

**Excellence in Classroom Education at the Local Level
(EXCELL)**

FINAL EVALUATION

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May 26, 2005

Work Order No. 3189-0302-01
Project 3189-0302 EXCELL

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I. Introduction

*Project Summary*¹

The “Excellence in Classroom Education at the Local Level” (EXCELL) Project has been designed to address educational priorities in El Salvador and improve student performance in 250 rural schools, grades K-6. Based on the evidence from international literature on the strategic role of principals in school effectiveness, between July 2003 and May 2005 the Project trained and supported the development of principals’ abilities to lead education improvement efforts in schools, strengthen mid-level management capacity in the Ministry of Education (MOE) in support of school principals, strengthen the MOE’s capacity to process and use information about quality in education, and improve production, availability and use of education research for policy decision-making in this sector.

The Project has been structured in three components, as follows.

- Component 1.** Strengthen the Ministry of Education’s capacity to improve decentralized school management to modify and implement educational reforms. This component is divided into two sub-components.
- Sub-Component 1.1** Strategic planning and management capacity development.
- Sub-Component 1.2** Application of monitoring and evaluation systems and research.
- Component 2.** Improve learning conditions for student achievement in at least 250 rural schools, K-6, through training and technical assistance to school principals.
- Component 3.** Extend educational policy research.
The Project contributes to the MOE’s work in the context of USAID/El Salvador Mission’s Strategic Objective 1—Expanded access and economic opportunity for El Salvador’s poor rural families.

The conceptual framework builds on a quality in education model that brings together multiple elements such as teacher training, school infrastructure, curricula, textbooks, teacher performance, educational resources, school management, principal leadership, school climate, and time used on academic tasks. The principal’s role in improving the quality of education in their schools is considered a necessary factor for the development of integrated interventions. These interventions include improved school management and enhanced principal leadership to improve the quality of education. The Project has been designed to complement the activities of concurrent MOE initiatives to improve the quality of education, using tools such as the Strategic Institutional Plan (PEI) and the efforts of other cooperation agencies that support the MOE. The Project has also been designed to address inequities in access to education due to discrimination for reasons such as gender, socio-economic circumstances and different educational needs.

¹ This section has been adapted from *EXCELL Project Sixth Quarterly Report OCTOBER 2004 –DECEMBER 2004* submitted to the United States Agency for International Development by the American Institutes for Research and the Academy for Educational Development. January 2005.

The Project strategies have included leadership strengthening, integrated teambuilding, professional development of MOE middle managers (Components 1.1) and school principals (Component 2). The model has been developed through the training and continues support for managers, principals and their teachers through the use of in-service technical assistance by project field personnel and the establishment of quality circles for middle managers, teachers and parents that meet on a monthly basis to actively criticize, discuss and strengthen their respective roles and activities. In addition, the project supported educational research and dissemination of findings (Components 1.2) and the formulation of educational policies to support the improvement of educational quality Component 3).

II. Methodology

The methods used in this evaluation consisted of a complete review of the documents produced by EXCELL, including project descriptions, quarterly reports, middle manager and school director training modules, the project monitoring plan, monitoring and evaluation reports. In addition to the document review, the EXCELL staff were interviewed, ranging from the Chief-of-Party to the field staff that provided technical assistance to school directors and teachers. Key personnel at both the central and departmental levels of the Ministry of Education (MINED), a selected number of school directors and teachers were also interviewed. The total number of interviews is shown table below.

<p>EXCELL Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chief of Party – Directors of Components 1.1, 2 y 3 – Trainers for Component 1.1 – Trainers for Component 2—2 interviews – Field Personnel—10 interviews
<p>USAID Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Education Officer – CTO for EXCELL
<p>Ministry of Education (Central Level)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – General Director of Education – General Administrative Director – National Director of Monitoring and Evaluation – Director of Planning – Director of Human Resources (Actual y Anterior) – Manager of Complementary Projects – Personnel from the National Directory of Monitoring and Evaluation (<i>Dirección Nacional de Monitoreo y Evaluación</i>)
<p>Ministry of Education (Department Level)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Personnel from the Department of Cabañas (3 interviews)

Ministry of Education—Schools

- Directors (13 interviews—Cabañas, Chalatenango, Cuscatlán y La Libertad)
- Teachers (5 interviews—Cuscatlán)
- Classroom Observations (3 in Cuscatlán)

Most of the interviews were recorded and the respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions about their views and specific involvement in the EXCELL project. The content analysis of the interviews consisted of the categorization of specific view and activities in relation to the principal components of the project that were subsequently compared to both the qualitative and quantitative findings of the monitoring and evaluation activities.

In addition to the interviews, the evaluator attended the last training session of the middle managers and observed the dynamics of building consensus and conflict resolution, and two training sessions for the school directors held in Santa Tecla and Chalatenango. Middle managers and school directors were randomly selected and interviewed at their respective training sessions.

III. Principal Findings

A. Component 1.1—The Training of Middle Managers

The program designed to train middle managers was quite complex and consisted of a series of steps beginning with an examination of the stated needs of the middle managers, followed by a proposal for the design of program modules, didactic letter with the design details for each of the modules, and finally the written modules for the training course. Each EXCELL instructor was in charge of the design of modules that were part of his or her expertise, but the basic issues that were addressed included the general frustration of the middle managers, the feeling that the bureaucracy of the MOE could not be changed, and the idea that the work of the middle managers had no relationship to the classroom teaching activities or student learning.

In addition to the teaching modules, a video was produced to demonstrate the relationship between the role of the middle managers and the activities in the schools. The video showed how both school directors and teachers are affected by their contact with the MOE bureaucracy and how this in turn can take time away from school administration, reduce the effectiveness of school directors' leadership, take teachers away from the classroom, and negatively affect the quality of teaching. Both directors and teachers have to deal with MOE personnel in relation to salaries, benefits, school supplies and budgets, and it is the nature of these transactions that has a direct impact on how both directors and teachers do their jobs.

