Planning for successful alternative schooling:

a possible route to Education for All

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Table of contents

List of abbreviations

BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
EFA	Education for All
EQUIP2	Educational Quality Improvement Program 2
MoESS	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (Ghana)
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NFPE	Non-formal primary education
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

List of tables

List of boxes

Introduction

Through a series of international conventions and declarations in the course of the twentieth century, a basic primary education – generally thought of as at least five to six years of traditional formal schooling – has come to be understood as one of the universal rights of the child, and thus as a basic human right. This movement started in a formal international sense in 1924, when the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Resolution of the Rights of the Child. After many years of interim efforts, interrupted by the Great Depression and World War II, this resolution was followed, 65 years later, by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 by the United Nations General Assembly, and thereafter ratified by 192 nations. As UNICEF's report on The State of the World's Children (2006) notes: "As the most widely endorsed human rights treaty in history, the Convention ... lays out in specific terms the legal duties of governments to children. Children's survival, development and protection are now no longer matters of charitable concern but of moral and legal obligation. Governments are held to account for their care of children by an international body, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to which they have agreed to report regularly" (UNICEF, 2006: 1). In both of these international agreements, basic (primary) education was noted as one of those fundamental human rights.

This emphasis on education as a basic human right was reinforced at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. This conference was attended by ministers of (or responsible for) education from almost every nation in the world, or their senior representatives; representatives of such international agencies as UNESCO, UNICEF, The World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme; most bilateral donor agencies; and many international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These delegates unanimously declared that access to a full primary education (and its equivalent for un-schooled adults) was a basic human right. A target was set to achieve universal access to free primary education by the year 2000, and elaborate international monitoring and reporting mechanisms were put in place. During the ensuing decade, it became clear that in many nations this goal was not attainable within the time given. At a follow-up meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, the goal was reaffirmed, but the target date was postponed to 2015. These international identifications (or declarations) of free primary education for all were reconfirmed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, which resulted in a list of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and which were reaffirmed at the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on Children, held in May 2002. The second of these eight MDGs was to "achieve universal primary education", or, in other words, to "ensure for all boys and girls a full course of primary education" (UNICEF, 2006: 2). To support the declarations and promises of Education for All (EFA) and the MDGs, a high-level meeting of donors and developing countries met in 2002 and agreed to the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), which would co-ordinate funding to countries that have prepared satisfactory national plans. By 2005 an additional US$348 million had been committed to 12 nations under the FTI, although this was far less than the estimated amount required to meet the universal basic education goal (Sperling and Balu, 2005).

Many justifications have been advanced, from many different theoretical and ideological perspectives, for this call for universal access to primary education as a basic human right, ranging from matters of individual personal development and fulfillment, through collective economic, social or political development. Underlying all of these justifications is a claim – sometimes implicit, but usually explicit, in the full texts of the declarations and conventions, as well as their supporting

documents – that whatever else may be accomplished in terms of curricular learning objectives by a full course of primary education, it will develop graduates who are literate and numerate, at least to the level expected at the end of formal primary schooling. Thus the international establishment of a full course of primary education (or its equivalent for adults) as a basic and universal human right is also a call for *literacy* (and numeracy, but there is not enough space here to explore the debates about whether, or under what circumstances, numeracy is different from or part of literacy) as a basic and universal human right. This is a very important rhetorical shift, as it changes the focus from the simple provision of schooling places to the presumed results of the enterprise: *learning*.

This connection between *schooling* and *literacy* has long been assumed. It has been established for many years that the vast majority of people in our world who are literate (to whatever level) have become so through exposure to traditional formal schooling. In the other direction, since real estimates of literacy rates for various nations and population groups are difficult and expensive to establish through tests or household surveys of one sort or another, many of the published rates for entire populations or sub-groups thereof, especially time-series data, are derived in one way or another from estimates of the proportion of the relevant population who have completed a certain level or full course of primary education.[1] This conflation of literacy with formal primary education was based on a widely held assumption (or assertion) that the minimum level of education usually required to be functional in society or to succeed in further levles of schooling (if available) is four to six years of primary education of reasonable quality. Since the Jomtien declarations, now almost 20 years ago, there is an increasing recognition that what is important about Education for All is not just physical presence in school, but the development of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will actually contribute to individual and social well-being (see, e.g., World Bank, 2006).

Unfortunately, this long and long-standing chain of international declarations, and the assumptions undergirding them, have proven to be unattainable for hundreds of millions of young people. An analysis of over 700 projects supporting primary education (World Bank, 2006) concluded that raising enrolments and completing primary education are not sufficient to assure basic literacy and numeracy. The evaluation noted that little analytic work has focused on learning outcomes, so there is little research that can inform efforts to raise the literacy levels of those children who are enrolled in primary schools. It has become increasingly evident that those nations with the greatest number of children out of school also have a high proportion of primary school graduates who are functionally illiterate (World Bank, 2006; *The Economist*, 2006; Filmer, Hasan and Pritchett, 2006). The problem is outlined in the section immediately below. The following section explores and compares some promising possibilities based on an ongoing international analysis of more than 200 cases, mostly from developing nations, where implementation of a radically alternative form of primary schooling has dramatically increased enrolment, retention, and, most importantly, learning, especially among highly marginalized young people in very poor places in the world. The following section discusses some of the lessons learned thus far, of particular relevance to educational planners and administrators, as well as to practitioners and scholars. The final section reviews some of the key questions pending, for which the comparative analysis thus far does not provide a clear answer, and where more research is needed.

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1. Prior to 1990, UNESCO measured literacy with estimates of the percentage of the population who had reached a specified primary grade level, which was usually Grade 4 (UNESCO, 2000).

1   The problem

There are several aspects of the problem to consider here. The first is that, even after major national and international efforts over several decades, millions of young people still have no access to school. Consider, for example, the three nations of the Indian subcontinent, whose combined population is about that of China. Their net primary enrolment ratios are: India, 77 per cent; Bangladesh, 79 per cent; Pakistan, 56 per cent. The enrolment ratios are generally even lower in much of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the Middle East. Moreover, during the 1980s, primary enrolment ratios actually declined in 45 developing nations, leading many observers to refer to that period as a "disastrous decade for education", from which many nations have not yet fully recovered (Farrell, 2007a). A 2001 UNICEF document notes the not-surprising causes for lack of access to primary education:

> "Where are the missing children? Most live in remote rural areas or in urban slums. Most are girls. Most belong to population groups outside the mainstream of society: they pass their days in overcrowded refugee camps, displaced by man-made or natural disasters, or wander with their herds. Others are marginalized by language, life-style or culture" (UNICEF, 2001: 34. See also UNESCO, 2004: 4-7).

After the Jomtien Education for All conference in 1990, some progress was made. In the following decade, the absolute number of children with no access to school declined slightly, from 123 million to 111 million, and many very populous nations, such as China, Indonesia and Brazil, achieved near-universal enrolment. The follow-up conference in Dakar referred to these as "tangible but modest gains" (Farrell, 2007a). It remains the case, however, that well over 100 million children have never enrolled in school. UNESCO's 2005 estimates indicate that the number of children out of school in that year was identical to their estimate for the year 2000 at the EFA summit in Dakar, indicating no improvement at all in those five years (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2005). There are also hundreds of millions more youth and adults who had no access to schooling in their younger years.

The second part of the problem is that among those who do manage to enroll in primary education, many do not finish the full course, often dropping out so early that they have no chance of obtaining even the most minimal levels of learning. Among middle-income developing nations, the non-completion rates range around 20 per cent. Among very poor nations they range up to 50 per cent, in some cases even higher (Farrell, 2007a; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2005). Thus the total number of children, youth and adults in the world who have never entered formal school or who left before achieving even a minimal level of learning is well over the hundreds of millions estimate noted above.

A third part of the problem is that even among those young people who do manage one way or another to enroll and stay for the full course, many do not become literate (or achieve the other basic learning objectives of primary education, but literacy is fundamental). Hartwell (2006: 3) notes that, in many low-income nations, less than half of the primary school graduates attain a level of reading fluency necessary to master the rest of the primary curriculum. He also notes that in Ghana, where English is the language of instruction, the results of a National Educational Assessment indicate that 25 per cent of those in the final grade of primary school achieve a minimal level of competence in English (which indicates clearly that 75 per cent could not possibly

master any of the rest of the primary curriculum taught in that language) (MoESS Ghana, 2006). Further, studies of the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) indicate that across the seven countries taking the sixth grade reading assessment in 1995/1996 and 2000/2001, there was a 4 per cent decline in Grade 6 literacy achievement. The evidence grows that with increasing numbers enrolled in education systems which are under resourced, few children are learning to read – a prerequisite for other school learning. *Table 1.1* reports levels of minimum mastery of literacy among final-year primary students, based on national or international tests.

Table 1.1   Levels of minimal mastery of literacy (in ascending order)

	% minimal mastery by final-year primary students
Malawi	7
Yemen	10
Tanzania	18
Namibia	19
Burkina Faso	21
Papua New Guinea	21
Madagascar	20
Senegal	25
Colombia	27
Cameroon	33
Cote d'Ivoire	38
Togo	40

Source: Abadzi, 2006: 6.

Even in Latin America, often considered to be a region with relatively high educational development within the developing world (primary enrolment ratios generally range above 90 per cent), Schiefelbein reports that among the 63 per cent of each cohort of entering students who actually complete the primary cycle, "no more than half of those who completed their primary education understand a short text published on the front page of a [popular] newspaper (Schiefelbein, 2006: 1).

Thus, in the developing world, more than 100 million children who never enter primary school. Of those who do enter, only two-thirds complete a full cycle of primary education. But of most significance, of those who do complete primary schooling, it appears from recent assessments (World Bank, 2006) that fewer than half acquire even a minimal level of literacy (and consequently other basic curricular objectives). This pattern is illustrated by the cases of Zambia, Senegal, Peru and Mali, as seen in *Table 1.2*.

Table 1.2   Profiles of access, survival and learning

	% entering primary	% reaching Grade 5	% reading with fluency
Zambia	80	70	43
Senegal	62	48	23
Peru	98	88	18
Mali	44	33	15

Source: Education Policy and Data Center database at www.epdc.org.

