ignorance of rural families, so that they can let community wisdom and experience into the school and integrate these into the activities of the active process. These are slow processes and therefore teachers and facilitators must be ready to encourage, convince, and negotiate this new way of participating.

The belief in the importance of parental participation in the educational process implies developing new social and political meaning that contributes to poor, rural schools' increasingly becoming places for dialogue and an opportunity for a meeting of the minds and experiences among children, young people, and adults. It also implies an institution for appreciating their worth as a group with all that a community thinks, knows, and aspires to in order to meet their needs within a new meaning of rurality.

When parents do get involved in all of these aspects of their children's education, Active School students learn to relate to and apply what they learn in the classroom. In short, parents can become active members of the school, learning what their children are taught, thinking about the learning guides, and using other resources the school has to offer them. Parents can learn even more with literacy courses and other educational programs coordinated by different agents in the educational community and civil society.

In the Active School, the community becomes an extension of the classroom. With this approach, students develop a thirst for knowledge both inside and outside the classroom. The community offers an environment full of agents, factors, and situations from which the children can learn functional and practical life skills. A community may contain markets, stores, crops, green areas, and many other places where children can use the concepts they have worked on with the learning guides. Thus, they practice and use what they learn, and the walls of the traditional classroom are replaced by bonds between the school and the community forged by participation.

Parents' organizations have made important decisions for the school.
One of the premises of the Active School is that it ensures that parents participate actively in school decisions. In each region and country, different initiatives and projects have been implemented to bring the school and the community closer together, and in particular, to ensure that all children attend and remain in school. In Peru, parents have organized school-based councils (CONEIs) to provide opportunities for them to participate in the general pedagogical, institutional, and administrative management of the school. At the pedagogical level, in Nicaragua, parents have bought into the LPA method, which has meant that they are a regular presence, taking turns to help the teacher facilitate the process. They are particularly involved in interactions, in obtaining materials and resources when needed, and in coordinating activities with the student councils both inside and outside the classroom.

Parents helping children in Nicaragua

External evaluations of projects that implemented the Active School approach agree on the following benefits of parental involvement:

- Parents increase their capacity to learn with their children. Primarily in the early grades, parents are participating in the classroom thanks to the more enjoyable and meaningful techniques for teaching reading and writing. This has attracted parents to the school to learn and help the teacher.

- The development of a parent-teacher partnership. By being present in the school, parents help the teacher successfully use the guides and efficiently teach several grades and levels at the same time. This parental support makes it easier to switch from customary rote tasks to meaningful activities or simple projects. Parents act as tutors for small investigations done by their children, while at the same time they are developing their own perspective of what they believe, expect, and need from the school.

- The involvement in problems, the increase in creativity, and the recognition of other knowledge from the home (not from the national curricula) that parents share and that the teachers and technical teams incorporate into the students' learning guides. This participation is what feeds the quality of classroom processes. Parents, even if uneducated, develop skills for providing accompaniment to their children, guided by teachers who understand that only with effective family engagement can they develop an equitable, just future for their students.

- Parents participate in Achievement Days, where children demonstrate their learning and identify and assess their approaches, and with this the aspects that have had good results and those that presented difficulties or did not have the expected results. This approach contributes to parents' agreeing to help their children to reach their goals, so that together parents and children analyze the progress they have made and the obstacles they have faced, all in an environment of respect and free of authoritarian evaluation.

- Better comprehension of their children's learning process, which progresses from learning subject matter to developing life skills. Parents understand the changes in teaching methods and the ways students learn, and discover in the process that these changes take education beyond copying, memorization, and repetition.

- Changes in the perception of the school. Many parents begin to see a school that is preparing their children for life in the countryside and in the city. For this reason, parents support giving their children more time to study than to shoulder household and farm responsibilities.

- Better student performance, reflected in achievement, not only in their courses but also in their self-esteem, participation, and social skills.

Conviction 6

Children are the artisans of their own education.

In the Active School, students have the opportunity to understand and control the mental processes they use to learn. When they share their experiences in small groups, they express their ideas and feelings at the same time that they practice strategies for navigating differences and interests.

All the components of the Active School are oriented toward believing in the children and to convincing them that they can learn, inviting them to overcome passivity, to be curious, and in general, to be creative in seeking solutions to the problems that crop up in school and in everyday life.

Traditional thinking says that only teachers and parents can decide for children and young people. This stunts children's creativity and initiative and leads many to adopt a passive, rather lazy attitude toward their own learning processes. However, in the Active School, students have the opportunity to understand and control the mental processes they use to learn. As they work in teams on the tasks proposed by the guides, they start to be aware of strategies and materials they can use to attain the results they expect. This increases their interest in learning and prepares them, starting in the early grades, to be active agents of their own learning processes.

In sharing group experiences, the children express their ideas and feelings, and practice strategies for navigating differences and interests. As this occurs, teachers are able to understand the students better and interact with them in ways that help them to develop autonomy. This does not mean students do whatever they want to, rather, they act in accordance with their own judgment, responsibly assuming the consequences of their actions and developing as full persons, without injuring their own dignity or that of the others.

For children to be the artisans of their own education, the Active School offers students opportunities for developing the capacities and attitudes they need:

- To learn to think for themselves about what they should do, how they should do it, and to what purpose.
- To practice consensus building around tasks and responsibilities, which prepares them for decision-making and helps them discover their potential and limitations.
- To develop their self-identity and a sense of how they see themselves in relationship to others—not only self-esteem, but also esteem for others.
- To develop knowledge individually and as a group. This involves self-evaluations and co-evaluations to recognize their progress and difficulties and encourages a committed attitude toward learning.

Student government president working with classmates in an Active School in Peru

Children are the artisans of their education in administration, leadership, and democracy through the student council. The best way to put learning into practice is to simulate real-life situations or relate learning to each student's specific living conditions. The Active School's educational approach promotes actions and strategies that enable students to develop the social skills they need to live in society.

Creating situations where children have decision-making power over school and community issues fosters their capacity to listen to, talk about, and debate different points of view respectfully and objectively. In the process, justice and solidarity emerge as indispensable values, and students apply these very abstract concepts in practical, educational ways. Students are educated in liberty, tolerance, and autonomy, understood as the liberty to act freely and take responsibility for the consequences. Student leadership in the Active School reaches out to the community, and in this way, educational authorities and parents also share in the responsibility for decision-making and problem solving.

The student council provides a strategy for children to choose roles that enable them to exercise leadership in their education. As they do so, each student council member develops skills related to these roles. Along with others who are not a direct part of the student government, they learn about democratic processes, gender equity, an appreciation for rights, and ethical behavior.

The student government is organized as a democratically elected structure in which all members have a voice and a function. The process for forming the council starts at the beginning of the year, with the teacher explaining to the students what the student council is, why it is important, and how they can participate in it. During the year, children who want to be school leaders run for the offices of student council president, vice president, and secretary as well as other positions that vary among schools and regions.

Once there are candidates, students learn by doing about the importance of justice, democracy, and freedom of expression by electing, through secret ballot, those whom they believe will best represent them before the entire educational community. After the student council has been elected and formed, small committees can be created for each classroom or grade to promote positive initiatives for the students. For example, these could be library, garden, classroom decoration, or recreation committees, among others. This ensures that all children participate, not only by casting a ballot, but also by collaborating in the development of their school and their own education.

From this, it follows that the Active School is not only concerned with ensuring that children in all grades learn enough and apply what they learn to their immediate context, but that it also provides opportunities for hands-on experience for social and affective development in school and the community. Thus, through the student councils, children develop skills and abilities and strengthen values and attitudes that prepare them to be citizens capable of contributing to building democracy and peaceful social interaction.

The experience with fostering student governments in each region and country has encouraged education based on democracy, solidarity, and tolerance, to such an extent that even schools that are not part of Active School projects have appropriated the concept and organized students into work committees and groups in the classroom, even without learning guides and other active learning elements. The idea that students can run the school and oversee their own education is the way to open the doors to change. This has been taken advantage of as motivation for reaching out naturally: teachers train neighboring teachers in democracy, students teach students in other schools that the world is not divided into good guys and bad guys, but rather that we can learn together and extract the best of both for the good of everyone. Active Schools have worked on all of these ideas in the hope that they will build listening and reasoning skills.

Conviction 7

Interactive learning guides to develop life skills.

The guides put the curriculum in the students' hands for them to administer, making them the active artisans of a learning that is functional and applicable to real life. They encourage quality actions in multi-grade and multi-teacher schools and provide children with the opportunity to complete primary school at their own pace.

The big difference between a learning guide and an informational textbook is that the latter offers the answers to the students and does not make them reason things out to any significant extent, while the guide leads them step by step through a process by which the children find the answers. Using the guides, the endpoint is the definitions, in contrast to the traditional school, in which one starts with definitions and continues with a passive process. The essence of educational constructivism is that through interactive materials such as the guides, it is possible to arrive at definitions, not just memorize them. To achieve this objective, the guides are designed around the LPA method and use previous experiences as the starting point. In this way, experience can be related to the new material. If this were done by rote instead, the bits of information would be isolated and eventually these memories would be forgotten.

The learning guides were first developed to provide a means for the multi-grade school with one or two teachers to be more able to innovate; offer relevant, high-quality education; and implement flexible, personalized learning strategies. Guides in the multi-grade school are based on the students' background, and all of the active learning processes respect the local culture. At the same time, they do not focus solely on local issues, but rather make it possible to investigate and learn about other frames of reference and cultures, without neglecting a universal view of reality.

The interactive self-instructional guides are educational resources, organized by units and accessible to teachers and students that stress strategies enabling

students to play an active role in the learning process. They clearly spell out the accomplishments the students expect, the markers for the competencies being developed. The guides integrate conventional subject matter with the students' workbooks and the teacher's plans. The situations posed by the guides promote interactions—between students and teacher and with library books, the surrounding resources, and the community's store of knowledge—and involve preparing for real life.

In each country's context, the guides are developed in accordance with the national curricula, competencies in the educational goals, country policies and interests, and the ideals that guide the lives of different social groups. The guides respond to a concrete, simple, and relevant request: what each country believes its students should learn and how they can use what they learn at school in real life. Each country has its own approach to transforming its educational system. The Active School only offers a bridge to help ensure that this approach can have a positive impact in disadvantaged socio-economic situations. Providing interactive guides to schools where it is more difficult to provide children with a quality education is essential for integrating curriculum, school, and life, which can help ensure that children remain in the educational system. However, the guides are only an instrument, a resource for building and rebuilding knowledge. The work of the teacher, the situation of the school, the interests of the parents, and the characteristics of the social and cultural setting are all essential factors in making the curriculum a link between community and school.

Active School children manage the curriculum via the learning guides. For children to be active students, artisans of their own education, they need the right tools for learning to learn. When we say that the children manage their own curriculum, it is important to understand that the guides are not the only element of the curriculum. The guides integrate subject matter, capacities, and proposed activities into a didactic process that also includes continuous evaluation, the development of values and attitudes, etc., which strengthens their relationship to the curriculum. The guides have the children work on subjects related to daily life, the students' interests,

Students in Equatorial Guinea

and their socio-cultural background, but they are not limited to local knowledge; rather, they enable sharing universal knowledge. Knowledge construction through use of the guides is based on the local setting, the village, hamlet, or province, and offers opportunities for learning to learn and being creative and critical. The norms, conduct, and values promoted in the guides strengthen children's sense of equity and responsibility. Once they internalize these principles, children become capable of turning away from the false stereotypes that develop in society and they experience a positive paradigm shift. Values are worked on constantly through experiences.

To work with the interactive guides, students have to learn to read and comprehend, to produce text, to participate in dialogue, and to listen, starting in first grade. If they are not active readers, working with the guides ends up being just an exercise in copying information and rote memorization, and does not develop the skill of comprehension that an active reader would acquire. The children who work with the guides also require special orientation to learn to work and produce as a group without

neglecting individual learning. In other words, the teacher needs to promote collective work without forgetting that each child is learning at his or her own pace. The teacher who does not do a good job as mediator does not recognize the rights of each student to be heard, respected, and valued. Teachers learn in workshops how to adapt the guides to the needs of the children and to the social structure in which the school is immersed.