As part of the training course, the middle managers were asked to design and implement projects with the goal of improving the relationship between the middle managers, school directors and teachers. Specifically, the purpose of the projects was to improve the educational experience of the students. The project were designed using the logframe approach which consists of defining an overall goal, a purpose, results or outputs and a series of specific activities or inputs. The idea is

that each of the activities produce desired results that contribute to the stated purpose and the overall goal of the project. In order to measure the effect of the activities, objectively verifiable indicators were defined and the means of verification were described. Also, a series of assumptions were made for each of the level of the logframe, e.g., a specific project goal would be feasible providing that the MOE upper management would give the requisite support.

The major challenges for the training of the middle managers was to make learning guides that were geared to the appropriate level of the middle managers, not make any of the presentations too superficial and at the same time avoid subjects that were too complex. In order for the dynamics of the training course to keep the middle managers involved and intellectually active, there had to be adequate time for discussion and reflection. Central to the structure of the course was the idea that the institutional culture of the MOE both at the central and departmental levels would change, and that instead of being self centered and myopic, the middle managers would have a concern and sensitivity for improving the quality of education in the schools. As a result, the middle managers would change how they view their jobs and seek to improve their relationships with the schools in ways that would have a positive impact in the classroom.

Problems

According to the EXCELL staff, some of the problems encountered during the training sessions were that few of the middle managers actually read the materials they were given. One instructor said that he was sure that no more than one-quarter of his students read carefully everything they were given and studied the material highlighting the most important points. Along this same line, a number of the managers asked for the modules on diskette or CD in order to use the material themselves, and the instructor felt that this was part of a culture of 'liberal borrowing' where the text would be used with no attribution to the original author. Many of the managers were also observed taking more materials than necessary, and it was felt that this was to be given to friends who were absent or to be used for other purposes. The positive view of this, however, is that materials were being distributed and that information was being disseminated, albeit without appropriate recognition of source.

The instructors also felt that there were severe time limitations during the sessions and that the managers had problems completing their activities on time. This was in part due to the fact that too much material was included in some of the modules and that some managers were slow in completing exercises and were constantly asking for more time, making it difficult for the instructor to cover all the planned material and activities.

Because the middle managers were a heterogeneous group with a wide variety of different positions and responsibilities within the MOE, many did not attend on a regular basis. This was in part due to the fact that their immediate superiors would not give them the necessary time off or the managers themselves felt that it was not necessary to go to all the meetings. During the training sessions many of the managers would leave the room, did not turn off their cell phones, and would speak out without being called on. Others would talk among themselves rather than pay attention to the instructors; this was especially the case when the managers had held political positions and were accustomed to holding conversations during political meetings such as legislative sessions. A related problem was that the managers were divided according to political

affiliation and the members of the party in power felt at greater liberty to speak out and participate while those of the opposition tended to be more subdued and passive.

As the courses progressed, the problems diminished. As far as the talking and leaving the room was concerned, a group of managers pressured the rest to conform to better behavioral standards which in the end led to greater participation and more mutual respect.

Successful Activities

While there were some initial problems with the training of the middle managers, the instructors also felt that they met their goals and had numerous successful training sessions. When asked what had been the most successful activities, the instructors identified the following:

- The design of strategic school maps
- Project feasibility analysis
- Identify and eliminate critical project bottlenecks
- Visit schools to observe and discuss problems with directors, teachers and parents
- Design objectives and procedures to strengthen the schools and to improve children's education
- The use of the logframe method, define indicators and monitor project implementation
- Design cause and effect sequences
- The application of modules and project for activities outside of the schools, e.g., construction of solar panels, build water reservoirs, make schools gardens and set up marketing procedures to sell produce

The middle managers themselves felt that the training course was brand new for them and that it was very relevant for them and their jobs at the MOE. Some also said that this was the first time that a serious and very useful course had been especially designed for them, and that this was very much outside and beyond the usual trainings that they had attended previously. As a consequence, most said that as a result of the course, they now understood much better the relationship between the nature of their work at the MOE and the process of learning in the schools, and that now for the first time, they understood that the final purpose for all their activities are the children and their parents. The managers went on to say that their way of thinking had fundamentally changed from a very narrow view of their work to the much broader and more inclusive perspective where the school and learning are of prime concern.

The middle managers said that the most valuable part of the course included strategic planning, effective communication, concern for the client, and visits to the schools. The school visits were considered especially important and for many, it was the first time that they had visited a school since the days that they were primary school students themselves. The visits made the managers see the school as a unified whole where the infrastructure, the teachers, the students and the parents part of the learning process.

The consequences of the school visits and other parts of the training course were that the managers realized that they do not work independently but that they do have an impact on the educational activities in the classroom. Thus, the managers said they had to better serve the teachers by providing timely services and make quick responses in order not to frustrate the teachers. In other

words, they must help solve problems and make sure that the teachers go back to their schools feeling that they had satisfactory experiences dealing with the managers. Virtually all the managers agreed that bad services will in fact affect how they teachers work in their classrooms.

Middle Managers' Criticisms

Although the managers had mostly positive comments about the course, there were a number of criticisms as well. These included the following:

- There was a lot of variation in the quality of the course presentations and that some of the instructors were better than others
- Some of the presentations should have been more detailed and extensive
- They received too large a volume of written material to read in very little time
- The gender and equity modules were too general and not very useful
- The last session on conflict resolution was somewhat superficial and should have included more real life situations

Sustainability

The middle managers were asked to comment on how they would use what they had learned and what should be done to sustain the accomplishments of the training course. Most felt that continuity of the activities they had started was crucial and this included the projects and the quality circles where they would meet on a regular basis to discuss experiences, share ideas and solve problems. The managers in department offices felt that there should be better communication with the central level of the MOE and that they knew there a *grupo dinamizador* had been organized at the central level but they had not been officially notified. Others felt that a new training course should be given in order to give the same opportunity to more managers, especially from departments that were not able to participate.