Thus, the internationally acclaimed goal of education and literacy as basic human rights (EFA) is far from being attained. What is the problem here? Most of the diagnoses and attendant policy and practice prescriptions are essentially 'technicist' in nature. Many claim, for example, that the problem is primarily one of the following: lack of resources and investment; shortage of schools; inappropriate locations of schools; not enough teachers, and/or teachers are not well prepared and are very poorly paid; lack of basic learning materials; or the nationally prescribed curriculum is not relevant for many children and their life situations. The attendant solution is more money, better spent. However, it is not clear where exactly this extra money is to come from, given that many of the nations with the most serious learning problems are desperately poor. The only visible solution would be greater dependence on external aid, or to borrow externally, which would only land them once again in the debt trap in which they have already been engulfed. But a core argument here is that even if the problem of resource scarcity and/or misallocation were somehow to be solved, this would not deal with a far more fundamental problem, which is discussed below.

1.1 The fundamental problem: the forms of formal schooling and their resistance to change

Educators and scholars of education are observers of and parties to a most peculiar pattern. Over the past century or more they have come to learn much about how human beings, young and old, actually *learn* best (see Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000; Olson, 2003; Abadzi, 2006). Yet almost none of this new knowledge has penetrated into the standard practices of formal schools, which generally carry on the century-old traditions reflecting outmoded conceptions of how learning occurs and what is worth knowing, which were first developed in Western Europe and then spread around the world through a combination of colonial imposition and cultural borrowing. Many observers have been making this point for many years, but the message is often overlooked in educational practice (see Farrell, 1989; Farrell 1998; Farrell, 2004*a*; Abbot and Ryan, 2001; Caine and Caine, 1997; and www.21learn.org). In 1995, two major books chronicled a century of failed attempts at educational reform in the United States (Tyack and Cuban, 1995; Ravitsch and Vinoskis, 1995; and for a review of both, see Farrell, 2000). The stories told there of dysfunctional formal schooling and of failed reform initiatives were noted in another review article published in 1997, which indicated that the patterns found in the USA can be generalized to most of the world.

> "One general lesson is that planning educational change is a far more difficult and risk-prone venture than had been imagined in the 1950s and 1960s. There are many more examples of failure, or of minimal success, than of relatively complete success. Much more is known about what does not work, or does not usually work, than about what does work [...]. Moreover, when planned educational reform attempts have been successful, the process has usually taken a long time, frequently far longer than originally anticipated. In recent decades there have been

a few examples where an unusual combination of favorable conditions and politically skilled planners has permitted a great deal of educational change in a relatively brief period, but these have been rare and ideosyncratic" (Farrell, 1997: 298).

During the latter years of the twentieth century and the early years of the current one, several other major state of the art papers were published, which came to roughly the same conclusion (see, e.g. Caillods, 1989; Fagerlind and Sjosted, 1990; Davies, 1996; Elmore, 2000; Polyzoi, Fullan and Anchan, 2003). A review of educational reform efforts in Africa, published in 2002, notes that the experience has "demonstrated that there are serious difficulties inherent in implementing the comprehensive, multifaceted educational policy reforms being proposed by the international community ... Even if the time, funds, and other resources had been adequate [which they never were] however, it is unlikely the reforms would have been implemented as planned" (Moulton, Mundy, Walmond and Williams, 2002: 2 and 210). A 1997 review of educational reform efforts in Latin America observed: "... there is a high degree of failure of reform plans. We don't know what factors favor the implementation of reform plans, nor what conditions or institutional capacity are needed for the reform plans to affect wide sectors of society" (Alvarez and Ruiz-Caseres, 1997: 7). In short, these reviews of the educational reform experience, whether focusing on one or a few wealthy nations, or regional groupings of developing nations, all come to roughly the same conclusion. Proposals for educational reform or change are seldom enacted. If enacted (whether via legislation, regulation, or experimental programme) they are seldom implemented well and widely. If implemented, they tend after a few years to fade away as the system slowly moves back to its normal state. If implemented widely, well and sustainably, there is very little evidence of long-term and wide-scale impact on the primary mission of the schooling enterprise: enabling and enhancing the capacity of young people to learn.

What we have come to understand about human learning has almost nothing to do with how schooling continues to be conducted. What are called here the forms of formal schooling (outlined in *Box 1*), which were set in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, reflected the misconceptions about human learning of the intellectual and political-economic elites of that very different time and place. But now that we have them, and have set them firmly in place, we do not seem to know how to change them, at least at any large scale.

When looked at as a set, this list of characteristics illustrates well the degree to which they are taken for granted. A striking feature of almost all of the reform proposals, whether for a system as a whole or school-by-school (as in the school improvement movement) is that they rarely, if ever, question the basic model, the forms of formal schooling. Typically they aim to alter or improve one or a few bits of it, while taking the rest of it for granted, unquestioned.

The existence of these forms of formal schooling, and their apparent intractability to efforts to bring about change, has continued to be a source of great frustration to many individual citizens seeking a better and more productive form of organized learning for their children, to well intentioned reformers who see their efforts regularly fail, and to scholars of learning who have consistently seen their hard-won findings knocking fruitlessly on the door of the school house.

Among the first group (i.e. individual citizens, or small groups of them, that seek a better and more productive form of learning for their children), there has been, over the past years – especially, but not exclusively, in North America – a small movement toward charter schools, home-schooling, and other forms of alternative schooling (see, e.g., www.newhorizons.org; http://www.sudval.org/; www.educationrevolution.org/; www.pathsoflearning.net/). These efforts have resulted, in some cases, in very local alternative schools or school programmes. (A recent source suggests that

there are more than 12,000 alternative schools or school programmes in the USA, and there are estimates of at least a million parents in that nation opting for home schooling (Bauman, 2005)). But these efforts show that a still very small minority of parents (mostly those who are well-off in wealthy nations) are withdrawing from the forms of formal schooling, and that they have had no perceptible effect on the broader formal system. Indeed, that very withdrawal may reduce any pressure to change from that standard formal system.

Box 1.   The traditional forms of formal schooling

- One hundred to several hundred children/youth assemble (often compulsorily) for at least a period of time in a building called a school.

- Pupils are aged from approximately six or seven to somewhere between 11 and 16.

- The school day last for three to six hours.

- Pupils are divided into groups of 20 to 60.

- They work with a single adult, who is a certified teacher, in a single room.

- The school day is (especially at the upper grades) divided into discrete periods of 40 to 60 minutes, each devoted to a separate subject.

- Each subject is to be studied and learned by a group of young people of roughly the same age.

- Supporting learning materials, e.g. books, chalkboards, notebooks, workbooks, and worksheets, are used, and laboratories, workbenches, practice sites, etc. in technical areas.

- The support materials are grouped together within a standard curriculum, which is set by an authority level well above that of the individual school (normally the central or provincial/state government), and organized according to age-group to which they are targeted.

- Adults – assumed to be more knowledgeable – teach, and students receive instruction from them.

- In a broader system, students are expected/required to repeat back to the adults what they have been taught if they are to go any higher in the education system.

- Teachers and/or (a) central exam system(s) evaluate students' ability to repeat what they have been taught, and provide formal recognized certificates for passing particular grades or levels.

- Most or all of the financial support comes from national or regional governments, or other kinds of authority levels (e.g. religion-related schools) well above the local community level.

Two voices from the well-intentioned reformers group (both of whom might well be labeled public intellectuals) are worth noting. In 2001, in a special issue of *Harpers Magazine* entitled "New Hope for American Education" (an editorial essay for *Curriculum Inquiry* a few months later noted that it might better have been labeled as *"Old Ideas* About American Education" – see Farrell, 2001), Theodore Sizer noted the following in a forum discussion (he is referring specifically to the USA, but the point can be generalized):

"You are assuming that Americans make educational policy rationally. But I think history will show that the system follows a kind of mindless thread. In the sixties, Charles Silverman wandered around and visited all of these schools and listened to all these state superintendents, and concluded that the whole thing was mindless, that we do what we do because we've always done it. The basic architecture and ideas behind the high school [for example] haven't changed in a fundamental way since Charles Eliot and the Committee of Ten designed it in the 1890s. We know more about human learning. We understand that the culture and the economy have changed. But we are so stuck in what has become the conventional way of schooling that we don't think twice about it. So we still say that the mainline subjects that Charles Eliot and his colleagues established in 1893 are the core of the school. We still assume that one can test children's mastery of those mainline subjects in a way that is rigorous and useful. We still persist in thinking that school is a school is a school. It runs for 180 days. You take English, math, social studies, science, in forty-seven-minute periods, taught by teachers who have more than a hundred students, sometimes two hundred. The students march forward on the basis of their birthdays, in things called 'grades' – like eggs – and we tell ourselves that we can ascertain whether these kids have profound intellectual competence. The system is mindless" (Theodore Sizer, 2001: 56).

Two years later, John Taylor Gatto, one of the participants in that original forum with Sizer, noted the following: "Do we really need school. I don't mean education, just forced schooling: six classes a day, five days a week, nine months a year, for twelve years. Is this deadly routine really necessary? And if so, for what?" (Gatto, 2003: 34). It can be noted that the standard characteristics developed by Sizer and Gatto are very much like those noted in *Box 1* above, though not quite so complete. But the list in *Box 1* is based on long, considered analysis of an international database, and theirs comes from a set of discussions about a single nation's education system. But the fundamental point is the same.

A similar cry of desperation from the psychological researcher side has recently been published by a leading cognitive psychologist, David Olson. In the preface to his latest book he notes:

"For some time I have been struck by the fact that whereas the psychological understanding of children's learning and development has made great strides [...] the impact on schooling as an institutional practice has been modest if not negligible. With most of my colleagues I had assumed that if only we knew more about how the mind works, how the brain develops, how interests form, how people differ, and, most centrally, how people learn, educational practice would take a great leap forward. But while this knowledge has grown, schools have remained remarkably unaffected." (Olson, 2003: ix)

He then outlines a series of key distinctions between what cognitive science now knows, and what schools do.

Table 1.3   What cognitive science says vs. what schools do

What cognitive science says:	What schools do:
What people learn depends upon what they already know.	What they learn depends on what the school mandates.
People learn because they are intrinsically interested or because they love learning.	They pursue knowledge because they need the credit.
Learning is inspired by the search for meaning, growth and understanding.	What they learn depends on what books, chapters and pages they are responsible for.
The growth of mind is spontaneous and continuous.	It is a matter of obligation and duty.