If teachers do not study and learn the guides in depth, unit by unit, they might end up being used only as informational texts, with the children just doing rote exercises and losing interest in the activities provided. If teachers do not provide step-by-step guidance to each group of children, the guides might end up training only the senses of students and not providing activities for their minds that require effort and enable developing knowledge. It is good to understand that these precautions do not refer to defects in the guides, but to their appropriate use, to the context, and to stakeholders who have the capacity to use them.

The interactive process of the learning guides creates situations that model relationships that are conducive to self-esteem, respect, acceptance, and confidence. All of this occurs in a safe setting for the children, where they can make mistakes, correct, review, reread, and rewrite, openly and sincerely. The guide itself strengthens a positive self-concept, because the students have the accompaniment of the teacher who orients them to learn with self-assurance, motivation, and success, from one step to the next, from one guide to the next, and from one unit to the next. All students have their own particular role in the group and their own identity, potential, and limitations.

In brief, interactive learning guides benefit learning in the following ways:

- They enable teachers to perform their role as mediator of learning, stimulating active learning through interactions with the students. The educational situations in the guides are flexible and can be adapted or enriched to respond swiftly and appropriately when cognitive conflicts arise, ensuring conditions that are conducive to students' finding meaning in what they are learning.

- They help to make the single-teacher, multi-grade classroom a place for meaningful reading and writing, because the active process emphasizes activities that involve speaking, listening, and reading with defined objectives; meaningful communication occurs that respects individual and group needs.

- The guides are not exclusively for single-teacher, multi-grade classrooms; rather, they are applicable to any learning situation—in multi-teacher, rural, or urban schools. By promoting an active, participatory methodology, they can meet the needs of teachers and students for interactive readings that improve learning outcomes.

- They facilitate the monitoring of teaching quality through analysis of achievement and performance levels and analysis of progress with a guide's process.

- Students can evaluate their own and their classmates' work, and at the same time make the necessary corrections for staying on course to attain the projected goals.

- They enable putting equity into practice with the children by ensuring that everyone participates in the activities and by promoting respect for the differences among students. This includes verifying that all school-age children have the opportunity and support necessary to attend and stay in school.

- They replace competition with mutual aid in learning, develop the steady exercise of solidarity, and engage everyone in being concerned about everyone's learning.

- The dynamics of the guides and the constant dialogue they promote transform the multi-grade classroom into a peace-building environment.

- Parents participate in the preparation of the annual workplan, which involves using the guides. They give a clear idea about what can be done during the year, what their children have to learn, and how parents can fulfill their role in supporting the learning process.

- They facilitate inviting other people or institutions, from the community or elsewhere, to participate. This support is important for the projects involving activities that put learning into practice and for improving peaceful social interactions with family members and other adults.

- For teachers, they provide support for planning and conducting classes, especially in multi-grade schools where they might have to prepare and teach classes in all subjects for five or six different grades while being attentive to different learning styles and paces.

- The guides are essential training instruments, providing teachers with basic teaching methods for both single- and multi-teacher schools.

- They integrate pedagogical content, processes, and practices. That is, their purpose is not to offer information about particular areas of knowledge, but to give step-by-step instructions so that the children can carry out the activities individually and in interaction with their classmates, family, and community. The guides enable the teacher to work on subject matter as an instrument for attaining the well-rounded education of the children: teach them to think, teach them to love.

- They strengthen children's linguistic skills by giving them opportunities for guided reading comprehension, text production, and oral expression, which are beneficial to learning in different knowledge areas.

- They foster active, meaningful use of other readings from the library and attend to children's needs and interests. The guides encourage students to verify the information they provide and to explore further through additional reading. They help to teach by example how to respect different opinions, discuss one's own opinion, and come to agreement.

- They can be easily used by teachers with little pedagogical training, but at the same time can be adapted and improved by teachers with more solid training. In most cases, the teachers themselves decide to join the author teams and further contextualize the subject matter and processes.

- Teachers can participate in a work team, with experienced advisors or authors, on producing new guides or enriching those they receive, using the new perspectives they develop from practice and reflection, which, in fact, are fundamental elements in the development of theory.

- Adapting the guides to the students' backgrounds and interests or developing new guides has enabled rural teachers to conduct effective research based on the daily observation of how children learn and to convince themselves of what Piaget said, that *what we teach is not always what children learn*.

- They help make the right to basic education a reality in disadvantaged rural areas, in schools with only one or two teachers, since these schools are supplied with the most important materials for learning.

- They provide practical links to training on issues that directly affect learning quality.

- They make it financially viable to provide an adequate supply of materials since the guides cost less than textbooks and can be used for several years and by pairs of children. These guides are not consumables.

Conviction 8

Many limitations can be overcome by making rural teachers visible.

Teachers are indispensable stakeholders in educational change.

It would seem that there is a deeply rooted idea that only projects and programs sponsored by private organizations funded by international cooperation agencies can implement comprehensive approaches to quality education: equip schools, train teachers, supply educational materials and media, conduct regular monitoring, evaluate results, and provide feedback, etc.

People also believe that these kinds of efforts never go beyond pilot projects that require twice the effort to benefit a small number of participants, and that they are impossible to significantly scale-up. People doubt that such programs have either the money or the qualified personnel to provide personalized attention to each teacher in the workplace and ensure sustainability.

We have examined traditional ways some countries foster educational change, for example, mass training events on general subject matter that are scheduled, held, and evaluated by central entities, often with lecture hall seating and methods. These events, although legitimate, do not lead to significant change in isolated schools.

Despite the central authorities' capacity, dedication, and efforts to train teachers and improve student learning, the true protagonists at the in-service training workshops were not the teachers, with their own background and with knowledge acquired on the job. Nor was the school a source for the development of theoretical reference points that help to shape a new approach and to reframe the discourse of change.

Even in cases where training is personalized to address specific teacher and community requests, back at work, when teachers begin to feel they have been left alone with the responsibility to implement what they learned, or even worse, when they are transferred to other schools, everything reverts to the way it was before for the students and the community, and for the

trained teachers. Continuity is missing from a process that could make the theory behind their practice meaningful; the opportunity is wasted to train teachers in something the Active School feels is valuable: reflecting on practice, contrasting it to the theory received in workshops, and developing knowledge useful for reorienting teachers' practices.

On the rural school and its context. We also need to reflect on a new way of understanding the rural school and the benefits of the multi-grade classroom. Training processes should focus attention on communities' sociocultural dimensions, productive aspects, environmental diversity, and other issues that central-level authorities rarely address.

Although some countries do have programs that maintain approaches, fundamentals, and services for serving rural schools, there are no strategies for making schools into incubators for educational reform, or for molding teachers into thoughtful professionals who can preserve their prior knowledge yet modify their thinking based on new things they learn through their new way of working.

On the path towards keeping students grounded in their social reality. Teachers are indispensable stakeholders in educational change and in transforming pedagogical practices so that students can develop life skills. We look to teachers with all the influence they have in the educational community, to help develop the approach to change for rural education in their country. Without teachers, it is impossible to bring about educational change. They work where the future of the most disadvantaged is being forged by society: the rural school.

The idea of supporting a proposal for change for a country, starting with the teachers themselves, has been a challenge that is not easy to face. At the same time, it has meant creating opportunities for dialogue about intercultural knowledge and for constant reflection about not only what was done, but also how it was done, how to continue, how to improve, how to get change to catch on at the neighboring school—and about how to accomplish this with quality and at a lower cost.

On the challenges of developing proposals with teachers. Involving rural school teachers in the development of proposals for change means adopting an ongoing technical and pedagogical training process. It means recognizing what they are confident about as well as their qualms regarding what they might contribute to the group. It implies bolstering their identity so they do not feel they have lesser standing than urban teachers do. It requires a change in mind-set to be able to leave behind practices that for years they considered correct.

Along with these challenges, the skeptics (local, regional, and national authorities) must be addressed, those who think rural teachers do not have the skills to extract meaning from what they read or to write something meaningful (basic competencies for knowledge development). They also argue that these teachers have not received enough education to make decisions about change based on the investigation of their daily work. Many authorities have questioned the advisability of having rural teachers on the team that develops the proposals for change, and although their doubts are reasonable, calling on rural teachers appears to be one of the best ways to cut through the differences between discourse and teacher practice. The involvement of teachers during the entire process of developing proposals for change is necessary. When given the opportunity to assume leadership roles in the educational system, teachers believe the rural school with all its pluses and minuses can also be a place for redesigning concepts about teaching and learning.

Creating opportunities for teachers to participate, despite limited training, their resistance to change, and the gap between teaching theory and practice, is to put the Delors Report pillar, Learning to Learn, into meaningful action. In our work with training teams of pioneer teachers, they have developed capacities for participating as authors of the guides for second and third grade students, and proposing some training modules for teachers, especially for first grade reading and writing projects. This training process involved a critical, thoughtful analysis of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the different subjects, with guidance from area specialists throughout production of the guides. We believe the teachers who

Teacher authors in Nicaragua

become authors are those who think most deeply about their own practice, are the best at handling the multi-grade classroom, make the best adaptations to the process, have managed to turn their schools into model schools, and, in many situations, are the most successful at providing pedagogical accompaniment.

Trial by error. To support teachers as authors and writers is necessary to providing training that helps them develop a process in which they examine their practices, interpret them, and articulate them, aided by an area specialist and a teaching practice consultant who are responsible for meticulously guiding the scientific and pedagogical aspects of the process and for helping teachers edit their work.

Teacher-authors are able to ground the materials, and the activities to be appropriate to the student background and conditions, and provide the narratives that relate to everyday life. This ensures that what is imperceptible to curriculum and area specialists behind desks will be identified as one of the basic ingredients in the guides, and that encourage teachers to write down their reflections about their interactions with the students to improve learning quality.

Mentoring other teachers is another strategy that has reaffirmed that the Active School is a school of interactions. Part of the continuous reflection in this in-service training model is asking what rural teachers can contribute from their own experience and background. Teachers who have seen that change makes sense and can demonstrate that their school is active, closely mentor a group of teachers from neighboring schools, fostering a new pedagogical culture for problem solving where teachers work together to cope with isolation and deficiencies.

Multi-grade teacher with students in Nicaragua

In the mentoring model, neighboring teachers use their own experiences and work with their colleagues to make concepts and processes more understandable and make change occur more rapidly because it is more compelling, offer more relevant and regular support, provide access to functioning schools for inspiration on how to make it possible, and keep training costs down.

This type of mentoring, in addition to bolstering the self-esteem of the mentor teachers, has provided a strategy for expanding coverage beyond the limits of donor funding and to help best practices spread organically. It has also provoked even more reflection, complementing training agendas and exploring new knowledge.

Thus, the practices implemented by Active Schools that focus on teachers as innovators, authors, and mentors have also become tools for institutionalizing national and regional policies oriented toward the equitable distribution of education, recognizing the attributes of each teacher, each school, and each community.

We believe that developing proposals for change from the bottom up, along with the teachers, provides valuable lessons. One lesson is that if we want conceptual constructs and daily experience to be consistent, all proposals for improving educational quality should include teachers, not only as implementers, but also as developers, innovators, and authors. We must recognize all learning, even empirical learning, because quality improvements can be made based on this learning.

The new rural teacher's biggest challenge. Making rural teachers visible despite the enormous constraints on their professional development requires implementing in-service training strategies, where they must develop professional competencies such as the following to provide quality attention to students in all grades:

- Master content for different subjects;
- Develop didactic competencies, especially for working in a multi-grade classroom;
- Strengthen personal and professional identities;
- Develop competencies for understanding students and their milieu and for relating to the community; and
- Develop competencies for research, to remain current in a changing world.