Survey of Participants

During the final training session, the middle managers were asked to fill out a questionnaire, and 102 participants responded. The most important findings are presented below to show the relationship between the responses from the qualitative interviews and the structured questionnaire filled out by most of the participants.

Out of the 102 respondents, 55 worked in the central offices of the MOE, 45 in the departments, and 2 in the Centro Regional de Desarrollo Profesional. Some 98% said they had participated in the design of a project to improve or transform their work and to benefit schools. The goal of the projects varies considerably and included the following:

- Managers' service culture 35%
- Educational quality 27%
- Organizational climate/culture 24%
- Teamwork 20%
- Organizational development 19%
- Manager-teacher response times 18%

- Effective communication 15%
- Time management 13%
- Managers' abilities to respond 12%
- Professional development 11%
- Coordination within MOE 10%
- Empowerment 7%
- Diversity in education 6%
- Equity in education 4%
- Conflict resolution 3%
- Issues related to gender 2%

Once the projects had been designed, 84% said that had or were in the process of implementing their projects and 14% had begun, 41% said they were half way, 24% said they were nearly finished and 6% said they were finished. The managers were also asked to identify the strategies they had used for the design and implementation of their projects. The most frequent response was for the use of the logframe with 64% of the respondents, followed by 59% who said they used the quality circles for reflection, then 49% said they used tools for time management, followed by 47% who cited SWOT analysis,² and 23% said they used indicators to measure project impact.

Almost all of the managers (97%) said they had improved their client response times with two-thirds who said they were satisfied with their improvement, 23% were very satisfied while 9% said they had an average response time and one respondent said he was very unsatisfied. Along this same line, 96% said the quality of their services to their clients had improved.

B. Component 1.2— Application of Monitoring, Evaluation Systems and Research

This component was designed to provide training and support to the MOE's National Monitoring and Evaluation Office (*Dirección Nacional de Monitoreo y Evaluación—DNME*). The training has consisted of workshops on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in order to enhance the skills of the DNME staff to work with both types of data and to provide more in-depth analysis and interpretation of educational data.

The director of this office and two of his staff were interviewed for this evaluation. The consensus was that the training in SPSS and NUD*ST version 6.0 was extremely valuable and that truly new skills had been acquired by DNME staff. Furthermore, the interviewees went on to say that their abilities to better collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data would be applied to virtually all their work within the DNME office. The staff was especially appreciative of having learned how to use NUD*ST, a qualitative text analysis software, and how this had greatly enhanced their abilities to organize, interpret and more effectively present finding from focus groups and open-ended in-depth interviews. They went on to say, that the manual analysis procedures of the past had significantly limited their ability to do qualitative research and had, in fact, resulted in a dominance of qualitative statistical research over the more time consuming and stringent

² Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

qualitative methodologies. Their feeling was that both methods were necessary for a complete understanding of the educational realities in El Salvador and that qualitative data adds richness and substance to cold and impersonal statistics.

According to the EXCELL report³, thirty-five out of a total of thirty-seven members of the DNME participated in one or more trainings provided by EXCELL which are detailed in the following table.

Name of Training	Number of Participants	Hours of Training
Quantitative Data Analysis Overview	3	8
Quantitative Data Analysis Techniques/ STATA Software	1	60
Qualitative Study Techniques/ NUD*ST 6 Software	7	40
SPSS Software	2	20
Uses and Needs of Education Data	35	4
Total		132

All of the participants in the focus groups who report to have participated in an EXCELL training said that the materials covered were relevant to their daily work. Fifty percent reported that they have incorporated some aspect of their training into their daily work. Only 6% said that they have shared what they learned in the training with other people with whom they work.

According to both the interviews and the EXCELL monitoring report, the most successful part of the training was the NUD*ST 6 software training that was based on a special study of school teachers in El Salvador. The DNME has gone on to use the qualitative technique in two additional studies.

Not all the training was as successful as the qualitative workshops. One workshop on the use of STATA software for statistical analysis was seen as being too complex and in the end had only one participant and there has been no replication of this knowledge to others in the DNME.

In addition to the workshops, EXCELL has purchased SPSS software and an optical scanner to facilitate data entry. The use of the optical scanner has substantially increased the DNME data processing abilities in terms of the number of data forms scanned per minute by the DNME—this went from 55 images per minute in the baseline to 110 images/min in April 2005. Also, 81% of DNME focus group participants were aware that the new optical scanner had been purchased and was in operation, but in contrast, 94% of the participants were not aware of the new SPSS version 12 software. Overall, the number of DNME professional staff who said they have improved application of capacities⁴ went from zero in the baseline to 35% in April of this year.

³ EXCELL Project Monitoring Report, prepared by Heather Simpson, Juan Carlos Rodríguez and Critela Berenice Escamilla, April 2005

⁴ The improved application of selected capacities are defined as

- a. Improved use of statistical analysis techniques to better measure educational quality in El Salvador.
- b. Improved use of qualitative analysis methods to better measure educational quality in the classroom.

C. Component 2— Improve Learning Conditions for Student Achievement in at Least 250 Rural Schools, K-6, Through Training and Technical Assistance to School Principals

The school director interviews produced very consistent results in that there was considerable consistency and agreement in their responses regarding what was learned and accomplished by participating in the EXCELL project. Furthermore, there was similar agreement on what they considered to have been problematic and what needs to be done to sustain the results of the project.