The various observations above sum up well the dilemma faced around the world: what is now known about how humans learn has little or nothing to do with how we try to enable young people to learn in places called schools, and we seem generally not able to change those places in any fundamental way. What we mostly get, even with enormous efforts in some nations, is small changes, dearly bought, with small effects – if any – in terms of the actual learning of young people, especially those who are most disadvantaged. What we seem to have ended up with at best is a modest increase in the learning levels, however measured, of those young people who, because they were born in better socio-economic circumstances, are already well ahead of the game. This is not to say that there are not a lot of quite good schools and teachers out there. One finds them often, not only in well-off locations but in urban slums and poor rural villages, and that is like stumbling upon a beautiful blossom in the midst of desolation. A major part of the core problem here is that, as Michael Fullan and many others (see e.g. Fullan and Watson, 1999) have observed, while we are quite good at noting a really good school and characterizing it, we do not have any serious idea about how to create such schools, at least in large numbers, nor, particularly, how to change traditional schools in large numbers into places which better match what is now known about human learning. This does not *explain* the problem, but it does *identify* it. Several kinds of explanations have been offered in recent years.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) refer to the problem as an issue of a widely understood 'grammar of schooling' – a kind of widely understood mental model of what a school is supposed to look like and do. These grammars may vary slightly from place to place, but once set they are very difficult to change. Olson (2003: 85) extends this argument from a cognitive psychology perspective. Farrell also contributed to this literature, noting, among other things, that schooling is such a pervasive institution that large arrays of other institutional sets, patterns and habits of living have become set in place that assume the continued existence of the forms of formal schooling (Farrell, 2001). Many who argue from a critical theory perspective claim that these forms remain in place because they were designed, and continue, to serve the interests of those who already hold positions of power in society – to change them significantly would be to threaten those relations of power and influence. (For a particularly cogent and clearly expressed statement of this argument, see Davies, 1996.)

Whatever the explanation here, the phenomenon remains: whatever we learn about learning, schooling systems of the traditional sort seem generally unable to significantly change. That is the bad news.

2 A promising possible route to EFA: The quiet revolution in schooling

While schooling as generally known appears ordinarily to be impervious to sustained and spreading reform, except in very special circumstances (such as, for example, some parts of post communist Central Europe – see Kochan, 2005 and Fullan, 2003), the good news is that there is a quiet revolution in schooling developing in a large number of nations. Typically, these new programmes develop initially on the margins of the standard system, amongst groups where standard schooling has been unable to penetrate, or has manifestly failed. In some of the cases which have been in place for a few decades, there are signs of diffusion of the new patterns into the mainstream schools.

This quiet revolution started in small ways about 40 years ago and has been gaining momentum, especially since around 1990. It is, in many cases, radically transforming the forms of formal schooling as we have come to know them – particularly at the primary school level, but in some cases at the junior secondary level as well – into a model of schooling which fits rather closely to what we have come to know about how humans actually learn, as outlined above. These mostly successful radical alternatives are little known and seldom remarked upon among educators and scholars of education in the developed world, and are often not known (or, if they are known, are not well understood) in their home nations. There is little published literature about them, but it is beginning to grow. However, this existing literature consists mostly in individual case studies and reports to agencies with few references to other cases, or of comparative analyses of small sets of such cases, generally from the same geo-political region. (Reimers, 2000; Anderson, 2002; Lewin, 2005 and Pridmore, 2006, provide more wide-ranging, if brief, comparative analyses of one aspect of this revolution: multigrading). It is still scanty and hard to find, and much of the information consists of lore passed informally among practitioners and scholars.

Some of these programmes are still quite small, new (essentially at a pilot stage), and not very well documented. Others have several decades of experience, have grown to become systems containing thousands (in some cases tens of thousands) of schools, with solid research and evaluation results available. Some operate within the standard ministry of education administrative framework; others are operated entirely by NGOs; still others are mixed models with various combinations of government, NGO, and civil society planning and management. In almost all cases, these schools fall within what is generally referred to as 'community education' or 'community schools', with strong organic linkages with the communities in which the learners live. These linkages take different forms in different places, depending on the local history and patterns of social organization, but they are strong and crucial. In most cases which have been seriously evaluated, the results are very good in terms of enrolment, retention, completion, movement on to the next level of schooling, and measured academic success. Typically, the performance in achievement tests of students in these schools is at least as good as – often better than – that of students in standard schools. On-time primary completion rates range above 90 per cent, and the vast majority who complete primary move on to the first post-primary level, generally with excellent results. Considering that the children in these schools are among the most marginalized in their own societies, and in the world overall, and the hardest to reach and to teach in traditional schooling, such results are quite spectacular.

The remaining sections of this book are based on an ongoing comparative analysis of more than 200 of these alternative programmes by an international team of scholars, graduate students, international agency officials, and programme planners and developers. This ongoing comparative analysis, best thought of as an international and comparative grounded theory exercise, is still in many ways in its early days. There is much that is not yet fully understood, and new questions occur regularly. But some patterns and conclusions seem, even at this early stage, to be sufficiently clear to warrant writing about them. The core argument here is that the best hope we have of breaking through the problem or bad news outlined above, and of eventually providing a better form of learning for this and future generations of young people on a large scale, in both rich and poor nations, is to try to learn from those people who have managed to create these islands of success where so many others have failed, or succeeded only partially. The title of such a book could be: *Learning from success. Lessons for planners*.

Below is a representative list of some of the programmes included in this large and growing international database.

Escuela Nueva (New School) in Colombia. This is the oldest and perhaps best known internationally of these programmes. It started on a very small scale in the late 1970s, drawing upon the experiences of earlier programmes sponsored by UNESCO and UNICEF. It was carefully grown and nurtured with constant experimentation and learning from experience until it had spread to about 8,000 schools in the mid-1980s. It was thereafter declared by the government as the standard model for rural schooling in that nation, and has now spread to most rural schools there, with varying degrees of faithful implementation, and is currently spreading slowly to urban schools as well. It has been adopted/adapted in at least 10 other Latin American nations, and core features of the model have been used to develop new educational programmes in many parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. It is also noteworthy that this model has, in one rural region of Colombia, spread upward to the post-primary level of formal schooling. This allows us to consider how this successful alternative model of *primary level* may be adapted as youngsters move to more senior levels of schooling (Colbert and Arboleda, 1990; Schiefelbein, 1991; Psacharopolous, Rojas and Velez, 1993; Arboleda, 1994; Siabato, 1997; McEwan, 1998; Pitt, 2002 and 2004).

The Non-formal Primary Education Programme of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). This programme is another of the 'grandparents' here. It started in the mid-1980s, has grown to involve about 35,000 rural schools in that nation, and is slowly moving into urban schools and ethnic minority regions of the nation, partly through a diffusion programme with other local NGOs. It is also being adopted/adapted, with support from a variety of international and donor agencies, particularly UNICEF, in nations such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan (Ahmed, 1993; Sarker, 1994; Scott, 1996; Sweetser, 1999; Haiplik, 2004; Chabbot, 2006).

The Community Schools Programme of UNICEF-Egypt. This programme started in the early 1990s, drawing upon the experience of the two programmes noted above, and was adapted to the particular local situation in small hamlets in Upper Egypt, where girls' access to schooling was particularly problematic, and the boys who did attend school had very low levels of learning. It has now grown to be a core system of close to 300 schools, with carefully planned diffusion – in conjunction with the national Ministry of Education – of its non-formal pedagogy to roughly 8,000 government-managed one-classroom schools, and then to the broader system of mainstream schools. Its core pedagogical model is being adapted to many other Islamic nations of the Middle East (Zaalouk, 1995; Hartwell, 1995; Farrell and Connelly, 1998; Farrell, 2004b; Zaalouk, 2004).

School for Life in Ghana. This programme was started on a small scale in 1996 in the Northern Region of Ghana, and by 2004 had grown to include 760 schools. It is managed jointly by the NGO School for Life, supported by a consortium of Danish NGOs and the Danish International Development Agency (with USAID funding from 2005), the Dagbon Traditional Council, and the Ghana Educational Service. It aims at youth aged 8 to 15 years in rural villages with no or very limited access to regular primary education, and in a nine-month programme provides literacy in the mother tongue, numeracy, and general knowledge equivalent to the first three grades of the standard primary schools. Plans are under consideration to spread this pedagogical model to mainstream schools (Hartwell, 2006). Other examples are given in *Table 2.1,* which illustrate the geocultural spread of these alternative programmes (the numbers of schools and students are approximate).

Table 2.1   Examples of alternative education programmes and their growth

Nueva Escuela Unitaria		(Guatemala)
Start	1992	18 schools
Growth	1998	1,300 schools; 140,000 students
Source: Kraft, 1998.		
Multigrade programme		**(Guinea)**
Start	1991	18 schools
Growth	1998	1,300 schools, 40,000 students
Source: Bah-Layla, 1998.		
Multigrade and community schools programmes		**(Zambia)**
Start	1985	8 schools
Growth	2004	1,300 schools, 230,000 students
Source: Kelly, 1998; DeStefano, 2005*b*.		
Concurrent Pedagogy Programme		**(Mali)**
Start	1988	10 schools
Growth	2003	1,500 schools; 72,000 students
Source: Republic of Mali, 1998; DeStefano, 2006.		
MECE-Rural and P900 programmes		**(Chile)**
Start	1990	1,000 schools
Growth	2000	3,900 schools; 230,000 students
Source: Garcia-Huidobro, 2000.		

As noted, these are just a few of the representative and best-documented examples of such programmes – some still relatively small in scale, others large and growing rapidly. They are not identical. Each is, as it should be, adapted to the local conditions and culture, and to the history of educational thought and practice in the nation and culture in which it works. But there are some things that even now seem reasonably well established.