Despite the huge structural problems that projects will face in operating as if they were teacher-training schools (without attempting to be so), it is necessary to accept the challenge and take that giant step. We are beginning, from our point of view and backed by almost two decades of experience, to see that change does not happen with in-person training workshops, that competent professional teachers can be trained based on real-life working conditions, in their schools and in their own setting.

This requires transforming not only relationships among teachers, parents, and their students, but also between the teacher and those providing pedagogical accompaniment and between these people and the technical and area specialists. This is the only way for teachers to acquire the self-assurance needed to reflect on their pedagogical practices, and to accept the cognitive conflict between what they traditionally knew how to do and what they are being presented with, as the basis for internalizing new knowledge.

As mentioned in the section on the conviction related to pedagogical accompaniment in the classroom, continuous analysis and reflection about one's own performance is a key factor in the development of rural teachers. Otherwise, they would not be capable of being included in decisions, which are complex but manageable, about providing quality attention to schools lacking the basic conditions for success.

Should we not trust rural teachers, with structured in-service training, to lead the way for educational changes that inspire national and regional policies?

Conviction 9

Curriculum, values, democracy, and technology foster educational quality and equity in schools.

Values education prepares students to cope with everyday situations, act freely and responsibly, and make their lives meaningful.

For the rural school to be an Active School, we must not forget the approaches to and challenges for education in the 21st century—learning to learn, learning to be, learning to coexist—challenges we can meet through high-quality, integrated approaches.

All of our convictions have emphasized the intention to transform conventional schools into active ones based on what they already have, institutionalizing new ways of doing things, and strengthening the degree of responsibility and commitment of all stakeholders. This involves exploring different ways to access knowledge and culture, finding alternatives and opportunities not yet in regular use for integrating technology into the educational process, and making the rural school a community that practices values and exercises democracy.

The foregoing challenges, while difficult to address in any school in the city, become even more difficult in rural schools that have to begin by constructing the meaning of school itself. Following are some of the thought-provoking questions that we think helped Active School leaders to understand that there is no reason why rural schools cannot provide high-quality equitable education. These were some of the most relevant and led to the most discussion:

- How can we interpret the curriculum of each ministry of education so that it does not become a one-size-fits-all prescription for all schools?

- What do the terms relevance, curricular activities, competencies, and active processes mean?

- How can we orient unschooled parents to help in the educational process?
- How can we open the doors of the school to technology?
- How can student councils help to foster values?
- How can we use the interactive guides to awaken interest in and curiosity about technology?
- How can we develop a pedagogy of engagement?
- How can the culture of the greater society enter the school?
- What does improving education mean in terms of quality and equity?
- How can we support every student, teacher, and parent based on their needs?
- How can we organize continuing education for teachers whose education was geared toward working in an urban school?
- How can solidarity, teamwork, creativity, and a can-do attitude enable transforming even the most isolated school?

Questions such as these have been discussed at in-person training sessions, meetings with teachers in the ILCs, and parents' council meetings. We feel that although these issues do merit the attention of specialists, they also should be analyzed during continuing education and can serve as inspiration for opening the way to attaining greater equity in rural education.

Values education: a process linked to the development of each active student's life plan. Values education generally is understood as being concerned with educating and preparing students to cope with everyday situations, understand them, and act freely and responsibly, according to

ethical principles that make sense to them because they help make their lives meaningful.

For this reason, values education is an explicit part of the Active School curriculum. It is worked into all subjects experientially through LPA activities and is integrated into student council activities both inside and outside of school, since values acquire context-specific meanings. The subjects in the interactive guides include work on "attitudinal content," such as working cooperatively, taking care of school supplies, respect for the ideas of others, etc.

Given the complexity of acting morally at all times in one's life, the Active School curriculum makes room for values in all of its components, beginning with teacher training, based on the belief that training is a continuous process of acquiring, structuring, and restructuring knowledge and values. Teachers have a powerful influence on the development of values by students as part of their ideal life plan. Teachers' attitudes—what they say, how they say it, how they practice what they teach, the tone of voice they use, among others—influence whether values are compelling and easy for students to put into practice because they find concrete meaning in them.

Inspired in authors who have defined 'education as perfection' (e.g., Plato, Pestalozzi, Comte, Fröebel) and strengthened from experience with an approach that was developed with the participation of all stakeholders, we have ensured that values are included not only in the educational program for students, but also as subjects for teachers, parents, and authorities in the educational community. This has led to approaching values as core themes, so that everyone has opportunities for discovering and renewing them in daily interactions both inside and outside the school. Seeing education in this light, as perfecting individual potential, both intellectual and moral, enriches an approach that is aimed at advancing, both individually and socially, all those involved. Relations between school and community are strengthened using strategies that guide parents to relate to their children in a way that enables them to make responsible choices: how to act in any

situation, how to choose the path they consider most appropriate, and how their behavior affects their lives and the lives of others. This gives them the opportunity to develop their own values scale, which is different from theorizing, chastising, or imposing norms without understanding what they mean. It is also part of the process of changing the school culture to adopt tolerance, autonomy, and self-evaluation.

The ILCs and parent workshops have worked on developing some challenges that should be worked on in school to develop values through school practices. These topics have traditionally been interpreted by teachers only as school rules, without realizing that they are a manifestation of values and are based on them. This turns rules into the ways the group chooses to express its values.

For this reason, students participate through the student councils and parent associations, where values are chosen that should be practiced concretely and that can be turned into rules that provide guidance for everyday work. In the schools, this has led to internalization of values such as autonomy, identity, creativity, collaboration, justice, participation, tolerance, responsibility, and democracy.

Values education in schools with obvious deficits creates an opportunity for discussions between teachers and specialists, and among parents, to think about how to educate their children without punishing them for not obeying senseless rules, or because they are not as good as those they consider to be good students. This has also resulted in continuous monitoring of regular interactions in school and, with this, continuous teachers' self-evaluation of their own commitment to help those who have the least to develop their life plans.

In summary, values are present in all components of the Active School, in all subjects in the interactive guides, and in all activities. They are cross-cutting themes that run through everything and serve as guiding norms for teachers, parents, and students. These values, integrated throughout the process, almost hidden yet alive, have to do with the

Teacher bringing curriculum to life in Peru

conservation and rational use of natural resources, gender equity, mutual assistance, respect and appreciation for differences, and human rights, among others. This process is both implicit and explicit, takes place with the involvement of all stakeholders, and is one of the things of greatest interest to the student councils, which stimulate them both in the school and beyond its walls.

A curriculum in synch with reality and the future. The curriculum can be understood as a bridge between the culture and the school. Fundamental elements of the social culture include knowledge, capacities, and values, which are also key components of the curriculum. This means that for the curriculum to be meaningful, it must acknowledge the diversity of contexts, make cultural elements visible, and identify short-, medium-, and long-term community objectives for contributing to quality education and relevant learning.

Understanding relevance and culture. Relevance is not meant to limit students to their local frame of reference—their neighborhood, village, or municipality—but, rather, that by knowing the place where they live and to which they belong, they develop the capacity to understand regional, national, and international reality.

> *A curriculum that is relevant does not limit the student but rather grounds him or her in local knowledge to better understand national reality.*

Pertinent subject matter is taught through active processes throughout the entire curriculum and is included on the basis of consultations regarding

necessary competencies and capacities, the approaches in national curricula, the needs and aspirations expressed by the communities, prior analyses by teachers and specialists, and international experiences with different strategies (many not known, but well-grounded) for encouraging a dialogue between cultural realities and scientific knowledge.

These topics have required regular, in-depth discussions with teachers, many of whom do not understand culture as a human creation and education as responsible for helping human beings to create their culture. Very often, it was necessary to guide teachers away from ways of thinking that resulted in their taking a passive attitude toward the curriculum. They would not propose or change anything and were resigned to coping with curricular requirements that are the same for all schools and do not take community or culture into account. Many rural teachers think communities do not have culture because their inhabitants are uneducated.

Others who were more active would put curricula together as collages. They would add unrelated subjects, which in their experience were no longer being included in competency- or capacity-based curricula, or would discard other subjects for being so close to real life that there was no point in acknowledging or studying them. Furthermore, since cultural themes are not exactly scientific, but rather rich in content created by the community, these teachers did not consider them relevant.

In developing the second- and third-grade guides with groups of teacher-authors and preparing the first-grade reading and writing projects, it was important to analyze the curriculum of each country with the teachers, looking beyond programs, school activities, and subject-matter content. Debate touched on the differences between the explicit curriculum and the hidden curriculum and how to assume the challenge of linking the explicit with the hidden to develop contextualized learning guides. This process emphasized the different kinds of interactions; the conduct of the teachers, students, and parents; the different ways of evaluating; and other aspects that are relevant when working to develop capacities, values, and attitudes.

Education of indigenous groups has motivated discussion about the approaches ministries of education in each country use. Responding to the educational demands of these communities, we have worked with teachers about their role in intercultural bilingual education. Many teachers define bilingual education as teaching in two languages, where the teacher uses the vernacular language by necessity and for a short time while students learn the official language of the school. However, true bilingual education should use the maternal or vernacular language as an instrument of education, maintaining and developing the first language while teaching the second one. This has been a topic of discussion with teachers working in indigenous communities who must cope with language and cultural difficulties.

We have also relied on valuable experiences from countries that offer intercultural bilingual education and not only work in two languages, but also preserve, strengthen, and promote other facets of indigenous culture.

We begin by recognizing the subjects and values important to each culture that should be integrated into the active process of the school, and from there we design methodology for vernacular language acquisition and for learning Spanish. We feel that it is not enough just to acquire the written code of one's own language; it is also important for the process to be natural, enjoyable, and meaningful. This is a first step toward the fair treatment of children in rural indigenous schools, and we hope to continue developing appropriate linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical strategies with teachers and communities.

Some lessons learned. The process of demystifying the curriculum to develop proposals for a more democratic, more equitable, and less exclusive Active School can be summarized as follows:

- When teachers understand the true meaning of the curriculum, they approach the students' interactive guides with a more critical and creative eye. No longer do they see the guides as a textbook to read and copy, nor as subject matter isolated from reality, but rather as a proposal that they

can improve, enrich, and rework from a 21st-century perspective, rather than being tethered to a list of topics from the past.

- By accepting the curriculum as a proposal they then develop with input from outside the school, teachers can develop a certain autonomy in the design and implementation of integrated curricula that respond to the community's needs and aspirations. Even in the midst of difficulties, teachers can offer initiatives that are conducive to thinking about how to address diversity and about respect for different learning speeds.

- Teachers have made progress in figuring out the curriculum, in responding to suggestions to make it more flexible, and in accommodating it to local needs, yet the results are vulnerable. Many central-level authorities continue to be skeptical that what teacher initiative is doing in the rural school classifies as quality education, often without analyzing many factors that can provide evidence of quality in rural schools, such as relevance, for example.

- Deciding to develop the guides along with the teachers, based on studying and diversifying the curriculum, led to something very significant for the Active School: a deeper understanding and use of the last step in the LPA sequence—APPLY. In thinking about the need for a curriculum that responds to community needs and expectations, discussion naturally turned to the following questions: What is the meaning of what the students do in school? How can students use what they have around them to solve their problems? How can they communicate to the community what they learn in school? What does learning for life mean? Does it mean life right now or life in the future?

These thoughts, and others related to applying what is learned and practiced, helped teachers in all of the countries to understand the concept of a competency-based curriculum as a set of capacities that includes knowledge, attitudes, skills, and abilities that are attained through a learning process and that are manifested in students' performance in other contexts. This led to a permanent shift in many paradigms in the traditional curricula

and brought visibility to an active process that leads to using what is learned in school in real-life situations and contexts. This means using what is learned, not storing it in one's memory. Additionally, using knowledge in non-school settings opens the door to other opportunities for learning outside of school.

Bringing technology to the rural school. One of the Active School proposals for improving rural school quality is that from the earliest grades students should develop practical competencies that prepare them to compete successfully in their own milieu and beyond it and to continue learning in a constantly changing world. Therefore, the rural school must transform itself in all aspects to widen its horizons to include other areas, such as productivity and technology.