As a group, all the directors interviewed felt that they had acquired new knowledge to consolidate their role as school leaders, streamline their administrative activities and to help their teachers be more effective in the classroom. They went on to say that in terms of the kind of knowledge and support they received, there were really no other sources of information and direct help available to them from any other source within or outside the MOE. The directors were emphatic in saying that this new knowledge had indeed changed the way they view their position as a school director and how they carry out virtually all of their activities. They said that no longer do they or their teachers give monologues when standing on front of the blackboard, and that before, the students would copy from the blackboard and their text books without knowing why they were doing this.

In-Service Technical Assistance

The directors and the teachers were asked to comment extensively on the in-service technical assistance they have received from EXCELL field staff. The consensus was that the field staff made the programmed monthly visits to the schools in the six departments but most make more frequent visits. During the visits, the field staff provided new materials to the teachers, provided assistance in carrying out new projects, observed classes and gave counseling on how to do things better. A few of the field staff also give demonstrations (*modelaje*) on how to carry about new teaching practices. The overall feeling is that the field staff was very helpful and indispensable for the successful implementation of new projects and in assuring that previously incorporated practices continue to be done correctly. The field staff was always available and more than willing to make extra visits when called upon.

School Directors' Responses

The directors feel that as a result of the EXCELL project they now know their students better and have been able to identify any learning problems or disabilities that they may have. In general, the students are learning better, and this is particularly true for mathematics which has always been an enormous problem and generally despised by most students. Reading comprehension has also improved, and there is now more time devoted to reading followed by questions and discussion about what has been read. This has led to students expressing themselves more spontaneously and more freely, and they are also criticizing what has been read and express more of their own

c. Improved accessibility of information produced by the DNME in reports and studies for different users.

opinions. In summary, the students have become more active and involved in the learning process through increased reading, reflection and self expression.

When asked about parental involvement, the directors and teachers said that the quality circles (CIRECA-FAM) have gone a long way to increase parental involvement, and some directors said that parental attendance has more than doubled from previous levels. Parents were also said to have become more involved in school activities, and the director of one school said that his parents were now participating regularly in food, health and sociocultural committees that have been established through the CIRECA-FAM. Most also said that parents are now making more monetary contributions, food and manual labor for school maintenance. Several directors also said that the level of parental involvement when all is said and done is really a function of the amount of energy and work input provided by the director.

Innovative Pedagogy

As a result of the training and in-service support provided by EXCELL, the directors and the teachers were implementing projects that were changing pedagogy to include more active student involvement where the teacher is more of a collaborator and more of an equal instead of the solitary voice from the front of the classroom. In addition, the directors were meeting on a regular monthly basis with other directors (CIRECA-DIR) to share experiences, discuss problems, identify needs and to plan courses of action to solve problems. The teachers and the directors hold the same kinds of meeting (CIRECA-DOC) at their respective schools and were designing new projects and writing plans for innovative teaching practices (PIP). In addition, many but not all of the teachers and directors interviewed had begun to hold meetings with parents (CIRECA-FAM) to discuss the importance of education for their children and how the parents can be more active by participating in school activities and what they can do in the home to help their sons and daughters to become more effective learners.

At the beginning many of the teachers were reluctant to take on new activities, spend time in meetings and in any way change their classroom behavior. The directors said that their teachers felt that they already had to spend a considerable amount of time doing administrative work and attend meetings which meant they really had no time to do anything new, much less spend even more time in meetings. Specifically, the teachers felt that designing and writing the innovative project plans was especially time consuming and that doing even more would take time away from being with their families as well as participate in other extra-curricular activities. The directors said that this was, in fact, how many if not all of the teachers reacted when they first heard about EXCELL and what would be required of the participants, but after about a month or at the most two, the teachers began to better understand and to appreciate what EXCELL was about and how it would benefit their students. Gradually, the teachers' enthusiasm grew and they became even more appreciative of the new projects, and now that EXCELL is coming to an end, there is a general sadness, especially in that the regular visits by EXCELL field staff will no longer take place. The teachers and the directors said they would like to participate in another project much like EXCELL, but in the meantime, they will not stop the activities and practices that they learned and implemented through EXCELL. Everyone interviewed said emphatically that they would continue with their new classroom practices, participate in the CIRECA meetings with directors, teachers

and parents as well as continue to design new projects by writing more innovative project plans (PIPs).

EXCELL Field Staff: Problems and Constraints

The EXCELL staff who were responsible for carrying out the training of the directors and coordinating the in-service technical assistance to the schools felt that it was difficult to implement all four sets of activities—pedagogic leadership, classroom innovations, school organization and evaluation—because each set involved a series of interrelated activities and the sheer variety or heterogeneity of activities to be implemented. Furthermore, the directors as well as the teachers had problems learning and internalizing what was involved in carrying out all four sets of activities, and as a result, the greatest emphasis was placed on leadership and innovations in the classroom.

A fairly generalized problem identified by EXCELL staff and an external consultant was that both the directors and the teachers had some initial problems understanding how quality circles should be organized and what should be going on. Many thought it involved having one or several people giving talks to the others with relatively little feedback or discussion. However, after some time, the directors and the teachers learned the group dynamics that should take place and were able to have very productive meetings.

EXCELL staff said that a number of directors simply did not want to cooperate by simple inaction in that they did not promote or try to motivate their teachers to implement the new activities. It is not that they were openly hostile and refused to participate but rather that they did not put required time and energy into working with their teachers. As stated above, many teachers were also reluctant to cooperate and actively participate and were quite fearful of committing to changing the way they work in the classroom. The bottom line is that it is a difficult and slow process to change the attitudes and subsequent behaviors of directors and teachers regardless of the stated desires to participate. In other words, it is one thing to say you will be part of project activities and completely another to be committed and behave accordingly.