> **Box 2.   The emergent model: Common features of the alternative school programmes**
>
> • Child-centred rather than teacher-driven pedagogy
>
> • Active rather than passive learning
>
> • Multi-graded classrooms with continuous progress learning
>
> • Combinations of fully-trained teachers, partially-trained teachers and community resources – parents and other community members are heavily involved in the learning of the students and the management of the school.
>
> • Peer-tutoring – older and/or faster-learning students assist and teach younger and/or slower-learning students
>
> • Carefully developed self-guided learning materials, which students – alone or in small groups – can work through themselves at their own pace, with help from other students and the adults as necessary. The students are responsible for their own learning.
>
> • Teacher- and student-developed learning materials
>
> • Active student involvement in the governance and management of the school
>
> • Use of radio, correspondence lesson materials, in some cases television, in a few cases computers
>
> • Ongoing, regular and intensive in-service training and peer-mentoring for teachers
>
> • Ongoing monitoring/evaluation/feedback systems allowing the system to learn from its own experience, with regular modification of the methodology
>
> • Free flows of children and adults between the school and the community
>
> • Community involvement includes attention to the nutrition and health needs of young children long before they reach school age.
>
> • Locally adapted changes in the school day or school year, as needed
>
> • The focus of the school is much less on teaching and much more on learning.

Box 2 notes what seem to be the most common characteristics of these alternative programmes. It will be easily noted that this is a model or style of schooling which is far different from the forms of formal schooling outlined in *Box 1*. The comparative analysis section which follows explores these differences and similarities in more detail. But at this point it can be noted that, while all of these alternative programmes share most of these characteristics, not all share all of them. The ongoing comparative work shows variations, especially across geo-cultural regions, but what meaning that has is not yet clear. In comparing *Boxes 1* and *2*, one should also note that they have different kinds of truth-value. It can be asserted that *Box 1* is a reasonably accurate representation of how most of the schools in most of the world are. There are, of course, minor variations on the theme (e.g. in some parts of Asia students regularly stay with the same teacher through much or all of their primary schooling – Hayhoe, forthcoming) but this represents pretty much what happens to most children in school in most places most of the time. *Box 2* is closer to a Weberian 'ideal type'

scheme; it is an intellectual construct to capture what is now understood about these alternative programmes, but much more variation and much of what needs to be known can be seen in *Box 1*.

It is also now clear that many of the differences between these two boxes can best be seen not as dichotomies, but as continua. These successful programmes can be variously close to and far away from each 'side' of various characteristics which seem in 'pure' terms to differentiate the two core models. This way of thinking seems better to represent culturally different local understandings of teaching and learning which operate within the many programmes we are trying comparatively to understand. The ongoing analysis is focused on four key questions which have emerged from the first stage consideration of the overall data set. 1) The *results* question: what constitutes success in such programmes, and how do we know? And how do we relate this to the ongoing costs of these programmes? 2) The *pedagogical* question: how do teachers and learners actually produce these learning results in the day-to-day life of their schools, within and linked with their communities? 3) The *teacher development* question: how do teachers quickly develop (as they do) practices which are radically different from those in traditional schools? 4) The *planning/administration,* or *going-to-scale-in-a-sustainable-manner* question: how have the planners and administrators involved managed to go, over time, from a good idea, to a pilot phase, to large-scale and sustained implementation of radically alternative forms of schooling? The next chapter provides a detailed comparative analysis of four of these programmes guided by these main questions.

3 A detailed comparative analysis

Here is presented a detailed comparative analysis of four core cases selected from the much larger database of cases: Escuela Nueva in Colombia; the BRAC Non-formal Primary Education Programme in Bangladesh; the UNICEF Community Schools Programme in Egypt; and School for Life in Ghana. This draws upon extensive and detailed case studies of these programmes which were produced from 2004 to 2006 under contract with the Academy for Educational Development, under the EQUIP/2 programme funded by the United States Agency for International Development. They are cited in the text below and in the bibliography as Pitt (2004) for Escuela Nueva, Haiplik (2004) and Chabbot (2006) for the Bangladesh programme, Farrell (2004*b*) for the Egyptian programme, and Hartwell (2006) for the Ghana programme, and they are available online at www.equip123.net. They were designed to provide not only the facts of the case – e.g. history, context, measured learning results, costs, teacher development programmes, etc. – but also a kind of pastiche narrative account of what actually occurs in the day-to-day life of the school.

These cases were chosen for this first comparative exercise for several reasons: They are exceptionally well documented and evaluated, including both formal outsider evaluations and insider insights; they are exemplars of different approaches to alternative pedagogy, with a common core of understanding, in different cultural locations; three of the cases are being widely adapted to other cultural locations; and there were individuals available who knew the programmes intimately and could thus provide the sort of day-in-the-life-of-the-school accounts being sought. The discussion below begins with the most fundamental questions: How is success understood? What are the measurable and measured outcomes of these programmes compared to traditional schooling? And what are the costs and the cost-benefit or value added indications? It then proceeds to a comparative analysis of various other features, from systemic to curricular to teacher development to pedagogical.

3.1 The results: What constitutes success and how do we know?

There would not be much point in comparing and analyzing these programmes and the broader set which they represent unless they could demonstrate that they are producing good learning results, and not just for a few young people who manage to survive and complete the schooling process, but for most – if not all – of the young people involved. Thus the issue involves not only measured academic achievement at any given grade or level, but also cohort survival and completion rates. This is obviously a complex and difficult issue. All of these exemplary programmes, and the broader set they represent, are targeted at young people who are severely marginalized. Among such young people, the achievement of a primary school leaving certificate, or its equivalent, is a very high-stakes matter, not only in terms of carrying on to the next level of formal schooling, but in terms of ultimate life chances. In all of our cases, the youngsters who pass through these alternative programmes do at least as well as, typically much better than, those who have gone through traditional forms of schooling. Given the circumstances from which these young people come and the stakes involved, this can be considered a major triumph, truly succeeding against the odds. In economic terms, this is a value added accomplishment of high degree.

Escuela Nueva has been formally evaluated many times throughout its existence, by both national and international agencies. These studies have consistently found that Escuela Nueva students

score higher than students in traditional schools in standardized tests of Spanish language and mathematics, and have markedly lower repetition and drop-out rates. About 90 per cent of these primary school graduates continue to junior secondary, where they seem to do well. They also have higher self-esteem and more developed civic values. In a 1998 UNESCO study of academic achievement in 11 Latin American nations, Colombia was the only location where rural students outperformed urban ones. This remarkable achievement was attributed to Escuela Nueva (Pitt, 2004: 22-23). This discrepancy was widely reported in the Colombian news media, and has led to considerable political pressure from middle-class parents to expand the programme to urban areas. Experiments are currently underway to explore how the programme can best be adapted to the urban schooling environment (Vicky Colbert, personal communication, March 2006).

With reference to the BRAC Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) programme, Haiplik (2004: 12-13) observes that students in these schools perform academically much better than students in traditional schools. The completion rate is about 95 per cent – markedly higher than in traditional schools – and over 90 per cent of those students continue to junior secondary and do well there. By 2002, 2.4 million children had graduated from the BRAC schools, two thirds of which were girls. It is noteworthy that the BRAC schools cover the core elements of the standard five-year primary curriculum in four years. These are quite astonishing accomplishments in one of the poorest nations in the world.

The Egyptian Community Schools Programme has also been regularly evaluated by both national and international agencies. Its students also take standard government achievement tests in grades 3 and 5 (end-primary). Drop-out rates are extremely low; of those who enroll, between 95 and 99 per cent complete. On Grade 5 achievement tests, 95 per cent pass compared to 73 per cent in traditional government schools. Ninety-two per cent of the graduates go on to junior secondary, of which 96 per cent successfully complete that cycle. About 70 per cent of these successful students are girls. Observational evidence from international and local officials consistently notes that the students also exhibit high levels of self-esteem and confidence, enthusiasm for learning, are well-mannered and collaborate among themselves and with adults, and act as conduits of knowledge to their families and the wider communities regarding such matters as health, sanitation, child-care and the environment (Farrell, 2004*b*: 16-18; Zaalouk, 2004: 104, 109-110, and 130). Considering that the target population for these schools are by far the most educationally disadvantaged youngsters in Egypt, these results are quite remarkable.

Regarding the School for Life, in 2003 the Ghana Educational Service administered tests of mother-tongue literacy, numeracy and general knowledge to students about to complete the programme that year. Just over 80 per cent achieved the minimal standards of success for Grade 3 students in literacy and numeracy, and over 50 per cent had reached the government-defined 'mastery' level for that grade. A subsequent tracer study of the programme's graduates indicates that about two thirds carry on to the Grade 4 level in standard primary schools and do very well there, adapting quickly and successfully to instruction in English – the standard language of instruction in Ghana (Hartwell, 2006). These results are in marked, and vastly superior, contrast to results in the standard primary schools in that nation, where about two thirds of those who enter complete Grade 6, and of those who complete primary schooling, less than 25 per cent have achieved the minimum level of reading competence in English (MoESS Ghana, 2006). These quite remarkable results re-enforce what cognitive science and second language learning experts have long claimed: children need to become literate first in their home language, and can then more easily transfer their basic literacy skills to another language of instruction (Abadzi, 2006: Chapter 6).

In sum, in terms of results in all of these cases, as in most of the other cases studied (although the data is firmer in some cases than in others), extremely poor children come to school, stay in school, finish the primary cycle, learn not only the necessary academic material and skills but also develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and in large proportions carry on to the next level of formal education. And all of this generally at superior levels to their compatriots who are usually from much more advantaged social backgrounds.

3.2 Costs, cost-benefit ratios, and value added

Whatever the educational value of these alternative programmes may be, the question of costs, and with it cost-effectiveness, inevitably arises. There is a general belief that these alternative programmes are actually quite expensive, reflecting a widespread understanding that one cannot get quality education 'on the cheap', particularly in areas that have poor roads, communications, and are generally underserved. Programmes that are managed by NGOs, particularly international NGOs, are assumed often to have large – and often hidden – overheads, which, if included in recurrent costs, would make these programmes far more costly than government schools.

The facts do not support these assumptions. Rather, analyses carried out through the EQUIP/2 noted above suggest that the alternative schools in Egypt, Bangladesh and Ghana are far more efficient and cost-effective than public schools.[2] However, before explaining the methodology of this cost analysis comparison and reporting the findings, it should be noted that providing good cost data on alternative schooling systems and comparative data on public systems in the same nation or region, much less attempting a cost-effectiveness comparison, is notoriously difficult, even in countries with well-developed information systems. Part of the problem is inherent methodologically; part of it is that the very process of developing and analyzing the necessary information is itself inherently costly. The latter is particularly a problem in poor nations, which rarely have the local resources available in their education budget to finance good cost analysis. But the issue is critical, especially (but not only) when one has limited resources. The problem is particularly challenging in alternative programmes such as those under consideration here, which often have multiple and complex sources of financing, with various mixtures of government, NGO, private-sector and parental/community support, plus international donor agency support (see Farrell, 2002 for a more detailed discussion).

