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**Term Paper**

**Fall 2010**

**Social Foundations of Education**

**EDUC 521**

**Multigrade Education**

**Shereen Abd El Razek Kamel**

## **Introduction:**

In most primary schools around the world a single teacher is responsible for a class formed of students from a single year grade at any given time in the school day. This is known as monograded teaching. This may be contrasted with settings where a single teacher is responsible for a class formed of two or more year grades. This is known as multigraded teaching.

Angela W. Little, 2006.

Although monograded schooling is somehow a recent form of education that has only emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in urban areas with increasing populations and amounting student enrollment, it is still capturing the minds of educational policymakers and local practitioners (Little, 2006). They seem to be unaware of the option of multigrade education, which in my opinion, could be a very good reform strategy to provide not only access to as many children as possible, but also to promote quality education that would maximize the learners' potentials, if countries are really after achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals. This is the main hypothesis that I will try to prove in the paper.

The main aim of this review is to provide an overall picture of multigrade education; what it is about, its various forms, when it has emerged, where and why it is applied, and where and why it works best. I will try to explore how far the kind of education should fit the social context, whether we should stick to formal public education even if it is not working in some areas, and how far multigrade schooling can be an alternative developmental strategy to fill in the gaps of the public education system.

This review will tackle many issues concerning multigrade education. It will focus on ten main points. First, it will start with a brief historical background, and then provide some current facts about multigrade education. Next, it will shed some light upon its varied definitions, terms and modes of instruction, with a special reference to the Escuela Nueva Program. Following this, the paper will tackle the challenges and the strengths of multigrade education, together with its effects on student's performance. Later, it will explore some cases of multigrade schooling in developed countries, followed by three main forms of multigrade schools in the developing ones – Quranic, mobile and community schools. Finally, there will be a conclusion that wraps the whole discussion about multigrade education and its applicability in unreached, impoverished societies.

## **I-Historical background:**

The history of the emergence of multigrade schooling is long and complex. Historical texts state that 'traditional education' in Europe, for instance, was mainly occurring in one-teacher schools where students of varied ages learn together from texts provided by the teacher (Little, 2006). Moreover, no entrance or achievement tests were administered. Progress was informally assessed by the teacher as they go along (T.Morgan, 2001). This sounds very much similar to what was happening around in Quranic schools, which the paper will later shed some light upon, as one of the most prominent forms of multigrade schools in developing countries.

In fact, the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas and practices about classifying learners into ages and specific developmental stages were heavily lent to the 'periphery', rather than borrowed from the center, or in other words, imposed through the process of colonialism under the pretext of '*mission civilizatrice*'. Now the question is why multigrade classes persist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, how prevalent multigrade classes are around the world, why we still need them, and where they work best. These are some questions for which I will try to find some answers. Research has identified several factors.

## **II-Current facts:**

There are many current conditions giving rise to multigrade schooling. As we have seen, multigrade education is not a new thing. What is new is that many countries are striving to meet their commitment towards achieving EFA goals by 2015. Accordingly, lots of them consider multigrade schooling a golden chance to reach out to the children who are impoverished, disadvantaged, living in remote areas and who are not yet enrolled. This kind of schooling, I believe, might be a viable alternative for those children, especially girls, who have missed joining school at the entry age or who dropped out for economic or social reasons. This would also help in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly universal primary education.

Multigrade education is prevalent worldwide, whether in the 'center' or the 'periphery'. Catherine Mulryan-Kayne (2004) provides us with some indications for the extent of multigrade education in many parts of the world. In developed countries: 25.4% of primary classes in England are multigrade, 53% in Netherlands, 40% in Ireland, 33% in Scotland, 32.4% in Finland, 42% in Norway, 25% in Austria, 31% in Greece, 35% Czech Republic, 23% in Switzerland, 35% in Sweden, 34% in Australia, and 34% in France. In Canada, one in seven classrooms is multigrade, and in Germany 80,000 students attend multigrade classes. But in the US only 3% of the schools are multigrade.