The dilemma is how to bring the rural school and technology together, even in situations where the school is immersed in poverty and teachers lack opportunities to modernize their technological know–how. However, since we are aware that something is changing in the world outside the school, we cannot speak of educational quality and at the same time leave students to communicate in the language of the past, with a one-size-fits-all textbook that imposes absolute truths and reading and writing methods that do not provide opportunities for developing and expressing new meaning.

In fact, transforming the rural school's ambiance, academic relationships, and furnishings; promoting teamwork, project-based work, and consultation of library resources; and emphasizing process over results have opened new horizons in the rural school and have already overturned several educational paradigms.

The interactive guides as 'rural computers.' The learning guides can be seen as the computers for rural children. Urban students who have the resources to have a computer benefit from advantages such as using the internet and learning different computer systems and programs. The educational benefit of these technological advances is that the children who

use them become participants in the process, from turning on the computer, to following all the steps, to overcoming on their own any obstacles they might encounter. Use of the guides, like the use of computers, involves steps for solving problems: defining a situation and analyzing it, identifying possible solutions, choosing the appropriate one and implementing it, and then, at the end, evaluating the outcome. In both situations, students develop important thinking skills and must make decisions, which requires weighing the advantages and disadvantages of different options.

In addition to being participatory tools, the computer and the internet compel students to develop their language skills, increase their vocabulary, and use logical reasoning to conduct searches or other similar activities. Children who have access to computers and the internet become involved in new channels of interaction. Examples include messaging, email, thousands of chat rooms, and other information and communications options that can be used to communicate around the world instantaneously. These means are now within the reach of municipalities and provinces and in some countries are already part of students' social milieu.

Unfortunately, not all children enjoy these benefits since these services and products are limited in most rural areas. In addition, when they are available, they do not belong solely to the students, so they do not fully develop the capacity to use them. In these cases, the learning guides, in addition to offering all of the educational benefits mentioned previously, also prepare students for successfully using computer resources in the future. Like computers, the guides also engage students, who work through them at their own pace, following instructions and figuring out what they must do, while making choices about resources on their own or with the group.

The learning guides also engage students in expanding their knowledge of their own language and introduce them to different pertinent topics that enrich their vocabulary in a way that is logical and helps them to communicate.

Just as the internet and computers introduce their users to new channels of interaction, the learning guides give children guidelines on how to interact

with the different agents in the school and community and how to consult other references. In these guides, students find challenges that lead them to seek out their classmates' cooperation, talk about their progress with their parents, or converse with a member of their community or social group. Given the similarities between the use of a guide and of a computer, children who learn in an educational environment like the Active School are capable of learning to use other interactive instruments, such as computers, more easily.

The dilemma continues to be how to support teachers who have taken the risk of transforming their teaching, leaving the front of the classroom, and beginning to establish horizontal relationships with students and parents who may be poor but who are not as ignorant or naive as they might have been decades ago. To some extent, students in today's rural schools do have contact one way or another with large quantities of information, whether via radio, television, telephone, and advertising, or even internet kiosks or cafés as they become more common in rural towns. Furthermore, people from rural communities now travel more frequently to cities, where they gain experience with other forms of media, other people, and other cultures.

The projects implemented in each country have sought ways to support schools and communities with some technological resources, which, with effort, ongoing training, and willingness, help schools to stop being places that just transmit information and transform them into places that process information. They do this, however, without losing sight of the school as a place where students interact and are educated using values, who internalize modern life, know the language of technology, and access information autonomously.

This is the reason why the learning resource centers (LRCs) have been developed and strategically placed in municipalities or provinces where they are available to schools and communities. LRCs have become places where teachers and parents can meet and share information and experiences. In addition, many students organized by their teachers and accompanied by family members visit the closest LRC to investigate topics of interest on the

Classroom experiment in an LRC in Nicaragua

internet and communicate with other active project members by email as part of activities suggested by the interactive guides.

Each LRC has an assigned teacher who is in charge and who is continuously learning about the pedagogical use of the Active School approach and the use of technological resources to improve educational quality and equity in rural areas.

Communities help the LRCs care for materials and equipment provided by the project to benefit clusters of approximately 15 to 20 schools. Given the inevitable problems due to the distances between widely scattered schools, those in charge of the LRCs and the facilitators or those who provide pedagogical accompaniment, along with teachers, have had to come up with creative solutions for traveling to communities or for organizing visits from communities to the learning resource centers.

The LRCs have tried to overcome their initial difficulties, designing plans for training in the care and use of the equipment and internet use and offering this training as a service to teachers and students. However, since these initiatives are sustained by grants, they have also developed creative fundraising strategies, which they hope will bear fruit, as part of the decentralization of education in the region, and that they will not end up closing when the projects end.

Our objective is for everything based on school transformation that is implemented in a region or country to have meaning and not die a sudden death when the funding and technical assistance run out. Therefore, it has been necessary from the beginning to encourage the communities and local-level authorities to take responsibility for the LRCs. We have worked to integrate parents and municipal and district authorities into this effort, making them aware that they will have to maintain the LRC and turn it into a community-owned resource, to ensure that students will continue to have a place close to school that they cannot afford to lose as proof that their education is transforming.

To have quality and equity, schools must be democratized. Most of all, we are convinced of the need for having schools where it is possible to develop harmonious relationships that involve mutual enrichment and learning in close relation. Traditional tensions between teachers and students, and among teachers and family and community, are being replaced by dialogue, by exercise of the right to listen and to be heard, the right to disagree, and to use that right with respect and without trampling on the opposing side.

With this conviction, it becomes imperative to democratize the rural school, a place where the teacher does not impose either knowledge or values, but where these are assumed to be the result of critical thinking. The first lesson is to abolish punishment, reprimands, and humiliation. In their place, we propose establishing relationships among teachers, students, and parents,

where they participate in decisions about school life and what they need and expect from education to be able to meet their goals. From the outset, all students are taught to recognize their own skills and those of their classmates, to learn to negotiate, and to learn that they cannot always get their own way, all of which contributes to learning to respect differences.

Democratization involves dialogue and leaving behind authoritarian relationships. This is what the student councils do when they work to turn teachers into mediators, students into autonomous individuals, parents into peacemakers, and the school into a place for interacting and developing an identity. This identity is strengthened through practicing dialogue, negotiation, tolerance, participation, and the recognition of everyone's feelings and individual skills and traits.

Student councils turn teachers into mediators, students into autonomous individuals, parents into peacemakers, and the school into a place for developing an identity.

The capacity to feel, think, and act democratically also develops through working actively on the interactive guides individually and as a group, by letting everyone have a chance to talk and by listening to them, by interacting in group activities, and by conducting formative evaluations of each LPA exercise, among other things. These are all opportunities the Active School provides that enable students to make decisions, agree on responsibilities they can and should accept, and accept the consequences when these responsibilities are not fulfilled. All of this, practiced day after day, in a setting of peaceful social interactions, prepares students to assume roles in society later, to enter, self-assured, the world of adults, and to strengthen autonomy, a pillar of democracy.

Conviction 10

Teaching and learning to read and write can be fun, natural, and meaningful.

The Active School uses an approach known as *Expresiones Significativas* (Meaningful Expressions) to stimulate children to learn to read and write. Success with this method in Central and South America over several years and in urban and rural settings has provided a foundation for thinking about first grade and its importance for well-rounded child development (cognitive, social, affective, communicative, spiritual, ethical, and physical).

This thinking has also involved ideas about the importance of first grade teachers because of their commitment to welcome children to the school world, to create an environment conducive to learning new things, to learn along with them, and to ensure that everyone learns.

Aware of the situation of most children entering first grade in the rural school—without prior exposure to equitable, culturally appropriate early childhood education—we have designed an approach that links early childhood experiences in the home with the transition to first grade.

This approach focuses on games and activities that students see as a chance to play and have fun with letters. Taking into account each child's uniqueness and cultural differences, linking the reading and writing process to children's own reality, and bringing family upbringing and school-based education together are important steps in ensuring that this transition from home directly to first grade is a success.

From the start, the strategies used to introduce Active School children to the alphabet in first grade gives them opportunities to be active subjects and to strengthen their personality, self-concept, self-image, and autonomy. Breaking down the difference between play and academic activities aids the important process of socialization. Psychomotor skills are worked on as a whole, going beyond the traditional concept of mechanical movement.

Teachers face the challenge from parents who expect their children will learn to read in the 10-month school year and the need to provide a quality first grade that helps to reduce the considerable social inequality, especially that affecting those who have the least. In response, we continue to develop,

along with teachers and parents, successful strategies to make first grade in the rural school more flexible and prepared for children and their families to receive a new education with or without early childhood education.

To respond to this challenge, we have designed special training strategies for teachers, parents, and educational authorities with the following objectives:

- Develop capacities in teachers to professionalize their practice based on strategies designed by a group of teacher–authors who, with their experience and the guidance of area specialists, propose activities and concepts about the what, how, and why. These strategies then produce other activities in each school that, without becoming methods to follow, help other teachers to understand the theories, which if delivered in a lecture would end up being a nice discourse on the what, without attaining the expected results at school.

- Develop the capacity of teachers so that they are not only concerned with how to use the methods and means for learning to read, but also become interested in the why, that is, the theories that underline the method. This will provide a theoretical and methodological foundation for the need to make changes so that when children enter school in first grade they will enjoy discovering the opportunities reading and writing offer.

- The successful involvement of teacher–authors in the development of the training materials has enabled us to have shared meanings in the steps from theory to practice and back again to theory, the internalization of new attitudes, and validated strategies for guiding the rural first grade with quality and equity.

  The journey travelled with the teachers in the classroom has been a fascinating challenge. It has enabled teachers to break down paradigms about school routines in the process of teaching reading and writing. It has enabled teachers to bridge the theoretical approach of what "should be" with practical ways to overcome the difficulties. This approach would have been of little use to teachers if they had not been

motivated, because without motivation it is impossible to change, as it is also impossible to understand that we all have something to teach and something to learn, and that the strategies that have been traditionally used in teaching need to be reviewed, updated, and, if necessary, overhauled.

- Developing capacities in parents, even those from disadvantaged sectors, so they can participate in their children's education, stimulating and valuing all the efforts they make to learn. For parents taught with rote reading and writing methods, we have developed strategies that give them a positive attitude toward participating in the changeover, for accepting that reading and writing are not limited to copying and spelling. However, the main change is achieved by developing the capacity to value school success as a desirable achievement, so that parents believe their children are capable and they all express their strengths in different ways.

- Developing capacities in educational authorities for accompanying and monitoring the teacher in the classroom, to ensure accountability from teachers, but also to help them change their practices, which will also help children learn more and better.

  This involves fostering more horizontal kinds of participation that enable the authorities to interact with the interests, doubts, and initiatives of the teachers, so that teachers feel supported and not judged by questions such as "How many letters have the children learned? Why are they not all on the same letter? How many passed and how many failed? Which children read aloud the best? Why don't you give them sentences to copy to improve their handwriting?" These and other questions are common in conventional methods.

- Create settings in the school and the home for providing a high quality, equitable education for children who did not receive early childhood education and for over-age children, which lead to a significant reduction in dropouts and grade repeating in primary school.

Children learning to write their names in Nicaragua

The approach to learning to read and write. The Active School approach to learning to read and write is based on the principle that when children start first grade they bring with them things they have already learned in family and social settings that must be taken into account for enriching or completing the learning process. At the same time, it ensures that reading is not reduced to decoding, or copying, but rather to producing and interpreting texts. First grade follows the principle that reading and writing should be presented to children intact, just as it appears in their lives—as something natural, useful, and enjoyable.

Starting in first grade, the objective is for children to interact with different texts so that reading and writing makes sense to them from the onset. An Active School objective is to ensure that children entering first grade have

useful, enjoyable experiences with reading and writing. Considering that many of them have not had access to early childhood education, strategies are based on what each child knows, the child's socialization level, the colloquial register each brings from home, and reduced pressure on them to learn their letters and sounds without understanding them.