Methodology

The fundamental questions to be asked are these: What does it cost? How does that compare with the costs of public schools? Is it affordable and sustainable? These questions appear straightforward. They are not. First, when one asks the cost, one also has to ask where the resources come from: From parents and children? From the community? From in-kind contributions and charity? From local authorities? From NGOs? From central government? Or from donors? Each of these sources requires a different kind of accounting, which would all eventually have to be reconciled. Secondly, what should be included in the costs? Should one include the costs of buildings, classrooms, school uniforms or clothing, food provided, in-kind services contributed, the cost to a family of a child's lost labour when s/he is attending school? These are very complex questions, and require compromises in selecting which costs are to be included for an analysis. Finally, what exactly is it that is being costed? If one computes the total cost of a programme over an extended period, there would be

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2. This comparison could not be done for Colombia, since the Escuela Nueva schools there are all public schools. However, independent analyses done in that nation suggest that the more fully a school implements the Escuela Nueva model, the more efficient and cost-effective it becomes (Pitt, 2004).

no way of comparing one programme with another. Thus one has to focus on a common entity: per-pupil unit costs. But here, should one look at costs over an academic year, or over the number of years in the education cycle? The methodological choices made within this thicket of options were selected in an attempt to answer those three main questions: What does it cost? How does that compare with public school costs? And is the programme affordable and sustainable?

First, it was decided to limit the analysis to actual recurrent costs, excluding capital or development costs (for infrastructure), given the reality that, for alternative school programmes, one would often have to impute the value of donated or loaned facilities, or facilities built with contributed materials and labour (implying a higher level of community support and ownership than for public schools). Also, no attempt was made to compute pupil opportunity costs, as these would either be assumed to be roughly the same for both public and alternative school students, or require a level of field work far beyond available resources. As a simplifying matter, school fees for public schools and alternative models in these countries were absent or negligible. However, it is probable from many other reports, though outside this analysis, that direct costs to parents for public schools are higher than for alternatives, due to requirements for uniforms and a variety of often unofficially sanctioned fees for such things as sports, cultural events, examination registration fees and the like. No attempt was made to analyze these, but it was noted that they would tend to increase overall costs for public schooling. On the other hand, since alternative schools generally serve the poorest areas and communities, it is likely that the real opportunity costs to parents is a somewhat greater burden. One of the reasons that alternative schools usually negotiate school schedules with parents and the community is to minimize the loss of children's contribution to the household welfare.

The methodology involved examining total programme recurrent costs, including management, supervision, in-service training, travel and transportation, instructional materials and supplies, and teacher wages and benefits. For alternative programmes, these costs were derived from organizational budgets and expenditure statements; where possible these were examined over a number of years to derive average values. For public schools, government recurrent budget and expenditure reports, and analyses of these carried out for education sector work by international agencies, were relied upon.

To arrive at unit costs, so that the programmes could be compared within each country (one should **definitely not** attempt to compare these across countries; they are not comparable due to different average salary levels and operational costs, not to mention currency equivalencies), it was necessary to examine the costs of attendance, completion, and the attainment of a minimum learning standard. As far as the authors are aware, this is a first for this kind of analysis. The unit cost for attendance is the total annual recurrent cost divided by the number of students attending. This, of course, is the standard meaning given to the term 'unit cost' in educational planning. It simply provides the cost of having a child in school for one year, regardless of what s/he may learn. The second element of the analysis is the unit cost for completing a cycle of education – in this case the primary cycle. This multiplies the number of years it takes to complete the grades in primary school, times the annual unit cost, adjusted to take account of drop-out. Thus, if only half of the children who enter Grade 1 complete Grade 6 in a six-year system, and it costs $100 per pupil per year, the unit cost for completers is 6 x $100 / .5 = $1,200. The final stage of the analysis was what some might consider foolhardy, or at least very risky, given the problems with the data. That is, the estimated cost to produce a graduate who meets the minimum standards of learning and of literacy as set by the government. A common difficulty here is that public and alternative schooling systems, if they provide a competency-based assessment of learning at all, generally do

not use the same instrument. Comparison is hazardous. However, the good news is that in these three cases, either the same instrument has been used for both forms of schooling, or, in the case of Ghana, a comparable instrument is used. The method is to take the unit cost for completers, and to adjust this by the percentage of completers who attain a minimum competency level. Thus, if we have a completers' unit cost of $1,200, and 40 per cent of these pupils have achieved minimum competency as measured by a summative assessment, then the unit cost for producing a successful learner is $1,200 / 0.4 = $3,000. While this is a simple approach, it demonstrates in a palpable way the importance of analyzing the cost of education in terms of access, completion and learning, rather than simply looking at that $100 per year unit cost.

Findings

Table 3.1 presents the basic cost comparisons between alternative and public schools in Bangladesh, Egypt and Ghana regarding the categories just noted: annual per-pupil recurrent costs; per-pupil completion costs; and per-pupil learning costs. The results are quite dramatic.

Table 3.1   Cost-effectiveness of alternative education programmes compared to public schools

	Annual per-pupil recurrent costs					
	BANGLADESH		EGYPT		GHANA	
	BRAC	*Public*	CS	*Public*	SfL	*Public*
	$20	$29	$114	$164	$39	$27

	Per-pupil completion costs					
Completion rate	94%	67%	92%	90%	91%	59%
Cost per completer	$84	$246	$620	911	$43	$135

	Per-pupil learning costs					
% students meeting learning outcome	70%	27%	94%	73%	44%	28%
Cost per learning outcome	$120	$911	$659	$1,248	$97	$482

Source: Chabbot, 2006; Zaalouk, 2004; Hartwell, 2006.

One first notes that in Bangladesh and Egypt the annual per-pupil recurrent costs in the alternative programmes are lower than in the public system, while in Ghana they are somewhat higher. However, in all three cases, in terms of per-pupil completion costs and per-pupil learning costs, the alternative programmes cost much less than do the public school systems. With reference to completion costs, it should be noted that in the Egyptian case, both the community schools and the government schools cover the same primary curriculum in five years. Thus, the lower completion costs in the alternative programme are partially attributable to a slightly higher completion rate, but the primary driver is the markedly lower annual recurrent costs in the community schools. In Bangladesh the BRAC schools generally cover the standard five-year primary curriculum in four years (but not always – this is a decision made in consultation with the local school committee as discussed below). Thus, here the very much lower completion costs are mainly due to the markedly higher completion rates in the BRAC schools. In Ghana's School for Life programme, each cohort completes the equivalent of the first three years of primary schooling in a single academic year (nine months). Thus, the much lower unit costs for completion reflect two factors: First, it only takes one year to complete a three-year cycle (which says something important about the inefficiencies of

the forms of formal schooling, as seen in *Box 1*); second, the completion rate is very much higher than in the public schools.

With reference to per-pupil learning costs, there are few cases in the world where it is possible to make a comparison of learning outcomes for alternative education programmes and public schools. Thus a few comments on the measurement tools used in these three cases are in order. For Bangladesh, the Assessment of Basic Competencies (which measures general knowledge competencies, not necessarily all of the material in the official primary school curriculum) was administered to a sample of BRAC and public school students in 1992 and 1999. BRAC students performed very much better in both years.

For the analysis reported in *Table 3.1*, the 1999 pass rates are used. It is interesting to observe that government school students performed better on this measure in 1992, achieving a pass rate of 37 per cent, which produced a per-pupil learning cost of $625 – still far higher than for the BRAC schools (Chabbot, 2006). In Egypt data on student performance are derived from official Ministry of Education examinations administered in grades 3 and 5. Data from 1997 through 2001 show that community school students in five specific districts in three governorates, in which the community schools programme concentrates its work, consistently outperformed their government school counterparts in the same districts at both grade levels.

The data in the table reflect the pass rates in the 2001 test for Grade 5 (end of primary) students. In Ghana, a reading assessment for Ghanian languages, designed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, was carried out with a sample of 284 students from Grade 3 in public schools from Central, Ashanti and Eastern regions, and 1,227 students in School for Life from the Northern Region. The assessments for the public schools were in four languages: Fante, Ewe, Dangme and Akuapem Twi; for the School for Life students they were in Gonja, Gurune and Mampruli. Given the language and regional differences, the results are not completely comparable, but this should favour the public schools, since School for Life operates in the poorest and most underserved region of the nation. The results are the opposite: while in both programmes the results are unfortunately low, the School for Life graduates have a significantly higher pass rate than that of the public school students (Hartwell, 2006).

There are two major lessons to be drawn from this analysis. First, it is in fact possible (though often difficult) and worthwhile to critically examine education through the lens of learning outcomes, and to pose the question: "What does it cost to assure that children can read with fluency and understanding?". This has not been a question that educational policy-makers and planners have been disposed, and able, to ask, given the pressure of EFA and the MDGs to promote enrollments. A consequence is that many nations and programmes have little idea of how much or how well the children in their primary schools can read and use text as a tool of thought. There are exceptions, especially in Latin America (see Reimers, 2000 and Corvalan and McMeeken, 2006; and, for a more general view, Abadzi, 2006), but generally such information is hard to develop and not always in demand.

The second lesson is that even given the limited, and certainly somewhat flawed data and analyses presented here, there is ample evidence that alternative education programmes are able to reach underserved populations and regions cost-effectively and affordably, and demonstrate a considerably more efficient approach in each of these countries than the public schools with which they are compared.

Having established above the results and costs of these programmes, the following discussion deals with the remaining three of the four core questions noted above, but in a somewhat different order

than that in which the questions are originally presented. The discussion goes, in a sense, from the outside in. First, broad systemic, policy and planning issues are considered: history, programme size, learner target groups and approaches to going to scale. Then the discussion moves closer to the actual schools and classrooms – the 'teacher question': Who are they, how are they recruited, and how do they learn this new way of teaching? Finally, consideration is given to the heart of the matter: curriculum, school/learning organization, and pedagogy – what actually happens in these successful schools? It should be noted that while four programmes are considered above, these additional comparisons include five programmes. As Escuela Nueva is slowly moving up into the secondary level, it is adopting new forms and characteristics as it adapts to the needs and interests of an older age-group. Thus it is appropriate to consider it as a somewhat separate model, related to, but not the same as, Escuela Nueva Primary.