Another problem mentioned by EXCELL staff and a few of the directors was that school directors and teaching staff were frequently reassigned to other schools that in most cases were not participating in the EXCELL project. This meant that a new director was assigned that did not have the requisite EXCELL training and therefore was not in a position to work with teachers to design innovation and provide pedagogic leadership. A somewhat lesser problem was that teachers who had been training and were active project participants were reassigned to non-EXCELL schools where they would not be getting any technical assistance from field personnel.

A constant constraint mentioned by almost all who were interviewed was that everyone had a large workload and found it difficult to spend enough time reflecting on what they had learned and then acting accordingly. It was as if everything was done on the run by teachers and directors who were trying to cope with everything that was expected of them. This constraint was further complicated by the fact that some directors did not spend enough time with their teachers which led to minimal efforts in the classroom. At the same time, EXCELL staff said that the MOE had not

provided clear guidelines on the EXCELL project meaning that directors were unsure as to how much time and effort they were obliged to devote to the new project.

Successful Activities

The EXCELL field staff—facilitators and assistants—were asked what they considered to be their most important and successful activities in the schools. The responses were quite varied and included the following:

- Revising the classroom time schedule to have the maximum amount of time possible for each subject
- Instead of having one teacher cover all subject, assign teacher to specific subject areas and have them move from class to class
- School directors who have organized support networks in the community—social, monetary and manual labor
- The organization of quality circles to implement active teaching methods
- Activities outside the classroom that include carrying out a field investigation by interviewing community residents, analyzing responses, oral and writing presentation of findings, and suggestion action to resolve problems identified. Environmental problems—river and water contamination and how to clean up—were among the investigations that were carried out by students
- Learning mathematics by playing games—bingo, etc.
- Setting up student exchanges between grades by having students in an upper grade spend time in the grade below to catch up on things they should have learned—designed as a methodology to decrease grade repetition
- Organize after-school reading groups
- Stop all classroom activities and have everyone read for 15 minutes based on the DEAR model—Drop Everything And Read
- A sequence of daily reading activities consisting of reading a story on Monday, discussing the story on Tuesday, examining new vocabulary on Wednesday, writing a letter to the author on Thursday and writing an original story based on the same characters on Friday
- The use of puppet theatre to demonstrate market activities using math with an emphasis on the four basic operations

Sustainability of School Activities

All the respondents were asked to comment on what would happen now that the EXCELL project was ending. Virtually all of the teachers and school directors said that they would continue all of the activities started under the project. These included the design of PIP in order to continue with the design of additional innovate classroom practices and all three types of monthly quality circle meetings (CIRECA-DIR, CIRECA-DOC and CIRECA-FAM). Many also said it was very important to continue the meetings with parents which in many cases had just started or were just about to begin.

The respondents also said they would seriously miss the monthly visits made by the EXCELL field staff whose hard work had made the new practices possible and was the major factor contributing

to improved teaching, school administration and the effectiveness of the directors' leadership practices. When asked about the MOE's stated intention that their pedagogic advisers (*asesores pedagógicos*) would continue the work of the EXCELL field staff, there was much apprehension and skepticism. The general feeling was that most of the *asesores* did not have the requisite knowledge or experience to work with school directors and teachers in any effective way. Some said that the mindset of the *asesores* was to come to a school to supervise and criticize. However, there were some exceptions in that a few *asesores* had learned much regarding the EXCELL interventions and provided some assistance to the field staff.

Monitoring and Evaluation Results

In most types of interviews the question of whether or not the respondents do what they say often arises. In other words, are school directors and teachers changing their classroom behavior and incorporating new teaching methods into their daily classroom behavior? The monitoring procedures used by EXCELL to observe classroom interaction, environment and other factors has been carried out as part of the baseline study and then on two other even spaced times during the implementation of the project. The observations have been done in a statistically valid representative sample of schools and should therefore have captured any changes that that taken place in teacher and students behavior and should be a reliable guide to gauge the relationship between what has been said in the interviews and what has changed in the classroom.

The table below shows changes in school director behavior from the baseline in 2004, a year later in February of 2005 and then again in April-May of the same year. These data represent the four basic skills areas that have been the core of the EXCELL training workshops, and the percentages in parenthesis in the second column represent the targets set by EXCELL.

Teacher/Director Behavior	Baseline	February 2005	April-May 2005
The percent of directors who apply pedagogic leadership skills	48%	94% (75%)	98%
The percent of directors who apply new school organization skills	50%	50% (75%)	70%
The percent of directors who apply new evaluation skills	38%	39% (75%)	33%
The percent of teachers who apply improved pedagogy	44%	53% (50%)	68%

Clearly, there has been a marked increase in the number of directors who apply new leadership skills having increased to nearly all the participating director, surpassing the target of 75% and by April-May 2005 included almost all the participating school directors. Initially, there was no change in the number who has applied new organizational skills or new evaluation procedures, but in the three months between February and April this rose by to 20% to include 70% of the participants. At the same time, the number of directors who applied new evaluation skills remaining the same until February of 2005 and then dropped slightly over the next three months. The number of teachers who applied new teaching methods went up by almost 10% between the baseline and February, 2005, and then went up 15% during the following three months, resulting in an overall increase of 24% of the teachers who are using improved pedagogy.

About 80% of the participating school directors are also classroom teachers, and the table below shows a comparison of classroom practices between what the directors do in their own classroom and what their teachers are doing. It should be noted that the number of director-teachers is small compared to the much larger number of teachers who were observed. Nevertheless, the comparison is quite striking.