Likewise, it is expected that children will learn successfully, offering them real opportunities to read and write on their own, with their classmates, and with their teacher. Another objective of this approach is for children, starting in first grade, to develop a series of cognitive skills (prediction, anticipation, recognition of explicit information, inference, and argumentation) that will make them proficient readers while in primary school.

This approach is meant to be implemented in an environment where the educational exercises mimic real-life communication situations. The first-grade classroom becomes a place to converse about events in daily life, compare experiences, reflect about actions taken, write spontaneously, and read actual writing. This requires that the evaluation process be beneficial to the work of the individual children, keeping their interest for learning in mind at the beginning and in their achievements. This interest can be achieved if reading and writing appear in their lives as enjoyable and natural as playing.

The first-grade approach is framed within modern communications trends that consider language use. Its components are reading comprehension, text production, oral ability or competency as a speaker, and development of phonological awareness.

This approach works on oral competency intensely through activities appropriate to each child's development: conversing about the history of their name; listening to stories and then making up their own; narrating slices of community life, such as shopping in the store; having fun playing with letters and words; and other activities aimed at familiarizing them with school life.

Phonological awareness is taught through play to familiarize students with linked chains of sounds that are used in speech, and that in our experience, facilitate appropriation of the alphabetic code. However, teachers are counseled not to teach first-grade reading as if it were simply reading aloud; although knowledge of the oral and visual elements of writing is taught systematically, the important thing is to learn to read for comprehension.

By studying these components, teachers develop the habit of constantly reflecting on how they teach reading and writing. They also find opportunities for self- and co-evaluation of teaching methods. Teachers develop the capacity to observe all of the children individually, to see where they are in their guides at any given time, and to offer them the help they need. They also learn to have high expectations of first-grade children, regardless of their socio-economic background. The approach develops capacities in the teachers for analyzing and creating new learning situations conducive to learning to read and write. These include cooperative groups to aid socialization; the inclusion of play, art, and physical activities throughout the learning process; seeking support and collaboration from family and higher grades in the school; and the creation of lettered environments that help students discover the social value of writing.

This approach to the teaching and learning of reading and writing is implemented through different means, such as project-based work that enables the real use of language and brings real-life situations into the classroom. The projects are wide-ranging and interdisciplinary and enable integrating all areas that involve the act of reading. This approach has the students' interests in mind, it fosters an active, autonomous way of learning to read and write, and helps make a smoother transition from a socio-cultural setting to the first grade.

Why projects? The approach uses projects in the school that enable constant development of knowledge and skills by the group, through the search for answers to asking questions, and finding solutions to problems and information about the interests of group members.

The projects use strategies that provide children with opportunities for meaningful activities explicitly designed to encourage learning.

Although the projects grow out of the children's interests and needs, this does not obviate the teachers' intentions, which, without ignoring the students' interests, are geared toward proposing learning situations that foster group work; enable investigating, exploring, and posing hypotheses; and in which everyone has the opportunity to participate actively, even over-age students.

These projects are planned with the teacher–authors and, without the intention of being rigid models that must be followed, propose intentional learning situations that link the following:

- Development of oral communication competency as a prerequisite for developing written communication competency;
- Development of phonological awareness, understood as the children's identifying with the phonological values of their mother tongue; and
- Reading comprehension that goes beyond mechanical decoding and oral reproduction of written signs.

Starting in first grade, the children read with the intention of producing meaning; writing also avoids artificial language to make way for the language of daily life. They write for a real audience or recipient and with a purpose, and this motivates them from their very first writings to pay attention to the meaning of the text and how to present it. This means knowing how to produce writing that is coherent and meaningful and that communicates.

The first grade projects are the result of discussions and designs developed with teachers and with the support of parents in Colombia, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru. This is the result of over 25 years of work and research, which has enabled designing and planning an active process of language teaching and learning to improve on the routine classes of the traditional school. Involving the grade's parents has facilitated offering them the information they need to help their children, and the teachers and the school, through their requests, expectations, and suggestions.

The first-grade approach considers reading comprehension, text production, oral ability, and development of phonological awareness. This approach focuses on activities appropriate to each child's development: conversing about the history of their name; listening to stories and then making up their own; narrating slices of community life, such as shopping in the store; having fun playing with letters and words; and other activities aimed at familiarizing them with school life.

What projects have teacher–authors developed? The first project done in first grade is *My Own Name*, because of the power it has to awaken awareness that encourages children to discover the need to read and write. The knowledge of their own name and the names of their classmates, the teacher, and their closest relatives ensures that they will learn and will be motivated to continue learning.

Since 1980, when we began to develop the *Expresiones Significativas* approach, we have been trying to understand how first grade children see the world and to understand the challenges teachers face in the

Student in Equatorial Guinea

active multi-grade classroom. With teachers, we look for ways they can reinforce the socialization and upbringing children have already received at home and bring with them to school. We explore ways for teachers to emphasize cognitive-communicative and linguistic competencies that continue children´s reading and writing readiness for school. We also include ways to improve children´s visual-motor development and motivation to learn. Finally, we look for ways to help teachers have positive attitudes and expectations for the success of students starting school.

We felt that the success of Dr. Irena Majchzark, a polish educator, with literacy starting with the student's own name was a valuable lesson that could be adapted, and so we started using the name as a meaningful expression that touches on children's socio-affective, cognitive, corporal, communicative, and spiritual dimensions. The exercise was adapted to create a school project that is based on the child as a unique and social being. It recognizes that the starting point for each child is different, and that if we expect all of them to learn, we must adapt our teaching to provide meaningful opportunities where practicing talking, listening, reading, and writing are necessary from the start.

This approach uses *My Own Name* as a door to reading, which children decide on their own to enter. Instead of forced, stressful learning, this is meant to provide an initial encounter with the enjoyment of reading and writing. It is important to make clear that the educational exercises that are part of the name project and other projects are not isolated activities; they are all geared to working with language as something we use every day. Therefore, they include reading to provide opportunities for group reflection, oral expression to facilitate communication, writing closely

related to social practices, and phonological awareness for spontaneous knowledge of the elements that make up whole words (phonemes).

The My Own Name *project uses strategies to get children to think about oral expression while constantly inquiring into the writing system, which enables them to relate phonological awareness to the alphabetic hypothesis.*

Another project, *The Store: The Place to Buy, Sell, and Chat*, invites students to continue acquiring reading and writing through play. This project gives children the opportunity to identify types of texts, read meaningful messages, dramatize, play with words, and ask questions to verify hypotheses.

Every community, no matter how isolated or remote, has a little store where every family shops with their children. In the store, they see symbols and logos to which they assign a meaning based on their social function. For example, they see the names of food products, lists of products, signs with product prices, advertising, etc. Interpreting the symbols and logos in the store stimulates children's initiative to learn to read and write, while enabling them to discover the function of communication.

This project organizes classroom interactions with the shopkeeper in the store to promote the natural integration of information, values, and attitudes. The exercise is designed so that the children need to use nonverbal forms of expression—signals and gestures—and to use expressions of courtesy—thank you, please, excuse me, greetings and farewells.

The store project logically integrates problem solving and uses common situations, such as writing the names of products, reading shopping or errand lists, oral narration of shopping anecdotes, and role-playing that

requires using oral skills—speaking and listening. This project, as well as all the others, approaches writing not as a purely school-based activity, but rather as an eminently social one that has implications for life inside and outside of school.

A project on plants and animals in the community gives the children a variety of opportunities to interact with oral and written language, along with writing activities that involve investigating, producing real-life texts, vocabulary building, the development of creativity, and the main one: using texts to construct meaning.

Conviction 11

Moving beyond the traditional concept of education requires transforming space, time, and resources.

In Active Schools, we believe that one should start working with schools and communities using what they have already available and maximized. We foster the development of creativity, management skills and synergies among schools, families, communities and other actors, understanding that education is everyone's affair.

The Active School promotes the use of the stakeholders´ real-life experiences to create new knowledge. In doing so, stakeholders reflect on the space where these practices occur, the management of time for teaching and learning, and the complementary resources that are indispensable if the rural school is to make sense as a place for learning.

The use of physical space. We know that for learning to take place, the space needs to be pleasant and the students need to feel comfortable and secure while engaged in their activities. For that reason, the Active School trains teachers to creatively use all of the existing space—main classroom, auxiliary classrooms, corridors, yard, and surroundings—and to utilize furniture arrangement and adaptation. In general, teachers learn to analyze school environments. They learn how to make a school pleasant and to have functional spaces, not all of which need to be located in the school. Other sites can be used, such as community kiosks, parks, and meeting halls.

In training sessions, ILCs, and classroom visits, we work on individualized strategies (based on schools' current facilities and resources) to best arrange the schools and make changes, for example, by joining two classrooms to facilitate multi-grade work, using a hallway as a place to store materials, or building windows to improve poor ventilation.

With the participation of parents and community organizations, where they exist, we improve or build toilets or latrines and organize school vegetable gardens and medicinal plant nurseries, all of which foment learning many different things.

Poverty of most rural schools has not been an obstacle to organizing school facilities for active learning, because we have managed to move beyond the idea of physical infrastructure requirements to building active learning spaces where interaction, dialogue, and sharing take place, and to transcend school walls to achieve comprehensive learning. The idea of a quality rural school is not just the idea of designing a facility identical to an urban school. It goes beyond the physical and involves learning to make the most of the resources available.

The functional and creative use of school space has fostered strategies such as "The Reading Tree" (reading under a tree), "Experiment Alley" (using the school corridor for science and environment activities), and "Space and Information Exchange" (first grade students join another grade's class to listen to their presentations or make their own).The improvement of the physical space used for learning has led to a new school–family–community relationship that gives meaning to community participation in activities such as installing a window, patching leaks, or painting walls, which make parents feel part of an educational community and not just laborers working for the teacher.

Students participating in classroom activity in Nicaragua

The use of school time. We have discussed time with teachers and communities and the fact that there is never enough time to learn everything, which is why the available time should be used for what is most important. Students often have to walk an hour or more to get to class in rural areas, where they then have long, meaningless activities, a few hours of copying lessons, and an endless recess. This leaves families and students constantly frustrated. In many cases, this situation leads parents to take

their children out of school when they do not see them making progress with their education, and using them to help around the house and on the farm instead.

> *Parents do not really see the education as being free. Instead, it is very expensive when parents lose out on their children helping them work because they are attending a school where they are wasting time.*

We discuss situations in Active Schools where in-service training, helping teachers to better understand how the interactive guides (which are student-centered and respect their pace of learning) can help them focus the time in school on what is most relevant, which is to have students develop capacities and competencies. The guides also motivate students to attend class every day, to work on an active, varied, and useful process.

Multi-grade teachers in active schools now use the time they used to spend planning rote classes for all grades on studying the guides, adapting them, and preparing to better guide all students, both individually and as a group. The time used in developing capacities and competencies is sufficient for bringing the social culture to the school through practical activities, to strengthen values, and to address not only the cognitive dimension, but also the affective, corporal, and spiritual ones.

Flexible promotion gives individual students the time they need to learn, letting them advance at their own pace without pressure and without forcing them to copy or memorize what they do not understand. The learning process and pace is different for each student. Flexible promotion makes also good use of the time a rural student has to attend school and the time a multi-grade teacher has to provide quality, equitable attention to several grades at once. A student can spend more or less time finishing a guide or a unit, and a teacher can spend more or less time with the student, depending on the student's needs.

To make appropriate use of the time rural students have for attending school also requires us to abandon the concept of grade repetition or failure, to make room for a fair evaluation that enables promotion to the next higher grade at any time during the school year, when the student has attained the goals for each subject or grade. The time is spent on helping students discover their potential, finding strategies for making progress toward their goals, and strengthening their self-esteem and autonomy.

The task of learning to effectively use school time is perhaps one of the most challenging for any high-quality and equitable learning approach; however, it is the one that most contributes to achieving changes in pedagogical practices and to offering the education that all children merit and to which they have a right.