3.3 Issues of planning, policy and going to scale

The first set of comparisons relate to history, programme size, and the approach to going to scale. Escuela Nueva Primary and the BRAC programme have grown to a very considerable size over three decades and two decades respectively. Escuela Nueva Secondary remains a fairly small system, concentrated in the coffee-growing regions of the nation. The programme organizers are still experimenting slowly and carefully. For reasons noted immediately below, the Egyptian programme is intended to stay at the level of about 300 schools. The Ghana programme has grown in 10 years to cover close to 800 schools, and plans to expand/adapt it further in other regions are being actively developed. These programmes have adopted quite distinct strategies for going to scale. Escuela Nueva Primary has spread its pedagogical model principally through an innovation diffusion approach – school to school, teacher to teacher – all enabled and orchestrated by the Ministry of Education, recently with assistance from the Federation of Coffee Growers (a kind of production and marketing co-operative) and a social foundation (the Back to the People Foundation). It has been a process of enablement from the top and diffusion across the bottom. Escuela Nueva Secondary is following the same approach, though at this stage more slowly. In contrast, the growth of the BRAC programme has been directed and carefully managed from the top: BRAC headquarters – a highly centralized and very well organized bureaucratic establishment. The Egyptian model is yet again different. The metaphor used to describe this model is that of an 'experimental farm' or a 'seedbed of innovation'. The idea is that the Community Schools programme, as organized by UNICEF-Egypt, will always remain, in itself, relatively small – no more than 300 schools. These are envisioned as the sites for pedagogical experimentation and development/testing of approaches which can then be diffused to standard government schools: first the One Classroom Schools which are most similar; and then to the broader primary education system, in a bottom-up, or across the bottom style, but all enabled and orchestrated by the Ministry of Education, UNICEF-Egypt, and local and international NGOs and donor agencies. This process is already well underway, with thousands of schools in various regions of the nation having adopted/adapted core elements of the Community Schools' pedagogical model. The development of the Ghana programme has followed a somewhat different approach. It also involves a complex combination of actors, including the Ghana Education Service, Northern Region, a local traditional council, a bilateral donor agency, and national and international NGOs. As the discussions now underway regarding how best to expand this programme further proceed, a problem to be faced is one not seriously encountered in the other locations: the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of the national population. All of the other nations have all sorts of internal diversities and divisions, but ethnically and linguistically they are far less than Ghana. Thus, we have four different nations, four different sets of histories, cultures,

traditions and ways of doing things, and four different approaches to going to scale, each of which is working well in its own environment.

The next comparison, 'main student target group', indicates a core similarity and a key difference in target groups. All five programmes are directed mainly at poor rural children (although all are beginning, or intend, to move into urban areas as well). The gender specificity varies. Escuela Nueva, primary or secondary, has no specific gender target among students. This reflects the reality of Latin America, and Colombia specifically, where generally gender differences are not a major issue in education until upper secondary and university levels, at least compared to much of the rest of the world. The Bangladesh and Egypt programmes, and the Ghana programme to a degree, specifically target girls, as in these locations girls are the most disadvantaged group in terms of primary schooling. In these cases, boys are allowed to enroll, but only if there is school space available after all of the eligible girls in the community have been accommodated.

3.4 The teachers

The next set of comparisons relate to teachers: where do they come from and how are they prepared and nurtured in their work? Within our overall data set, there are two distinct patterns in terms of teacher selection. In most programmes the teachers are not formally certified according to the standard system of teacher selection and preparation (usually through university-based faculties of education or normal schools). Rather, they are young people, typically young women, who have a modest degree of formal schooling, typically of junior secondary level (i.e. Grade 10) – which ordinarily means that they are among those in the village community with the highest level of formal schooling available. They are locally known individuals, selected by the local school committee, and trained in the local area to teach in the locality. They are very much of the community and known to the community. They are frequently called 'facilitators' rather than 'teachers', so as to avoid problems with the national teacher unions or associations. The Egyptian, Bangladeshi and Ghanaian programmes exemplify this pattern. The two Colombian programmes represent the other common pattern. Here the teachers are university-educated and certified, as are all teachers in the regular formal education system, and are regularly moved from place to place under the standard rules of the regional/national bureaucracy regarding fully certified teachers. This has proven to be a challenge for the Escuela Nueva programmes, in that the routines of the teaching profession's bureaucracy and Ministry of Education regulations often create such frequent teacher career moves that continuity of teaching in the alternative mode can be a problem, necessitating a regular need for training in the new style of pedagogy. What is striking, however, is that whichever model of teacher is selected, whether it be facilitators with no more than 10 years of formal schooling, or teachers with up to 16 years (e.g. university level) of formal education, in all of these cases the adults learn very quickly how to work in a radically alternative form of pedagogy, and generate excellent learning results in their students. In all cases the pre-service training programmes are brief (a few weeks at most), but intensive and involve observation and practice teaching in successful demonstration schools, followed by several years of very intensive in-service teacher-to-teacher mentoring programmes and regular supervisory support. This pattern represents a significant challenge to our standard assumptions about how to train teachers, at least for the primary and early secondary levels of schooling.

It is important to note just how different this approach to teacher development and learning is from that typically found throughout the world. We generally 'front-end load' the process, devoting most of our teacher development resources and energy to the pre-service period. Once the new teachers are trained, hired/appointed, and are in their new classrooms, they are essentially abandoned to

their own devices. Opportunities for collaboration with and learning from other teachers are scarce, and on-going professional learning experiences are rare, sporadic, and most commonly devised by authority levels far from the individual classroom and school. (There are exceptions, especially in the 'rich world', such as Japan and France, but the general pattern holds.) An article by Kardos and Johnson (2007) maintains that this pattern of 'on their own' may account for the fact that in North America overall, about 50 per cent of any new cohort of teachers abandon the profession within the first five years of teaching. There is much that still needs to be understood about how these people learn so quickly and so well to be effective enablers of learning.

3.5 The heart of the matter: Curriculum, community, and pedagogy

The first comparison category is curriculum. All of these programmes 'follow' the standard national curriculum, if one thinks of that as a set of learning goals/objectives for a particular learning cycle or stage. What these programmes do, by altering the pedagogical model in fundamental ways, is provide a way for children to learn that curriculum to a generally far superior degree compared to traditional schools, sometimes in a considerably shorter period of time. They also provide opportunities for children to learn material of local relevance (or convert the national curricular objectives into locally relevant ways of learning and learning material), and they add to this learning such matters as democratic citizenship education (particularly important in the Escuela Nueva programmes) or arts education (particularly important in Egypt's community schools).

The following comparison categories refer to the relations of the school to the local community and to the broader national structures, both governmental and non-governmental. Schools of the types discussed here are often called community schools, but that term takes on many meanings, as these cases illustrate. In Colombia, the Escuela Nueva schools are all part of the formal national system administered and financed at the provincial level, as are all government schools in the nation. Nonetheless, at the local level they enjoy very heavy community participation in their management, with high degrees of participation in the actual pedagogy by parents and other community members. The BRAC schools, in contrast, are entirely the property of and under the control of BRAC, which is, by some estimates, the largest national NGO in the world. These schools also have quite deep and formalized relations with the local communities through school management committees, which are formed only after all the major stakeholders in a community have agreed to support a BRAC school. The Egyptian case provides a somewhat different version. Here the local communities own the schools, and manage them through formalized school boards. UNICEF-Egypt provides overall management of the programme, plus supervision and teacher training, in conjunction with a network of local NGOs. The Ministry of Education pays the facilitators' salaries and provides textbooks and other learning materials. At the local level, strong linkages have been established between the UNICEF community schools and the Ministry's One Classroom Schools. In Ghana as well, local communities form committees which support the schools on a day-to-day basis, and select/supervise the locally known facilitator, and parents/community members often teach crafts, gardening and dance/drama. But here the relationships between government (particularly the Ghana Education Service and the Department of Community Development) take a somewhat different form to those in Egypt, owing to differences in social organization and practices (for example in Egypt there is no equivalent to the regional traditional councils which play a very important role in the School for Life programme). Thus, in practice, in these programmes the distinction between government schools and community schools is often blurred. In all of these cases, then, there are very strong school-community linkages, with parents and other community members actively supporting the work of the school, but they take different organizational forms in the different locations. Generally, the programmes are supported through complex mixes of

government, NGO, private sector and civil society entities. But whatever the mix, the key point is that the school is not an isolated entity belonging to a far-away government apparatus; it is an integral part of the community in which the community is strongly invested.

We turn then to direct learning materials and support, textbooks and learning materials. Escuela Nueva Primary depends very heavily on textbooks, workbooks and teachers' guides, which are specifically designed to support self-guided, continuous progress learning in a multigraded setting. There is also much use of teacher- and student-developed learning material. Escuela Nueva Secondary depends much more on standard government-approved texts, reflecting the need at this level to prepare students for government tests and the perceived need for subject specialism. The BRAC programme also uses specially designed texts and learning materials and some teacher-developed materials. The Egyptian programme uses a combination of standard government texts and its own learning materials, and relies heavily on teacher- and student-developed materials. The Ghana programme uses specially designed texts and learning materials, written in the local language, plus teacher- and student-developed materials. One thing seems quite clear: that standard textbooks do not work well, certainly not as a sole learning resource, with these alternative forms of pedagogy. That is hardly a surprise, as those standard materials are specifically designed for use within the traditional forms of formal schooling. These standard materials can, however, be used in some cases, in combination with materials especially designed for the alternative forms of pedagogy.