Pedagogic Practice	Director-Teachers (n=8)	Teachers (n=118)
Work with students in groups	38%	20%
Substantive conversations	38%	34%
Connecting the classroom to the outside world	63%	34%

The number of directors who work with students in groups is almost double that of their teachers while an equal number engage students in substantive conversations. These are conversations about subjects that include higher order thinking and not just reporting experiences facts, definitions or procedures. Furthermore, almost twice the numbers of directors have designed activities that take their students into the outside world, and examples of these practices include the study of the contaminated river and the community investigation carried out by students as describer earlier in this section.

D. Component 3— Extend Educational Policy Research

The purpose of this component is to disseminate educational research reports to the educational community in order to heighten the awareness of important issues in education and to stimulate public discourse about education. To this end, the component 3 activities have expanded the available information on education in rural areas of the country, and in addition the project has produced and disseminated three special studies and a periodic newsletter. The EXCELL M&E Unit monitored the project website activity to determine the number of times each document was downloaded from the beginning of the project through March, 2005. The three documents produced included:

- *Proceedings of the Education Policy Forum: Workshop for the analysis of the education sector in El Salvador*
- *Equity, Quality in Education and Development in El Salvador*
- *Quantitative Profile of Teachers in El Salvador*

The number of printed copies distributed for all three studies were 1,100 and slightly more (1,220) copies were down load from the project website. Five issues of the newsletter were produced, 500 printed copies of each issue were distributed and an additional 705 copies of all the issues were downloaded from the website.

Two workshops were held to stimulate public discourse about the state of education and education policies in El Salvador as shown below.

Forum	Date	Number of Participants
Education Policy Forum: Workshop for the analysis of the education sector in El Salvador	December 1, 2003	135
Education Equity Forum: Public policy implications	November 12, 2004	85

The total number of participants in the two fora was 220 and the projected goal had been 135. Clearly, the EXCELL project had stimulated the desire for discussion in the educational community of El Salvador.

IV. Conclusions

Without a doubt, the EXCELL project has accomplished its goals in all three components. Since the principal effort and most of the budget went to component two, it stands out among the others as having been extraordinarily successful in many aspects. However, that is not to say that there have not been problems along the way, but an important consideration that should be taken into account for all aspects of the EXCELL project is the limited amount of time for implementation and the change of government that took place in the middle of 2004. Basically, EXCELL has had less than one full year to implement its activities while there were extensive changes in personnel at the MOE which led to changes in the nature and levels of support for project activities. It is with these considerations in mind that the following conclusions have been drawn.

The Middle Managers

Component 1.1 was an ambitious undertaking when taking into consideration the nature of education bureaucracies in so many developing countries. Middle managers are perhaps the most set in their ways when it comes to established procedures and the desire to maintain job security while at the same time trying to enhance one's position within the bureaucracy. As a result, the middle managers' concerns were focused within the narrow confines of their own institutional world at the expense of services to the client, namely school directors, teachers and their students. As such, the traditional culture of the middle managers has a long history, and any attempt to change this institutional culture and the behavior of middle managers was a challenge of considerable magnitude.

As indicated by the interviews at all levels, the initial impression on the 140 participants was that the training (*diplomado*) would be just like all the others, giving them some time away from their offices and a per diem. Although there were some initial disciplinary and attendance problems, it did not take long for the managers to realize that this was something different and potentially quite useful for their work in terms of how they serve teachers and the greater education community in El Salvador. The amount of written materials distributed was considered excessive and the new concepts quite rigorous with the exception of a few modules. The modules incorporating the use of logframe analysis and the design and implementation of projects were one of the most successful aspects of the training.

The end result was that the participants reported having changed their way of thinking and how they perform the duties. The changes centered on a new awareness that the managers needed to serve and help teachers do a better job in the classroom, and that all the managers' activities should be directed to that end. In addition, most of the managers reported that they were implementing projects to enhance certain their job performance that was directly related to improving teacher satisfaction. However, the middle managers still had a long way to go to complete their projects.

Since the EXCELL project is ending, a new group has been formed at the MOE to help sustain the knowledge, activities and momentum acquired by the *diplomado*. The major concern is whether or not the MOE will use the skills learned by the middle managers to sustain the changes promoted

by the EXCELL. If the MOE does not take advantage of the new attitudes and willingness to change expressed by the middle managers, it will in all probability be a relatively short period of time before many revert back to their old practices.

New Research and Analysis Skills

The workshops held for the DNME under component 1.2 has benefited a core group within this unit of the MOE. The most successful was the training in qualitative research using NUD*ST 6.0 to analyze complex text data. These skills have become part of the tools used by this office. Another useful tool has been the purchase of an optical scanner to increase the speed and reliability of data entry. The DNME has also completed a major study of Salvadoran teachers using the new methods and software.

The Training of School Directors

The centerpiece of the EXCELL project has been Component 2, the training and support of 250 school directors and their teachers. Although the directors were a very heterogeneous group, there has been a definitive change in attitudes regarding how the directors think and view their position in relation to administrative duties, pedagogy and the need to change teaching methods to improve the quality of education to enhance children's learning.

The model used to train teachers was described by some as a cascade model or a training of trainers where the critics say something is lost on each level of the cascade. Nothing is further from the truth as far as EXCELL is concerned. The strategy consists of training directors to sensitize teachers, but it does not end there. In order to support the trained directors, EXCELL field staff have made regular visits to school to provide in-service training to teachers, observe the use of new innovative teaching methods, introduce new procedures and methods, and help resolve problems to continually improve the quality of teaching. In reality, this amounts to a two pronged approach—train teachers to motivate and participate in improving pedagogy while providing intense in-service training and support to teachers in the classroom.