The use of complementary resources and materials. In an Active School, students use real objects to learn from observation, manipulation and experimentation. Students also create their own materials following the learning guides. To help students manipulate these objects and materials, learning corners or areas are organized within the classroom.

Having learning corners in the school, even if they are divided into areas or grades, enables moving beyond the traditional notion of breaking knowledge down into parts, and helps to experience global, interdisciplinary processes, which fosters learning to learn. In the math corner, students do not just make calculations to solve addition and subtraction problems; instead, they work on developing their logic, they read with a purpose, they produce texts, they play, and they practice values. The same thing occurs in the other corners, which becomes slices of real life, interactive museums where they find answers to many questions, where they work together, but take individual responsibility.

Students using local resources to learn to read and write in Nicaragua

For this to work, teachers are encouraged to study the learning guides and the resources needed for doing the activities. In general, teachers are taught to look at resources they had not considered before with a new perspective and to use them in teaching for investigation, for enriching knowledge, or for solving problems that arise in working through the guides. Teachers need accompaniment to help them see beyond just organizing spaces and materials, to organizing them with resources from their surroundings and using them as strategies for learning by doing, playing, discovering, trying over and over again, and developing and validating hypotheses.

This was the reason for developing the learning resource centers, mentioned in Conviction 9. These centers, run by a coordinator who knows the

Active School methodology, provide teachers, students, and parents with ideas for making the most of what they have in their natural, social, and cultural environments and to use this in the classroom to provide learning opportunities for all.

The use of a school library. The Active School library is an important tool for students as well as for teachers and parents. It offers the chance to complement the information provided in the guides; to broaden knowledge based on the reader's interests; to stimulate the reading habit and the production of texts; to consult on topics of interest to the community, and for personal enjoyment.

All Active Schools receive a basic library that includes:

- **Textbooks**, including different subjects and grades. These are useful for looking up information related to the guides and other topics of interest to readers. These are for both teachers and students.

- **Reference books**, including dictionaries, atlases with maps of the country and the world, and encyclopedias.

- **Literature**, including storybooks, novels, tales, legends and myths, word games (riddles, chants, tongue twisters), and biographies, by national and world-famous authors.

- **Pedagogy books**, including different subjects as part of the commitment to continuing education, which helps to enrich the discussions in the ILCs.

- **Parent resources**, including books on health, nutrition, and community well-being. Some of the titles include the productive activities of the region.

To select the appropriate content of each library, we have established book selection committees in each of the countries. They are in charge of studying book design, illustrations, appropriateness of format, and types of letters, depending on the target grade, and language, to determine levels of comprehension and vocabulary. We have worked with the teachers, facilitators, and local authorities analyzing the books and readings available in the area. Most importantly, we have done a survey of the interests of the students and the different grades, values, and culture.

Providing opportunities to all stakeholders to participate in selecting books for the library, with the advice of the project specialists, has engaged the communities in organizing the libraries. This includes building bookshelves, improving security in the schools to protect the books, and coming up with strategies for multi-grade schools, such as organizing special sections for first grade and others for higher grades.

Strategies have been developed to promote reading communities; reading circles have been created that involve parents, even some who are illiterate, and who are guided by the schoolchildren.

These kinds of strategies have led to communities putting greater emphasis on the importance of reading and creating conditions in the home for children, before enrolling in school, to have the opportunity to develop their communication competencies naturally. Additionally, families begin to understand that if reading is not comprehended, it is not reading, so they now pay more attention to comprehension than to sounding out words.

Most Active Schools are concerned with using all the natural, cultural, and human resources efficiently and effectively. Family participation in building bookshelves and other materials required for active learning has fostered interest in recognizing each region's resources, such as wood, the leaves of plants, seeds, and recyclable materials, but most important, parents have gotten involved in the learning process.

Conviction 12

A fresh outlook on the rural school can inspire new practices for initial teacher training.

This conviction reflects our final thoughts about the future for Active Schools grounded on the teachers as the foundation of the education system. This last thought focuses on the importance of pre-service teacher training programs that adjust the concept of training to the needs and complexities of teaching, including the classroom, school, and community using the Active Schools practices.

The modern concept of teacher training goes beyond the passive transmission of information that used to provide only some techniques and some methods for teaching. In order to help teachers excel in their classrooms we hope that teacher training institutes will link education research to their programs, starting at the introductory level, to motivate future teachers to act as researchers and maintain that mindset of constant inquiry about their own pedagogical knowledge and daily practice. From observing and sharing with teachers in training workshops, it would seem from their attitudes that they have not had the opportunity in their initial training to approach educational reality objectively. They also say that they have not been taught to reflect on and understand the pedagogical practices that pertain to the one-teacher, multi-grade classroom. Their insecure use of the basic concepts of the different disciplines is plain to see and reveals that many only got as far as the theoretical concepts regarding curriculum, didactics, and evaluation, and never concerned themselves with modernizing and redefining those concepts through their own inquiry of the traditional and current use of pedagogical knowledge. Others seem to have a lot of theoretical and practical knowledge but little imagination and creativity for improving their professional performance.

Changing teacher-training policy requires analyzing, implementing, and validating a series of strategies that helps initial training schools to develop teaching and learning process linked to reality. In doing so, future teachers could compare theoretical reflection with the reality of the classroom, including in urban, rural, one-teacher, multi-grade, and multi-teacher schools. This, of course, requires that initial training be done with a new pedagogical focus and use an active, participatory methodology—the same that guides the Active School- that serves as a reference point for future

teachers, which they can then reproduce in their classrooms, schools, and communities, under actual working conditions.

The active school as teacher training ground. Different schools implementing the Active Schools approach that are near and far from teacher training schools have proposed several ways to link initial teacher training with the continuing education that is part of the Active School, and to develop simple proposals with trainers of trainers to build closer relationships with disadvantaged single-teacher, multi-grade, and multi-teacher schools.

They propose making Active Schools central teacher training venues, where teachers can analyze real-life situations, enabling them to appropriate these situations and enrich their training as they identify other real elements that contribute new knowledge to pedagogy. They also propose that the real management of a single-teacher or multi-grade school be compulsory for student teachers, where they learn from hands-on experience that there is no reason why children from the poorest segments of society have to be at the receiving end of a poor education, and where these teachers in training discover the need for a new teacher for the new century and for a new school.

This new teacher not only needs mastery of the basic subject areas or disciplines, but also a professional identity; teaching skills for the single-teacher, multi-grade classroom; strategies for working with diversity; and an understanding of a new concept of rurality. These and other aspects should be emphasized in the initial training program.

Future teachers must know that their training does not end when they finish their academic studies. Rather, it is a continuing process that is nurtured by concrete, on-the-job experience. It has been suggested in every country that the initial training program should include, at a minimum, developing capacities for working effectively with children who are from different grades, over-age, lacking in early childhood stimulation, and from families uninterested in school or that are poor. We propose real practice for student

teachers as part of flexible initial training, where not only the professors from the teacher training institution have a say. In addition, the teachers in charge of rural Active Schools are also considered in planning observation and practice sessions, where not everything is planned as usual, but, instead, where things that are not planned represent an opportunity to learn. It appears that future teachers are still unaware that rural and urban students have different learning needs and different abilities, and that individual students have their own pace of learning, which is why teaching cannot be standardized.

Hands-on learning. The constant dialogue between the future teacher and the guiding teacher in the Active School can open horizons for future teachers to learn to substantiate their practices, and to be aware of the techniques they use when teaching more than one grade at a time, when promoting interactions among grades, or among work teams, or individually. This helps them to think about their actions, about how they cope with diversity, and their capacity for applying in the classroom teaching methods learned at the teacher's college. When future teachers learn from experience to reflect on their performance, they develop the ability to go beyond the requirements of the planning formats used in the teacher training institute. They learn to assess their teaching skills, to cope with unexpected events as part of active teaching, and to face challenges as if they were the teachers in charge, who are evaluated not by their students' grades, but rather by the children learning what they need to learn in due time and by being sensitive to their needs.

Reflections from the teacher training institutes. Building on the preceding reflections, we worked with professors from teacher training institutes in each country to link the training of future teachers with Active School practices during each phase of student teaching: observation, assistantship, intensive practice.

Activities to be carried out with the participation of the training school have been planned for each phase and are aimed at familiarizing future teachers with the Active Schools approach. With the LPA method, students have

Students using learning guides in Nicaragua

been organized differently for their involvement in the school, to enable active, collaborative learning, and to foster community participation in the education process and allow its traditional wisdom into the school. This has involved a series of discussions, local workshops, observation visits to demonstration schools, and analysis of how different Active School elements—interactive guides, parental participation, cooperative learning, use of local materials and resources, first grade reading and writing methods, evaluation, and flexible promotion—can be integrated into the different subjects and activities characteristic of the initial training of future teachers.

Discussions and proposals about the acceptability of teacher training institute curricula have focused on future teachers developing competencies for becoming facilitators or mediators, requiring a shift in mind-set toward educational problems. This entails the development of autonomy, critical analysis of their own practice, proposing changes to make education relevant and equitable, and decisive commitment to make the changes needed to attain this kind of education in schools.

What we would like to see is the development of competencies in future teachers as the result of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, all of which enable them to perform their jobs well. This means clearly formulating the aspects that an Active School teacher must address and building awareness in future teachers about what it means to learn and to teach, to adapt not only educational practices, but also educational processes. Even though changing the attitude of the trainers of trainers is not easy, and getting teacher training school discourse to come down to the level of the reality of contextualized educational problems is very complex, some schools are beginning to include Active Schools approaches in their initial training process. Concrete experiences in teacher training schools in Chinandega and Matagalpa in Nicaragua have been working in the framework of a pedagogical network on innovative strategies that are changing the teacher practices that have been handed down. The experience in these schools has had implications both for trainers and for trainees, acting as stakeholders who get involved responsibly and autonomously in the transformation of the primary school and in building educational quality.

Our ultimate goal is that schools transform into Active Schools and become open institutions where teachers refresh their knowledge continuously and find more opportunities for reflection and for strengthening their perspective as researchers. The school should be their laboratory, using an integrated process to address the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that students should acquire. In this school, there would always be room for applying and transferring the knowledge acquired in the training school, which will then become new knowledge for trainers and trainees. These lessons learned outside the training school—in real life—in contact with real students with different needs and unique abilities, will provoke in teachers the cognitive conflict that will enable theoretical and practical teaching know–how to be reworked and updated constantly through a critical understanding of the reality of students, their families, and their context. In the end, this is what drives the Active School.

Oscar Mogollón visiting students in Peru

Commentary

The Impact of the Active Learning Model Developed by Oscar Mogollón in Several Latin American Countries

by Dr. Ray Chesterfield, Mariposa Consulting, LLC

This commentary uses secondary sources to examine the results of the active learning model for rural multi-grade schools developed by Oscar Mogollón in several Latin American countries. Results suggest that the model consistently helped teachers organize learning so that students increased achievement and progress through the primary school cycle. The model also appears to engender democratic behavior among students.

Introduction

I met Oscar Mogollón in the late 1980s when I was doing a retrospective of USAID investment in basic education in Latin America and had chosen the Escuela Nueva as a case study. I was a bit surprised when the meeting that was arranged through mutual friends was scheduled for 6:30 a.m. at the Ministry of Education in Bogotá. However, Oscar was the director of the *Escuela Nueva* program, which was then involved in a nationwide expansion. Thus, I thought that I would receive a courtesy meeting of perhaps a half-hour so that Oscar could get an early start to an undoubtedly long day. When I arrived for the meeting, Oscar led me to a jeep and we jumped in for a four-hour trip into the countryside.

During the trip, Oscar talked about the program by describing the work of different teachers, schools, and communities implementing the program in small, rural schools. He talked about teachers with large classes encompassing all six grades, who were able to keep all of the students engaged by sending them into the community to find local elements for learning corners and using the student guides to monitor student progress and move them to different grades in individual subjects as the context was mastered. He described the elections of student governments in different schools and the student representatives' efforts to make sure their classmates

arrived on time. Most of all he stressed the need to involve teachers in using their experience to create materials and learning opportunities for all children in the classroom. He described the relatively lengthy training of three weeks in which the teacher trainees simulated a multi-grade classroom and worked on solutions to the various challenges encountered in a multi-grade school.