The next comparison category is age-graded or multigraded. All of these programmes have moved, to one degree or another, away from the traditional age-graded 'egg-crate' pedagogical model, in which the learners remain in classes with other learners their own age and progress from one grade to the next. Three of the cases (Escuela Nueva Primary, the Egyptian Community Schools and Ghana's School for Life) are multigraded, which enables continuous progress learning and peer tutoring. The BRAC programme is age-graded, in a sense, as the children in any given school all go together through Grade 1, Grade 2, etc. But the class group is composed of children of different ages, they all move together through the primary programme, covering a five-year curriculum in four years, with the same teacher(s) from start to finish, which thus provides many opportunities for a form of continuous progress learning and peer tutoring. It is thus a locally adapted means of accomplishing the core pedagogical changes. Similarly, although in a somewhat different fashion, Escuela Nueva Secondary is formally age-graded, and classes are divided by subject matter reflecting the subject content orientation and testing routines of standard secondary schooling, but they still manage to maintain much multigrade/multi-age and peer tutoring as part of the pedagogy. Again we see a locally adapted way of generating the same core pedagogical changes.

3.6 Pedagogy: The heart of the heart of the matter

This section has been separately sub-titled, as it is the heart of the heart of the matter: what do these students and their teachers/facilitators do day by day in their classrooms to produce the kinds of learning results noted above? A sense of the actual pedagogy used in these programmes can be obtained by reviewing *Box 2*. All of these programmes have moved, in one way or another, to one degree or another, away from the traditional age-graded egg-crate pedagogical model. This both encourages and permits continuous progress learning (children advance individually or in small groups, at their own pace, and at different paces in different learning areas – e.g. a child may, at any given age and stage, be particularly good at reading, but not so skilled in math) and peer-tutoring (older and/or more advanced children assisting younger and/or less advanced

learners). This is the core of the pedagogical model: self-guided learning, continuous progress learning, peer-tutoring, all enabled by one form or another of multigrading.

Within this model, young people typically spend a large proportion of the school day working individually or in small groups, in learning centres or corners, using learning materials which are specially designed for such self-guided learning. When an individual learner, or a small learning group, encounter a problem, they will typically first ask older or more advanced students for assistance. If that does not solve the problem, they will ask the teacher/facilitator for help. Thus the adults in the classroom spend much of their time moving about, checking the progress of various learning groups, solving problems and asking/answering questions, and recording the progress and obstacles of various individuals and learning groups for planning future work (e.g. "Jose and his group need special work in two-column multiplication"; "Tasneem and her group are having real difficulty with verbs in the future tense, but they have just written a wonderful story which they should share with the class, perhaps as a puppet play"; or "Ali and Ahmed seem to be having difficulty with the science corner material on the human body, and are avoiding it. Most of the children love this material. Are they embarrassed by it, or what? Must ask Mr G. [her supervisor] for suggestions." (Taken from classroom observation notes)).

This does not mean that the teachers do not teach. Rather, they teach differently. They spend much time working with individuals or small groups (although there is almost always some whole class activity as well), responding to learning needs as they arise. They also concentrate much effort on teaching each new child or group of children how to read, using a variety of teaching approaches which would be familiar to early primary teachers in many parts of the world, until the new students have reached a level of decoding and comprehension of written text that permits them to work with self-guided material. They can concentrate their efforts on such essential learning challenges as they arise precisely because they can depend on the fact that most of the young people, most of the time, are engaged in their own self-guided learning. Such classrooms are usually busy places, with much movement and activity, and are often rather noisy. But that is not the sound of children misbehaving or being disruptive, rather of young people being productive and working together on their own learning.

As a final note in this comparison, all of these factors which make the look and feel, and even the results, of these programmes so different from public schools are reflected in the structure of the recurrent budgets.

Table 3.2   Profile of recurrent costs: Egypt and Ghana

Costs	Egypt Community Schools	Ghana School for Life
Teachers/facilitators	20%	6%
Texts and learning materials	22%	25%
Supervision, facilitator training and management (includes staff)	35%	28%
Staff training	10%	10%
Operations and transport	13%	30%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Source: Hartwell, 1995 and 2006.

The most striking feature of recurrent budget profiles is the high proportion used for instructional materials, in-service teacher development, supervision, and programme management. In traditional

schools, teachers' salaries and benefits often consume over 90 per cent of the recurrent budget, leaving very little for instructional materials, in-service teacher development, or quality assurance (Farrell and Heyneman, 1989; Oliveira and Farrell, 1993). In contrast, in Egypt's Community Schools and Ghana's School for Life, the amounts for instructional materials and for on-going teacher development, supervision and management, together are over 60 per cent of the budget, while teachers receive what amounts to a stipend in Ghana, and a minimal salary in Egypt (although increases are being negotiated). This suggests that, as Oliveira and Farrell (1993) suggested, the motivation for teachers to enter such programmes, and to stay in them, is not simply a matter of salary levels but of a total remuneration package that includes such things as recognition and prestige within their own communities, as well as non-salary benefits.

4 Lessons we are beginning to learn

None of the ideas undergirding these programmes are particularly new. They have been in the literatures of curriculum, educational psychology/pedagogy, and philosophy of education, often for a long time. There are, for example, community schools even in very large cities in some places in North America and elsewhere (see Melaville, Berg and Blank, 2006). Many classrooms and schools have implemented various aspects noted in *Box 2*, but these have remained mostly isolated examples, as noted above. The most important thing which these alternative programmes teach us is that the traditional model *can* be changed, *on a large scale*. And this can clearly be done in very poor places, with very limited resources, with very strong learning results. These programmes demonstrate that child-centred, active pedagogy, with heavy involvement of the parents and their community in general in the learning of their children, works. And where this pedagogical model is implemented well, even modestly well, it is producing remarkable learning gains among even the poorest and most disadvantaged young people. This is an extremely important finding considering the problematic truths put forward in *Chapter 1*. How to implement this model in any particular place, rich or poor, is always a challenge, and the appropriate solution will differ from place to place depending on local history and traditions, socio-cultural and political-economic conditions. There is no one-size-fits-all solution on offer here. But knowing that it can and has been done in even very poor places is the learning resource available.

It is also extremely important that these successful change programmes have not simply altered one feature or another of the forms of formal schooling, for example add some new curriculum content, improve some part of teacher training of the standard sort, alter this or that aspect of the standard pedagogy, or provide a small amount of extra local money to the local school. Rather, they represent a thorough reorganization and revision of the standard model of schooling, such that the learning programme, although occurring in, or based in, a building called a school, is far different from what we have come to expect to be happening in a school, and is far more effective than what we have typically seen, even in very good schools for very well-off children.

These programmes also demonstrate that, contrary to a very popular belief around the world, teachers are not obstacles to fundamental school change. Indeed, when it does happen, the teachers are the promoters and agents of such change, even when they are working in very difficult situations, are not necessarily formally well educated, and are often very poorly paid. They, like the equally disadvantaged young people for whom they are responsible, can and do accomplish remarkable feats of learning and change in quite short periods. There is an important parallel between the young and older learners here: Just as the success for the young people seems based fundamentally on a focus on learning rather than teaching, so the changes in teachers seem based on the same shift in focus. These successful change programmes typically spread or go to scale not by a centrally planned and commanded reform plan with goals and objectives set from afar, and agents or supervisors from the national or regional centre who go out to teach the teachers about the latest new educational idea or theoretical schema. Rather, they spread by an innovation diffusion process – teachers learning from other teachers, sharing their practical professional knowledge (see Clandinin and Connelly, 1998) and teaching skills with other teachers, and together exploring how their shared and growing knowledge and experience can help them all.

What of the role of government itself, and policy? Some of these programmes have grown under government sponsorship (as Escuela Nueva), others have grown entirely outside of government sponsorship (as the BRAC programme), and many others have been or are working well under various forms of combined sponsorship/ownership. This is a critical issue, from the experience to hand. Government agencies and bureaucracies (and private sector ones as well) have a predictable tendency to want to command, decree, regulate, control, supervise, organize, and generally keep administratively tidy all things that fall within their jurisdiction. This is part of what has led to the forms of formal schooling. Whatever else, they are predictable, controllable to a degree, and potentially – if not always actually – administratively tidy. In contrast, the programmes discussed here are somewhat to very anarchic, not fully predictable or controllable, and constantly changing at the local level as they learn from their own experience (as should the children with whom they work!). This is all typically unsettling to the administrators of the traditional systems. All of these programmes have encountered at least some (often a high) degree of resistance from the administrative officials of the traditional education systems in their locations. The first role of government in trying to promote cases such as these is to get out of the way, to loosen control and regulation. The second role is to provide space for, and indeed encourage, such experimentation, uncomfortable as that may sometimes be (Crouch *et al.*, 1997 provide an excellent analysis of this concept of 'policy space'). What is perhaps most remarkable about these cases of successful major educational change on a large scale is that they have somehow managed to find or develop that bureaucratic attitude which provides the policy space for, and even welcomes, change. Investigating through case studies how exactly this has been accomplished is a major task before us. Knowing that it has been done is a major incentive in the quest for understanding, but there is still much work needed on this question.

Another lesson is this: children do not have to be forced or coerced into learning. It is what they do naturally – indeed what they are genetically compelled to do, if given the opportunity. This is also *not* a new observation (see Hall, 1986; Gardner, 1993), but it seems to be often overlooked. It is what Olson and his cognitive science colleagues have long observed. But you do not have to be in an expensive learning laboratory in a large university to see this. In the late 1980s, one of the authors of this booklet was in a small village in Colombia visiting yet another of the early examples of Escuela Nueva, chatting with a group of the parents of the children in the new school. He asked them what they saw as the main difference between the experience of their older children who had attended, and mostly failed, in the traditional school which had more or less functioned in the village, and that of their younger children who were attending the new school. After some conversation among themselves, one mother replied, obviously speaking for the group (rough translation from the dialect of Spanish spoken there), "Look, with my older kids, they hated going to school. I always had to force them out of the house in the morning. Both of them repeated first grade twice, they weren't learning anything, and they were not happy. So finally I said OK, you can go with your father out in the fields and work, at least you'll be doing something useful there. My younger kids in the new school now? The problem is the opposite. I can't keep them away from the school, even when they're sick. And they don't come home in the afternoon – they're at school working on things. I have to send my oldest down there to tell them that they have to come home to eat dinner and do their chores. And they complain to me: 'Mamita, it's so much fun at school and we're doing such interesting things, why do we have to come home to do these boring chores?'" (Farrell, field notes, 1987). The anecdotal and observational evidence from the case studies cited here is compelling that youngsters in these alternative programmes are generally enthusiastic as well as effective learners (not always, of course; everyone has bad days and every school has problem students). They come to school not because they are compelled to, but because they

want to. Traditional schooling restricts and tries to channel the learning potential of children (see the standardization and accountability movements in North American education, and elsewhere); these new programmes work to unleash it.