This evaluation found that there was still a lot to be done in terms of implementing new and innovative teaching methods, but the groundwork has been done and most of the directors and teachers are poised to do more. For example, the nearly 20% increase in the number of teachers who are using new methods that took place during the first quarter of this year, show that this intervention is beginning to take hold. In other words, both directors and teachers need time to learn and prepare for the use of new teaching methods, and in most basic education projects, this has been observed to take place of a period of 3-4 years. The limitation has been the short EXCELL implementation time and the fact that the teachers feel that the project is ending prematurely just when they are getting started, and the data collected by the M&E component clearly support these statements.

Awareness and Dissemination

Although modest in the level of effort and funding, Component 3, has achieved its goals of increasing the awareness of educational issues, dissemination of studies and newsletters and the organization of two meetings of educators to discuss problems and possible courses of action. Also, the very well organized and informative website has given increased visibility to the goals, organization and activities of the EXCELL project. Another very useful aspect of the website has been the posting of all project documentation including the training modules, annual reports, and special studies to mention just a few.

V. Recommendations

Efforts should be made to continue the activities begun by EXCELL and to build on the considerable accomplishments. It is crucial that the momentum generated by the project should not be lost and that follow-on activities should be started as soon as possible. The following recommendations are meant to be taken into consideration by the MOE and funding agencies.

1. The MOE should actively support the newly established *grupo dinamizador* and incorporate the middle managers' newly learned skills into normal operating procedures. This should be done by examining MOE operating procedures to determine how new approaches can best be incorporated without causing resistance and disruption.
2. The MOE should organize and carry out training for their pedagogic advisors (*asesores pedagógicos*) to provide adequate and timely support to directors and teachers who are continuing with the activities and procedures learned from the EXCELL project.
3. International funding agencies should carefully examine the dual-level training model used by the EXCELL project—the simultaneous training and sensitizing of school directors and the in-service support of teachers. This examination should take into consideration the content of the training, the range of innovative teaching methods and the findings of the EXCELL M&E unit in order to design future projects to improve the quality of Salvadoran basic education.
4. Additional meetings of educators should be carried out for Salvadoran educators to become more aware of the accomplishments of the EXCELL project and how to incorporate these achievements in future efforts to improve the quality of education.
5. The EXCELL website should not be taken down once the project has ended. All the descriptions and documents will continue to serve as important resources for one person or organization interested in improving educational quality in terms of both motivation and classroom performance. Also, the extensive sets training modules will go a long way to help others who are seeking to introduce innovative practices in the classroom.

Evaluación Cualitativa Final del Proyecto EXCELL

Alcance de Trabajo

Antecedentes

- El Proyecto de Excelencia de la Educación en el Aula a Nivel Local (EXCELL) ha sido diseñado para atender prioridades educativas mejorando la calidad educativa a través del liderazgo pedagógico en 250 centros escolares rurales. El proyecto es una iniciativa de cooperación técnica y financiera de la Agencia de los Estados Unidos para el Desarrollo Internacional (USAID) para con el Ministerio de Educación (MINED) de El Salvador, ejecutado por el consorcio EQUIP1.
- El Proyecto está estructurado en tres componentes. El Componente 1 busca fortalecer la capacidad del Ministerio de Educación para mejorar la administración escolar descentralizada y modificar e implementar reformas educativas a través de dos sub-componentes. El Sub-Componente 1.1 desarrolla el planeamiento estratégico y la capacidad administrativa y el Sub-Componente 1.2 aplica los sistemas de monitoreo y evaluación y la investigación sobre las necesidades y usos de información del Ministerio. El Componente 2 está diseñado para mejorar las condiciones de aprendizaje para el logro estudiantil en 250 centros escolares rurales a través de formación y asistencia técnica para los directores y directoras escolares. El Componente 3 busca expandir la investigación sobre política educativa.
- En el diseño del proyecto se establecieron tareas y actividades que conducirían, a lo largo de los dos años de su operación, a los productos y resultados deseados. Además, para la evaluación y monitoreo del proyecto se definieron variables e indicadores de resultado que han sido incorporados a un plan de monitoreo del desempeño. Para su implementación se desarrolló un estudio de línea de base, además de contarse con procesos de monitoreo administrativo, técnico y de desempeño que generan información regular.
- Al aproximarse el término del proyecto, y según ha sido programado, es necesario realizar una evaluación final técnica⁵ que contribuya a comprender mejor los resultados que se han obtenido, así como analizar la relación entre las tareas y actividades, productos y resultados, para contar con información que mejore futuras intervenciones de asistencia al MINED. En este marco se ha considerado la conveniencia de contratar una consultoría para el desarrollo de un análisis cualitativo que permita examinar con detenimiento, no sólo el desempeño cuantitativo de los diversos componentes del proyecto, sino la dinámica que ha conducido a sus resultados.

⁵ Se excluye de esta consultoría el análisis y evaluación del desempeño financiero del proyecto.

Objetivos

Al término de esta consultoría se habrán alcanzado los siguientes objetivos:

- Se ha recolectado, organizado y analizado información de fuente documental, oral y presencial a las actividades de implementación del proyecto⁶ que dé cuenta de sus diversos aspectos.
- Se han analizado los insumos, procesos, productos y resultados del proyecto, y la relación entre ellos, con respecto a su plan de implementación, las variables del plan de monitoreo del desempeño y la condiciones de su contexto de implementación.
- Se han formulado conclusiones sobre el diseño, implementación, productos y resultados del proyecto, y se han presentado recomendaciones para el equipo de implementación del proyecto, MINED y USAID.