He also told the fascinating story of supporters of *Escuela Nueva* moving the incipient program into non-political divisions of the Ministry of Education during the early years when there was a change in administration. This kept the program from being visible and, therefore, not subject to closure or changes, as was often the case with popular innovative programs carried out under a previous government.

On reaching the school and observing classes, I had my eyes opened. Although I had taught in and observed hundreds of primary classes in rural Latin America, these classes were unique in my experience. They were noisy, busy with students working independently or in small groups, and the teacher was circulating among them or joining a particular group as needed. Students were using grade-specific, self-instructional guides to follow the principles of observing, doing, and learning. This was very different from the usual rural multi-grade classroom where the teacher commonly lectured to one grade, while students of other grades waited their turn.

Implicit in Oscar's description of the work of individual teachers, and of my observation of the program in practice, was his vision of creating tools that helped teachers with few resources to teach creatively and organize their classrooms so that all children had an opportunity to learn appropriate grade-level subject matter.

On the return trip, we discussed program evaluation and Oscar's worries about students in *Escuela Nueva* not being evaluated fairly. He thought the use of standardized tests made teachers target learning material for the tests rather than being flexible and allowing students to develop at their own speed in mastering subject matter. This was a period when Latin America

was beginning to develop testing systems that were often based on tests developed elsewhere and were norm-referenced, generally with little relation to the local curriculum. I mentioned that there were new testing procedures that captured mastery of the curricular context and that other means of evaluating students and teachers, such as classroom performance, portfolios, and assessment of good practice, were starting to be used. Oscar said he hoped that if his program was to be evaluated, some of those techniques would be used.

After my day with Oscar, I had the opportunity to visit a number of other *Escuela Nueva* schools, sometimes unannounced, over the next two weeks. The classrooms functioned similarly to those I had visited with Oscar, as students worked with their guides and teachers provided support. On two occasions, I arrived at one-room schools on days when the teacher either had been called away or was sick. In both, the president of the school government had opened the school; students showed up and went to work with their self-instructional guides under the supervision of the student government officers.

Over the next 20 years, I was involved with the evaluations of several of the programs for rural multi-grade schools in different Latin American countries that Oscar developed. In each case, I tried to use a number of different techniques that would help interested parties understand the results of his approach. This paper is not a systematic evaluation of Oscar's programs, which can be found elsewhere. Rather it attempts to point out the results of his active-learning model in several areas that are normally of interest to educators.

The Programs

The New Unitary School Program, known as NEU (*Nueva Escuela Unitaria*) in Spanish, was implemented in 200 schools from 1991 to 1997 as a component of the USAID-funded BEST (Basic Education Strengthening) Project in Guatemala. Half of the schools in the NEU project served Mayan children and half served Ladino children. The Model School Project in Nicaragua began in 1997 as part of the USAID-funded BASE Project. It began with 26 multi-grade schools and had 51 schools in 2002. The AprenDes Project, in the department of San Martín in Peru, sought to improve the academic performance of students in small rural schools and support the policy of educational decentralization by encouraging local participation in school decision-making. The USAID-funded project began in 2004 in 70 schools and added an addition 70 sister schools the following year. The project is still in operation. The data presented here are from each project's monitoring of the implementation of all components of the projects. Additional data were gathered in Guatemala and Nicaragua from a follow-up study conducted in 2002 that examined the participation of girls in rural multi-grade active learning programs.

Each program used a pedagogical model adapted to local needs from Oscar Mogollón's *Escuela Nueva* in Colombia. The model emphasized the importance of the teacher as a facilitator of learning by creating a variety of learning activities at each grade level. At the heart of the model was participatory, active learning that stressed the use of investigation, modeling, and practice for students to incorporate new skills, information, and concepts into their mental framework.

Data Collection and Analysis

Two sources of secondary information were used in the study. First, the monitoring databases of each program provided data on achievement, internal efficiency, and costs. Second, researchers used ethnographic studies that used multi-methodological designs that included systematic observations of students and teachers in naturally occurring classroom contexts. Structured classroom observations, maps, ethnographic notes, and informal interviews were used to collect data on actual classroom behavior.

The results of these studies, presented in terms of absolute and relative frequencies, as well as Chi-square, t-test, and correlational analyses, are used in this presentation.

Results

Classroom Context

Academic achievement depends on the learning contexts and processes in the classroom that allow students to interact with subject matter. One aspect of classroom context is the way in which learning situations are organized. Table 1 shows that across the three programs included in this study, students were observed in more small groups working with their teachers and peers than were children in small, rural, multi-grade schools without a Mogollón-designed program. At least 25 percent, and up to 47 percent of all student interactions occurred in the small-group context. In any of the comparison groups, the highest percentage of interactions in this context was 18 percent.

TABLE 1

Frequency of Learning Contexts—Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru

Context	Small-Group Teacher	Small-Group Student	Large Group	Seat Work
		Guatemala		
NEU	17	8	11	63
Comparison	1	2	52	45
		Nicaragua		
Model School	6	41	39	14
Comparison	18	0	54	39
		Peru		
AprenDes	32	5	21	42
Comparison	8	4	43	45

Sources: Chesterfield et al., 2004; Chesterfield and Montané, 2005.

In two countries—Guatemala and Peru—ethnographic studies of individual students permitted an analysis of the relation between the mean interactions of students by context and achievement at the end of third grade. As can be seen in Table 2, participation in small-group contexts in the active-learning programs had a significant relationship to achievement. Only Spanish-language test results were available for the Guatemala sample, whereas a positive significant relationship was found in both Spanish and mathematics in Peru. No significant relationships were found with the comparison group in either country.

TABLE 2

Correlations of Participation in Small Groups and Achievement—Guatemala and Peru

Program/Test	NEU	Comparison	AprenDes	Comparison
Comunicación	.79**	.30	.89**	-.71
Matemática	NA	NA	.66**	-.24

Sources: Chesterfield and Montané, 2005; De Baessa, Chesterfield, and Ramos, 2002.

The development of democratic behavior in the classroom was another important element of Mogollón's model. Participation in an elected student government, as well as working together with companions in the classroom, was seen as a way to promote respect for others and the importance of teamwork that would serve students in helping to build a democratic society.

In Guatemala it was possible to examine democratic behaviors through systematic observation of a group of students in the NEU program over a two-year period. Five types of behaviors were monitored in three categories: Leadership—directs a lesson; Sense of Equity—takes turns and shares materials; and Interpersonal Effectiveness—helps others and expresses opinions. As illustrated in Table 3, the majority of instances of all democratic behavior were observed among boys and girls in the NEU program. This was true among Mayan children in Region II and Ladino children in Region IV.

TABLE 3

Democratic Behaviors among NEU Students as a Percentage of All Democratic Behaviors Observed

Region II				
Behavior	Boys		Girls	
	1993	1994	1993	1994
Takes turns	74%	75%	71%	91%**
Helps others	100%	61%	50%	46%
Expresses opinions	--	69%	--	51%
Directs a lesson	81%*	87%**	60%	84%**
Region IV				
	1993	1994	1993	1994
Takes turns	88%	100%**	100%	100%
Helps others	100%	66%	66%	75%
Expresses opinions	--	43%	--	61%
Directs a lesson	85%*	100%**	69%	100%

* P .05; **P .01

Source: De Baessa, Chesterfield, and Ramos, 2002.

Table 4 shows the relationship between individual democratic behavior and achievement. As can be seen, there are positive significant correlations in terms of directing lessons, taking turns, and total democratic conduct. The correlations are significant for both boys and girls in the active learning program.

TABLE 4
Correlations of Achievement in Communication and Democratic Behavior

Program/Democratic Behavior	NEU	Comparison
Total democratic behavior	.77**	.03
Directs a lesson	.82**	.08
Takes turns	.70*	- .18
Helps others	.32	.14
Expresses opinions	.05	-.01

Source: De Baessa, Chesterfield, and Ramos, 2002

Internal Efficiency

Internal efficiency is minimizing waste in an educational system to maximize available resources. In education, in internal efficiency is often expressed as the percentage of boys and girls who enter a particular school cycle in a given year and complete that cycle on time. The combination of repetition and dropout has a negative effect on the use of a system's financial resources by elevating the cost to produce a graduate at a given level. The cost of the 20 million repeaters in primary schools of Latin America is estimated at $2.5 billion a year.

Table 5 shows the percentage of real cohorts that reached sixth grade in six years in NEU and comparison schools. Although there was not consistent positive change for either boys or girls, the NEU program children of both sexes had consistently higher percentages than did the comparison schools.

TABLE 5

Percentage of Boys and Girls in NEU and Comparison Schools that Reach Sixth Grade on Time: Guatemala, 1991–1995

Cohort	Boys		Girls	
	NEU	EU	NEU	EU
1991–96	18.4	10.1	12.8	8.8
1992–97	16.8	9.5	13.9	8.1
1993–98	12.2	11.0	10.6	8.5
1994–99	12.6	11.5	11.2	10.2
1995–00	13.1	11.3	14.6	9.5

Source: Chesterfield et al., 2004.

Table 6 shows the results for AprenDes schools when compared to all multi-grade schools not participating in the AprenDes project. As can be seen, AprenDes had slightly higher rates of completion in the baseline year than did similar schools. This trend has continued over the life of the project, with the original AprenDes schools generally having internal efficiency rates of 10 percent or more above the comparison schools. The difference is less in 2008, the result of a loss of a relatively large number of girls in fourth and fifth grades that year. Enrollment from third to fourth and fourth to fifth had drops of almost 15 percent from 2007 to 2008. This may be related to the large turnover of teachers who were then replaced with teachers

inexperienced with the program in 2008. Overall, the original, or "pioneer," AprenDes schools, have maintained relatively stable completion rates over the years of study, with only about a maximum 3 percent variation, whereas comparison school completion rates have varied by more than 9 percent.

TABLE 6

Internal Efficiency—Estimated Percentages of First Graders Reaching Sixth Grade in Six Years—AprenDes Pioneers and Comparison Schools, 2002–2007

Groups/Years	AprenDes	Difference	Comparison
2002/2003	41%	+2.1%	38.9%
2003/2004	46.6%	+9.0%	37.6%
2004/2005	46.5%	+15.2%	31.3%
2005/2006	45.9%	+12.6%	33.3%
2006/2007	47.6%	+10.2%	37.4%
2007/2008	44.5%	+3.9%	40.6%

Sources: Chesterfield, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009.

The effectiveness of the programs was measured by calculating the cost per sixth grade graduate. Ministry of Education data on the cost per student in the primary school system were used and supplemented by program costs per student in a cohort for each year a student remained in the system. The costs of all students in a cohort over a given cycle were totaled and divided by the number of students reaching sixth grade in six years. As shown in Table 7, the cost at the margin of producing a male sixth-grade NEU graduate was 1,807 quetzals or about $200 less than it was in comparison schools. Given the traditionally lower graduation rates for girls, the savings at the margin for NEU were somewhat less. However, the difference over

the comparison schools still resulted in a 666 quetzals saving, or about $70 in equivalent terms. Overall, the difference was about $160.

TABLE 7
Cost per Sixth-Grade Graduate for NEU and Comparison Schools

Cohort 1991–1996	NEU	EU
Boys	Q6,910.15	Q8717.62
Girls	Q8,423.99	Q9,089,18
Total	Q7,487.80	Q8,872.75

To examine the cost-effectiveness of the AprenDes Project, the average cost per sixth grade graduate in a normal six-year cycle was calculated using the projected internal efficiency rates for two consecutive years of project implementation. Reconstructed cohorts were used because the program had not been implemented for an entire primary school cycle.