In developing countries, multigrade teaching is mostly applied in rural communities. Its prevalence in many parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa is likely to increase, according to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report (2009)*, due to the efforts exerted by international organizations in collaboration with governments "to extend primary education on a wider scale." For example, 78% of public primary schools in Peru are multigrade, 84% in India, 26% in Zambia, 30% in South Africa, 40% in Namibia, 30% Burkina Faso, 64% in Laos, 63% in Sri Lanka, and 39% in Mauritania ( Mulryan-Kayne, 2004).

Despite the fact that multigrade schooling is available in developed as well as developing countries, in the latter it is much more critical. Bruce Miller (1991) relates this mainly to "financial, geographic and demographic issues," in addition to the small number of teachers, who are either untrained or inadequately trained, and to the lack of materials, resources and suitable curricula. He has also asserted the fact that multigrade teaching is not a new trend; it is rather a 'renewed interest'. It has received attention due to the dire needs and the educational innovations that are mainly based on child-centered modes of instruction. I think this is quite

similar to the Montessori system, to the notions advocated by Dewey, and to the constructivist theory; all which promote individuality and creativity.

### **III-Varied Definitions and terms:**

Many researchers have attributed varied definitions and terms to multigrade education. Pridmore (2007) and L. Lloyd (1997) define the term 'multigrade' as the situation in which learners belonging to different grades are educated in one class. On the other hand, in a workshop held in Pacitan in 2005 by the USAID, it has been mentioned that multigrade teaching is about teaching students with different abilities. Moreover, according to David Petrus Titus (2004), other alternative terms are used to refer to similar situations. Among these terms are: non-graded, multi-level, split grades, vertical grouping, family grouping, multiage grouping, mixed aged and composite classes. In addition, Nicole Blum (2007), when talking about multigrade education in India, referred to the fact that they tend to use the term 'multilevel' rather than 'multigrade'. For they believe that the latter has its limitations, whereas the former focuses on the student's level of performance in a particular subject, which might be totally different from his progress in another subject. Accordingly, students in Bodh schools in their first four years of primary education are divided into 'levels of abilities' and not into grades.

What we can infer from all these various definitions is that, no matter how many other terms can be used instead of multigrade education, they all have some main points in common. It is a situation where students belonging to two or more grades, or levels of ability, are educated together in one class, but not at the same time. Of course dividing them into age groups draws heavily on Piaget's developmental stages theory. Nevertheless, S. Veenman (1995) does have a point by saying that following such theories which can be an obstacle for attaining the students' full potentials, and for addressing their diversified learning abilities and styles, which in my opinion, are one of the main assets of multigrade education. No matter how students are divided, what counts is the mode of practice.

### **IV-Modes of instruction:**

Based on research, four main empirical models of multigrade practice have been identified. Actually, they are not mutually exclusive, as the case in many countries (Mulryan-kyne, 2005). First, there is the 'quasi-monograde', whereby the teacher spends some time with each grade group, while the rest of the groups work on an 'unsupervised activity' that the facilitator has prepared earlier. Second, in the 'differentiated curricula' model, the teacher addresses the whole class at the beginning for general guidelines, and then the groups are divided according to their level of learning. Meanwhile, the teacher monitors every group; checking their progress and giving help when needed. As for the third model, which is the 'multiple-year curriculum cycles', it involves students from two or more consecutive grades who work together on the same curriculum level, but later they split to work with other groups on another level. This system has proved to work quite well for the majority of curricula. This model also challenges Piaget's cognitive theory. The fourth and last model – 'learner and materials-centered', depends mainly on interactive, self-study learning materials. This model has been adopted in

Colombia for over 30 years in the rural areas through the *Escuela Nueva Program* (V. Colbert et al, 1993).

#### **V-The Escuela Nueva program:**

Since it has proved to be a successful model, this program has been adapted for use in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and Uganda (Colbert et al). The success of this program was mainly due to its overall mechanism which gives utmost care to the processes of training the facilitators, developing the curricula, improving community participation and promoting local accountability and management. Moreover, the children involved in that program demonstrate bigger strides in “peaceful social interaction” and “democratic behavior” than those in monograde schools (Little, 2006), resulting from peer collaboration. Since students work at their own pace, this model is a golden chance for those who have to miss out on school for familial obligations; whether to go work or to take care of younger siblings. This enables them to start where they left off.