Tareas y Actividades

- Recolección de información
 - Revisar la documentación del proyecto, en particular:
 - Propuesta de implementación
 - Plan de monitoreo del desempeño
 - Informes técnicos trimestrales
 - Informe de lecciones aprendidas (2004)
 - Registros administrativos, en lo concerniente al desempeño y realización de las actividades técnicas
 - Productos documentales de los diversos componentes
 - Otros que proporcione el proyecto
 - Desarrollar entrevistas individuales y/o grupales con informantes clave, incluyendo al menos las siguientes categorías:
 - Miembros del equipo del proyecto: director, staff técnico y administrativo, equipos de campo, consultores
 - Usuarios y beneficiarios directos e indirectos: directores y directoras de centros escolares y gerentes de mando medio del MINED participantes en actividades

⁶ Se consideran como *fuentes documentales*: productos y registros técnicos y administrativos del proyecto; *fuentes orales*: entrevistas a miembros del equipo del proyecto, usuarios y beneficiarios, contrapartes en MINED y USAID; y *fuentes presenciales*: sesiones de formación y de Círculos de Reflexión de Directores y de Gerentes de Mando Medio, actividades de asistencia técnica y otras.

de formación, docentes y asesores pedagógicos vinculados a centros escolares participantes en EXCELL, personal de la Dirección Nacional de Monitoreo y Evaluación del MINED, investigadores, usuarios de los productos documentales

- Contrapartes institucionales del MINED y USAID: el proyecto proporcionará una lista de estos al asignar la consultoría
- Acompañar y observar sesiones de formación, facilitación de Círculos de Reflexión para la Calidad (CIRECA) y visitas de asistencia técnica ofrecidas por miembros de los equipos de campo del Sub-Componente 1.1 (formación de gerentes de mando medio) y del Componente 2 (formación de directores y directoras de centros escolares) del proyecto.
- Observar otras actividades del proyecto que puedan estarse realizando durante la evaluación.
- Procesar y organizar la información recolectada en función de las categorías de insumo, proceso, producto, resultado, feedback y contexto del proyecto.⁷
- Análisis y validación
 - Diseñar y validar con la dirección del proyecto el marco analítico de la información recolectada
 - Analizar y establecer la vinculación entre insumos, procesos, productos, resultados, feedback y contexto del proyecto, de acuerdo con el marco analítico establecido. De forma particular:
 - Examinar la pertinencia del diseño original para el logro de los propósitos planteados
 - Examinar la vinculación entre las tareas, actividades y productos desarrollados y el diseño del proyecto
 - Examinar la utilidad y pertinencia de los productos (documentos, servicios) para los usuarios y beneficiarios
 - Examinar la vinculación entre los resultados obtenidos y las variables del plan de monitoreo del desempeño del proyecto
 - Examinar la relación entre el proyecto y su contexto

⁷ Se consideran como *insumos*: diseño, recursos humanos, materiales y financieros, tecnología e información, otros; *procesos*: dinámica y sistemas técnicos y administrativos internos, relaciones con usuarios y beneficiarios, contrapartes y otros; *productos*: bienes y servicios generados por el proyecto; *resultados*: efectos de los productos sobre los usuarios y beneficiarios, contrapartes y contexto; *feedback*: mecanismos y dinámica de uso de información sobre procesos, productos y resultados del proyecto para su modificación; y *contexto*: condiciones y características independientes del proyecto que tienen efectos sobre, o son afectados por, el proyecto.

- Preparar un documento preliminar de resultados de la evaluación y presentar los resultados del análisis para su validación en una sesión de trabajo con el staff técnico del proyecto
- Elaboración de informe final de consultoría
 - Tomando en cuenta los resultados de la sesión de validación, preparar a partir del documento preliminar de resultados, un informe de evaluación que detalle:
 - Propósito y objetivos de la consultoría
 - Metodología de trabajo
 - Tareas y actividades desarrolladas
 - Resultados obtenidos
 - Conclusiones sobre el proyecto
 - Recomendaciones para EQUIP1, MINED y USAID
 - Someter a revisión del proyecto el informe de evaluación e incorporar observaciones cuando sea pertinente.

Productos Final e Intermedios

- Propuesta detallada del trabajo a realizar (particularmente programa de entrevistas y visitas), incluyendo cronograma, productos y fechas de entrega.
- Documento preliminar de resultados (puede ser un documento PPT).
- Borrador del informe final de evaluación.
- Versión definitiva del informe final de evaluación.

Para considerarse definitivo, el informe final deberán contar con la recepción a satisfacción de la dirección del Proyecto EXCELL.

Programa de Trabajo

Para la realización de la consultoría se contará con diez días hábiles, tentativamente distribuidos de la siguiente forma:

Fase	Días									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
• Revisión documental	■	■								
• Entrevistas y visitas			■	■	■	■				
• Análisis y elaboración de informe preliminar					■	■	■			
• Presentación de informe preliminar								■		
• Elaboración de borrador de informe final								■	■	
• Elaboración de versión definitiva del informe final										■

Notas:

- Salvo los días de realización de entrevistas y visitas, las actividades señaladas no necesitan hacerse de forma continua.
- Las fechas de entrevistas y visitas deberán programarse de forma coordinada con el proyecto para asegurar su coincidencia con las actividades del proyecto. Debe tomarse en cuenta que las actividades de formación y Círculos de Reflexión se realizan en viernes y sábados (para gerentes de mando medio) y en sábados (para directores y directoras de centros escolares).
- Se contempla que, luego de la entrega del borrador del informe final, el proyecto EXCELL tomará una semana calendario en devolver observaciones al documento.
- La entrega de la versión final no necesita ser presencial.

Perfil del Consultor o Consultora

- Formación avanzada (postgrado) en educación
- Experiencia en evaluación de proyectos y programas de desarrollo social y/o educativo
- Dominio del idioma español

- Capacidad de desarrollar empatía con informantes
- Capacidad para comunicar efectivamente resultados de evaluación