Multigrading is not simply a second-best expedient for use when there are not enough children in a school catchment area to support age-graded schooling. It is, in and of itself, pedagogically superior to age-graded schooling; it matches much more closely what we now know about how children actually develop (Berry, 2004; Miller, 1989; Olson, 2003, especially p. 85). It is interesting to note that, in Canada, among the most advantaged jurisdictions in the world, the Province of Quebec adopted, in 2000, a modified form of multigrading as the standard policy for all of its primary schools – urban and rural, large and small. The new policy document notes: "The Quebec Education Programme divides elementary education into three two-year cycles. This organizational model takes into account the need for a long-term approach to developing competencies. It corresponds better to the students' learning rates and permits more differentiated teaching practices. In addition it makes possible the formation of teams of teachers who may stay with a class for more than one year, providing pedagogical support and evaluating learning" (Government of Quebec; Ministry of Education, 2001: 5). In two recent papers, Lewin and Pridmore note that multigrading is actually quite common in many parts of the world, rich and poor. They also note that it works best in terms of learning not when it is seen simply as a necessary adaptation to demographic realities, but as part of a broader systemic change (Lewin, 2005; Pridmore, 2006).

Early childhood education, or more properly put, attention to the nurture, health and learning needs of children before they reach formal school age, is as important (probably more so) as the primary school itself in developing ultimate learning outcomes (Levinger, 1993). People start learning at birth, and learn continuously thereafter. Most of these programmes have broken the age-specific patterns of the forms of formal schooling. What can be learned from this is that nothing fundamentally changes in that pattern of continuous development at the age(s) arbitrarily set for starting formal school attendance. And their development thereafter does not come in system-convenient nine-to-ten-month bursts which the age-graded system assumes. Continuing education, or lifelong learning, is not something that starts after one has completed formal schooling. It starts at birth and ends at death, and formal schooling, by the evidence available, can be as much a hindrance as a help in its continuance in the crucial years between early childhood and adulthood, and beyond. These alternative programmes demonstrate that, even with limited resources, a dysfunctional pattern can be broken.

Finally, these sorts of successful learning enhancement programmes must be grown and nurtured carefully and slowly. Trying to go too fast can damage or destroy potentially promising innovations. Escuela Nueva was almost destroyed in its middle years by the insistence of the World Bank that it expand more rapidly than was possible given the administrative capacity of the education system at the time (McEwan, 1998; McEwen and Benveniste, 2001). The useful motto is 'TTT' (Things Take Time). Unfortunately this does not match well with the common needs of governments to have demonstrable results in the short term, or with the short-term funding cycles of most donor agencies. If one is, as a government or donor agency, in the learning enhancement enterprise, one must be in it for the long haul or not at all. There are no large-scale quick fixes. What we do have is an increasing number of slowly and carefully developed long-term successes. It is from these that we must learn.

Conclusions and questions pending

Literacy, as well as numeracy, and the basic primary education assumed to provide them, have become enshrined in international declarations and covenants as basic universal human rights. But in reality, in much of the developing world, that right is far from being attained, and many are claiming that it is in fact unattainable, at least in any near term, except with massive infusions of resources which cannot be found. Hundreds of millions of young people have had no access at all to primary schooling, or start but never finish, or finish but do not attain basic levels of learning. To a degree, the problem is a question of lack of resources, or resources poorly used, but the core argument here is that the problem is much more fundamental: the traditional model of education, which is now well-nigh universal, what is called in this book the 'forms of formal schooling', does not fit with what is now understood about how humans best learn, and inherently serves very poorly the learning needs of vast numbers of youngsters, particularly those most marginalized by circumstances of birth. And we seem generally to be unable to significantly change that model on any large scale.

In the midst of that rather gloomy scenario, the alternative programmes considered in this book offer at least a modest ray of hope. By following a radically alternative form of pedagogy, they are achieving remarkable learning results, even among some of the poorest children in the world. So these are very hopeful indications. But these are, as noted above, early days in this long-term, international research programme. There is still much that we do not understand, or have only a rather weak and tentative grip on. Below is a quick review of some of the major questions pending.

A first major puzzle is the *planning and implementation* question, or perhaps, to put it better, the *institutionalization* question. This is, in many respects, the most fundamental question of all, since if the planners and managers of these radically alternative programmes had not been able to solve this puzzle, the other questions noted here would have little relevance. From the standard literature on educational change, as noted earlier, this is not supposed (in both senses of the term) to happen, at least not usually. In all of these cases, people have managed, within or alongside the bureaucratic systems that have long enshrined the forms of formal schooling, to design and implement successfully some form of the model presented in *Box 2*. How have they done this? It is essential to note that the design for planning and implementation in each case is different, depending, as it should, on local patterns and traditions, but they have all managed to work. It is important to note that in all of these programmes there are complex bureaucracies, including functionaries who routinely carry out all of the necessary tasks of any ministry of education. There are policy-makers, curriculum designers, evaluators, text and learning material developers, local co-ordinators and organizers, supervisors and instructors of teachers, and so on, but they somehow manage to do all those necessary planning and administration tasks in a way which encourages and promotes, rather than blocks, major educational change. Some detailed case studies on how this has actually happened are dearly needed. Some are planned, but much work needs to be done here.

Then there is the *pedagogical* question. How exactly do these young people learn as well as they obviously do? This is far from being clear. There are good descriptions of the day-to-day learning routines in many of these programmes, and the learning results. But *why* they work as well as they do from a pedagogical or learning theory point of view remains rather a mystery. All involved in

this long, international venture at trying to understand them have their own hunches (it would be far too early to label them elegantly as 'hypotheses'). It is worth reminding ourselves that none of the pedagogical ideas embedded in these programmes is particularly new; they have been in the literature of pedagogical theory, curriculum theory, learning theory, and philosophy of education for a long time, in many cases for well over a century. The problem has been that we have never figured out how to implement these ideas in standard schools on a large scale. This brings us back to the *planning* question above. So perhaps the issue is not so much that we have learned a lot about how people learn, but that some folks have figured out how to actually plan and implement these ideas, combining internationally known work with their own local traditions and cultures.

A third issue is the *teacher learning* question. How do these adults learn so quickly to implement successfully a radically alternative form of pedagogy? Again there are good descriptive accounts, and the results in terms of the learning of their students are clear. An early clue is that these teacher development systems seem to reflect rather well what adult educators have been saying for a very long time about what they call 'andragogy' (classic works are Kidd, 1973 and Knowles, 1989). Yet again, this is long-standing knowledge which we have not generally figured out how to implement with the forms of formal schooling. But *how* and *why* this happens in these alternative programmes remains quite a mystery.

Another major challenge is that the literature available on these alternatives is generally so highly laudatory as to convey an impression that they are all paragons of pedagogical virtue, which they are not. They are all very human institutions, far better on average than traditional schooling, but variable among and within the programmes. Among the evident successes, mistakes have been made, and in the best of cases corrected. These programmes are experimental, and the people involved are learning as they go. A critical literature reflecting the less than perfect as well as the successes has not yet really developed, and is much needed (see Sweetser, 1999, and Shadiduzzaman and Haggerty, 2005, for a critical analysis of BRAC's in-service teacher training system).

A challenge which, in some respects, is even more daunting has to do with the inadequacy of many of our standard terms and categories, derived from the long history of the forms of formal schooling, to capture well what we are slowly coming to understand about these alternative programmes. One of these issues refers to the inadequacy of the now standard distinction between formal and non-formal education. This was introduced into the literature in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly by the work of Coombs and colleagues, with much support from UNESCO (see Coombs, 1976; Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; Ahmed, 1975; Evans, 1981). It was a very important distinction at the time in denoting that education, as an organized and intentional enterprise, could be and was provided by many means beyond the forms of formal schooling, for young people and particularly for adults. That was, at the time, a very useful thing to do, as it called forcefully to our attention that many non-school organizations and programmes were, and are, often as educative or learning-promoting as the standard formal schools. But what do we do with this now-standard distinction when we find, as we are doing, that many of these highly successful alternative programmes are bringing into formal schools the pedagogical methods of non-formal education? Indeed, they are bringing into the school-house for young people many of the forms of andragogy long promoted by adult educators. Thus, the distinctions between formal and non formal, and adult vs. child education appear to be broken down by the people involved in these programmes. We do not yet seem to have a practical and theoretical language which adequately represents this reality (see Rogers, 2004 for a critical analysis of this challenge). This also applies to such terms as 'child-centred', 'active pedagogy', or 'contructivist teaching and learning'. As we have been trying to match these

many and varied programmes to the terms normally used in the academic and policy conversation about schooling and pedagogy, we have found ourselves increasingly confounded. The terms and categories do not fit well with what we are seeing. They are based upon an experience of teaching and learning rooted in the long history of, and assumptions undergirding, formal schooling as we have come to know it. Here, too, there is still much to learn.

Perhaps the major lesson for educational planners is simply that this *can* be done, and on a large scale. There is no single lesson or recipe available here, except that people in many parts of the world have made it happen, tailoring new and long-standing ideas about schooling and learning to their own places and histories, and learning from their own experience. A subtitle of this book could well be, as noted earlier, *Learning from success: Lessons for planners*. To learn more, we need an even greater international cross-cultural and comparative research effort to further explore the many questions outlined above.

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The book

With Education for All and Universal Primary Education gaining heightened attention at the start of the new millennium, there has been a surge in programmes that aim to increase enrolments, retention and, most importantly, learning. This booklet attempts to understand how and why more than 200 radically alternative primary education programmes from around the world – some still small and others quite large in scale – manage to succeed in achieving these goals among many of the most marginalized children in the world. These are the "hardest to reach and hardest to teach" children in the world, yet they, and their teachers, manage to learn very well. Lessons for planners and policy makers regarding how they do this are the focus of this booklet. These lessons must be adapted to each cultural reality; the most important lesson is simply that it can be done, that by learning from these successes there is at least a chance to reach Education for All.

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