As shown in Table 8, the almost 10 percent higher efficiency for AprenDes students in the first year of the program ameliorated the high cost of program start-up for students entering in that year. This trend continues for the 2005, 2006, and 2007 cohorts, with AprenDes consistently lower than the original baseline costs and cheaper than comparison schools.

The cost at the margin to produce an additional sixth grade graduate in six years has been, on average, several hundred dollars cheaper in AprenDes than in the multi-grade schools of San Martín that are not using the AprenDes program. It is expected that with refinement of training and materials, AprenDes will be incorporated into Ministry of Education activities and, therefore, will incur no additional costs beyond normal per student expenditures in the future. Thus, additional program costs for 2009 were not projected. It is also important to note that the general increased

efficiency found in San Martín multi-grade schools has lowered the costs to produce a sixth-grade graduate to below the baseline for the first time.

When the costs per graduate for both AprenDes Pioneer Schools and Sister Schools were calculated, costs have generally been lower for AprenDes schools. The exception is 2008, where a sixth-grade graduate is produced in the comparison schools for about $100 less than the graduate of Pioneers and Sisters combined.

TABLE 8

Estimated Cost to Produce a Sixth Grade Graduate in Six Years—Overall, 2004–2007

Group/Year	Comparison	AprenDes/Pioneers	Combined
2004	$2,769	$2,768	NA
2005	$3,123	$2,715	$2,685
2006	$2,927	$2,743	$2,851
2007	$2,806	$2,594	$2,677
2008	$2,627	$2,595	$2,725

*Includes Direct Costs (furniture, library, games, manipulatives, sports equipment, and general school repairs) and Recurrent Costs (materials for students and teachers, student self-learning guides, technical team and facilitator salary and travel, teacher travel and per diem, workshops and other technical assistance with teachers/UGELs/CONEI, and materials for Resource Center).

**2003 Ministry of Education cost per student.

***Costs based on sixth-grade entry given the high completion rates (97 percent) in that grade.

Sources: AprenDes evaluation databases, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008; AprenDes financial division data, 2009.

Academic Achievement

Learning the academic content that allows a student to be an effective citizen is the objective of national and local school systems. Student achievement can be measured in a variety of ways. The most common measure in Latin America has generally been assessments by teachers in the classroom. However, in recent years, standardized tests have become common and the use of Item Response theory and computerized programs for determining mastery of grade-level subject matter is replacing measurement of mean progress.

In Guatemala, data are from mean scores of the national testing program carried by the Universidad del Valle for the Ministry of Education. Although the NEU program that Oscar Mogollón developed did not receive financial support from the Ministry of Education during the years of testing, the university included the program and the comparison group in its analyses. As can be seen from Table 9, NEU students had lower test results than did the comparison group in the first year of testing. However, both NEU boys and girls made greater gains in achievement than did the comparison group in all areas tested. NEU girls had higher mean scores in each area at the end of testing than did girls in comparison groups.

TABLE 9
Change in Achievement of Active Learning and Comparison Students

Area/Years	Concepts				Resolution of Problems			
	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
	NEU	EU	NEU	EU	NEU	EU	NEU	EU
1998	41.3	41.4	39.1	44.3	42.9	44.1	40.5	47.8
2001	52.2	46.7	52.4	52.9	50.6	42.7	45.1	46.3
Change	**+10.9**	**+5.3**	**+13.3**	**+8.6**	**+7.7**	**-1.4**	**+4.6**	**-1.5**

Area/Years	Mathematics				Reading			
	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
	NEU	EU	NEU	EU	NEU	EU	NEU	EU
1998	41.3	41.4	39.1	44.3	42.9	44.1	40.5	47.8
2001	52.2	46.7	52.4	52.9	50.6	42.7	45.1	46.3
Change	**+10.9**	**+5.3**	**+13.3**	**+8.6**	**+7.7**	**-1.4**	**+4.6**	**-1.5**

Source: Chesterfield et al., 2004.

Achieving grade-level standards, or mastery, in communication was the principal indicator for monitoring progress in Peru. The use of this indicator was consistent with the Peruvian national emergency plan focusing on improving reading and writing skills that went into effect while the AprenDes program was being implemented. To have a program-level measure for tracking, all students reaching mastery on the tests in first, third and sixth grade were aggregated and divided by the population of students taking the tests in AprenDes schools that began the program in 2004, or Pioneer Schools; in Sister schools that began the program in 2005; and in comparison schools without the AprenDes program. Table 10 shows the results in mastery of the communication curriculum for all project schools in San Martín, and for the comparison group of multi-grade schools. As can

be seen, project schools have consistently had higher overall mastery levels than have the comparison schools. Since 2006, the difference in mastery between the two groups was at least five percentage points. The AprenDes schools also had at least 10 percent fewer students at the lowest level of mastery throughout the implementation period.

TABLE 10

End-of-School-Year Aggregate Mastery Levels in Communication: AprenDes and Comparison Schools, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008

Level/Year	AprenDes Combined					Comparison Schools				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Mastery		8%	15%	14%	18.0%	8%+	7%	8%	5%	13%
Near Mastery		39%	46%	47%	41%	32%	31%	37%	36%	36%
Basic		22%	14%	17%	20%	14%	17%	15%	22%	20%
Below Basic		32%	25%	21%	21%	46%	45%	40%	37%	31%

+All comparison schools, including future Sister Schools.

Source: Cueto, Guerro, Sugimaru, & León, 2009.

It is important to note the improvement in the control schools' level of mastery in 2008. This appears to be the result of a number of factors taking place in Peruvian education system. First was the influence of the AprenDes Project as a result of workshops by project personnel with outreach personnel of the local school districts, which may have led to the adaptation of some AprenDes methods in comparison schools. Second, improvement probably was related to teachers' taking advantage of national in-service training opportunities offered by the Ministry of Education that year. Finally, a national testing effort for second grade and providing results to schools may have helped teachers to focus their efforts on specific problem areas.

In Nicaragua, data on comparison schools' achievement were not available. However, Table 11 shows that in targeted grades of the Model Schools program developed by Mogollón, the number of students reaching mastery of the subject matter in Spanish and mathematics increased substantially from the 2001 baseline.

TABLE 11

Mastery Levels of Third- and Fourth-Grade Students in Nicaragua Model Schools, 2001–2004

	Subject	Sex	3rd Grade				4th			
			2001	2002	2003	2004	2001	2002	2003	2004
Multi-grade Model	Spanish	M	38	60	56	72	63	84	77	NA
		F	35	58	61	68	68	80	80	NA
		Total	37	59	59	70	66	82	79	NA
	Math	M	10	52	56	75	33	73	76	NA
		F	3	41	57	69	24	66	75	NA
		Total	7	47	56	72	28	69	75	NA

Source: Enge et al.,

Cost per graduate provides general benefits to society by making education service delivery more efficient. However, such a measure runs the danger of increasing efficiency with no corresponding improvement in educational quality, by, for example, offering universal promotion at all primary-grade levels. A second measure of cost-benefit that avoids this problem is the determination of the marginal cost of increasing student mastery. This analysis provides the cost, at the margin, for an additional student mastering the curriculum. When tests based on norms were the typical educational measure of achievement, this analysis was generally done by calculating the cost of raising achievement test scores a point at the margin. However, such an analysis did little to speak to the real societal benefit of knowledge testing, which is mastery of the curriculum.

Thus, this analysis focused on the cost of an additional student reaching mastery over the life of the AprenDes program.

Table 12 presents the cost for an additional student to reach mastery in communication for AprenDes and comparison schools. As can be seen, the original AprenDes schools reduced the cost of increasing student mastery in the first four years of the project because of both lower costs and a higher percentage of students reaching mastery each year. Although costs rose in 2008 because of a slight decrease in the percentage of students reaching mastery, over the five years of implementation, costs have decreased by almost 50 percent. In 2008, original AprenDes schools' costs for producing a student at mastery are still several hundred dollars below that of all multi-grade schools in the system.

It is important to note that the increase in achievement and completion rates in the comparison schools substantially lowered system costs in 2008.

TABLE 12

Estimated Cost for a Student Reaching Mastery, AprenDes Pioneers and Comparison, 2004–2007

Group/Year	Comparison	AprenDes
2004	$3,048	$4,020
2005	$4,403	$3,516
2006	$4,013	$2,234
2007	$6,469	$1,973
2008	$2,438	$2,168

*Includes Direct Costs (furniture, library, games, manipulatives, sports equipment, and general school repairs) and Recurrent Costs (materials for students and teachers, student self-learning guides, facilitator salary and travel, workshops, and materials for Resource Center).

Source: AprenDes evaluation databases, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009; AprenDes financial division data, 2009.

The costs for mastery in the AprenDes program as a whole, when Pioneer and Sister schools were combined, were also considerably below the baseline year. With the exception of the baseline year, they are also lower than for other multi-grade schools in the department. When Sister schools alone were examined, costs were higher than the for the comparison group, even prior to AprenDes's implementation, owing to low mastery results. However, in the last two years of implementation, costs have been considerably less than baseline and well below those of the comparisons schools. In 2008, Sister schools exceeded both Pioneers and comparison schools in mastery.

TABLE 13
Estimated Cost for a Student Reaching Mastery, 2004–2007

Group/Year	Comparison	Combined	AprenDes/Sisters
2004	$3,048	NA	$5,870
2005	$4,403	$4,997	$9,737
2006	$4,013	$2,430	$2,832
2007	$6,469	$2,570	$3,721
2008	$2,438	$2,012	$1,810

Source: AprenDes evaluation databases, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009; AprenDes financial division data, 2009.

Offering a variety of learning contexts, especially those that promote collaborative learning, is an important part of the active learning model. The use of small groups was higher in the three countries than in schools without the Mogollón program. In Peru and Guatemala, where academic achievement could be examined in relation to participation in small groups, there was a significant relationship between such participation and achievement in Spanish and mathematics. No such relationship was found in similar multi-grade schools without the model. The model generally promotes consistent learning gains compared to similar rural, multi-grade

schools, and learning tends to improve over time. However, mastery of the grade-level subject matter remains relatively low, even after a number of years of implementation.

The results suggest that democratic behaviors occur naturally among young children in classroom situations, and that the frequency of their occurrence can be increased by participation in certain types of classroom environments. For countries wishing to develop democratic behavior in primary school, decentralized classrooms that promote active learning by offering children the opportunity to engage in a variety of learning contexts, especially those of small-group, student-student interaction, appear essential.

Such participation appears to have an effect on student achievement. This is especially true of behaviors, such as group leadership and turn-taking, which are indicative of participatory learning. Given the range in the frequency of observed behavior in both participation in small groups and democratic behavior within active learning schools, a certain level of implementation of an active learning program may have to be reached to ensure sufficient context for such effects to take place.

However, in countries such as those examined, this requires a radical departure from the typical pedagogy of large-group lecture and individual seatwork, characterized by the non-experimental schools in this study. Thus, a substantial investment in teacher in-service training that allows teachers to build knowledge through social interaction, as Oscar Mogollón insisted upon, may be necessary if countries opt to promote more democratic collaborative learning.

The model is not a panacea. There are too many extraneous factors, such as: poverty and related malnutrition and disease; lack of a coherent curriculum and systematic grade-level learning standards; a dearth of learning materials; teachers' lack of knowledge of the subject matter; and few elements in the home environments of student to enrich learning, all of which combine to keep rural primary students' achievement and completion rates relatively

low. Despite the relatively inflexible budgets of most ministries of education in developing countries, the active learning model developed by Mogollón appears to pay for itself in terms of savings in internal efficiency. All three programs studied had higher percentages of students who made normal progress through the primary school cycle. In the two countries where program costs were available, the active-learning program produced primary school graduates at a lower cost than did similar schools without the Mogollón model. The model does appear to have met Oscar Mogollón's objective of providing a tool for teachers that allows maximization of existing resources so that students experience a variety of contexts and processes in which to learn grade-level subject matter. Moreover, the tool is cost-effective compared to other strategies used in rural, multi-grade schools in Latin America.

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Oscar Mogollón

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