This model can also be very helpful in high HIV-prevalence countries. For many surveys have shown that in over 30 countries, all the young people whose parents died because of AIDS have dropped out (UNAIDS, 2006; G. Bicego et al, 2003). Another study that was conducted in Mozambique and South Africa proved that young people – especially girls, affected one way or another by HIV/AIDS were either way back, falling behind their peers or dropped out altogether (Pridmore and C. Yates, 2005). I believe this model offers such students an opportunity to go on with their education, even if they had to stop in the middle of the way.

#### **VI-Challenges for multigrade schooling:**

One of the main obstacles for this kind of schooling in many countries is that the curriculum used is originally designed for the monograde system. This entails that the teachers are the ones who adapt the material to fit the multigrade context in addition to their other responsibilities. It also leads to poor quality teaching, as well as negative attitudes towards multigrade education. Gisela Sirivika, education officer at the National Institute for Educational Development, said at the Southern African Conference on Multigrade Education 2010 that this is the case in so many African countries as Namibia and Botswana. She even demanded for changing the system to fit the child, “instead of expecting the child to fit the system.” Curriculum designers can provide an outline with some general guidelines for lesson plans, in a way that would give teachers some flexibility in its application and delivery. This will definitely enable teachers to adapt this outline to the social setting of the school. Schools, in addition, should be allowed to apply the mode of practice which they think would best fit their social community. I believe this kind of decentralization will promote the integration of social foundations.

Another issue is the lack of trained teachers. Actually the whole system relies on the teacher as a facilitator. Based on some studies’ observation remarks, sometimes the teacher-talking time prevails, students’ interaction totally neglected, and students work individually even when they are divided into groups (S. Aikman and Pridmore, 2001). This makes multigrade

teaching lose one of its strongest assets, like collaborative learning and peer-tutoring, as teachers cannot be available for every single student at the same time. Moreover, when every student keeps waiting for the teacher's help or feedback, a lot of time is wasted. This shows that the teacher is not trained to work in a multigrade setting. Facilitators should be critical thinkers themselves and good problem-solvers to help students be like that. This is just like what Maxine Greene has said in *Landscapes of Learning*. Most notably, teachers should be convinced to let go of that role of the 'holder of knowledge' and help students be 'subjects' rather than 'objects' as noted by Paulo Freire (1970). In addition, there is a recent approach focusing on familiarizing multigrade teachers with using ICT (Information and Computer Technology) as an assisting tool in the classroom activities and cross-curricula projects (MUSE - Multigrade School Education, website).

Other challenges might seem less crucial to some people, but they are as imperative as the previous ones. One of them is related to the scarcity of resources provided for multigrade schools. To be cost-effective, they could be recycled materials, like old books, magazines or pictures which teachers can use in creating new materials. They can also use the help of the school community to get more of such materials. The other issue is the challenge of recognition. For in many countries, multigrade education is considered second best. It should not be thought about in that way; it is a matter of what works best in a specific social context. In fact, multigrade teaching has many positives.

#### **VII-Strengths of multigrade education:**

One of the major assets of multigrade schooling is the peer collaboration involved. This actually promotes social and cognitive development which Vygotsky (1978) viewed as a result of the shared activities involved and the cooperative spirit amongst the learners. This is actually the process which Vygotsky calls the "zone of proximal development", and which is also very much similar to the idea of 'scaffolding' mentioned by Wood et al (1976). Moreover, there was a study held in 2001 in the Turks and Caicos Islands which proved that this collaboration in multigrade classes helped weaker students to score higher in a shorter time than the students in a monograde setting (Berry, 2006). In fact, when more able students help other students, they will develop their own skills in the process, but of course without any sort of intimidation. This has been encouraged by Patrick Mc Ewan (2001).

In addition, this is a system that honors children's diversity and learning styles, through working individually or in groups, and through receiving a proportionate amount of teacher attention. Nevertheless, these assets would only be in effect if teachers created an environment that promotes independence, responsibility and respect— for people and for rules. This can be done through engaging all students in the classroom, where the teacher is not the sole provider of information, and where students are informed ahead with what is required from them and when to ask for help. Miller (1989) was totally right when he said that multigrade settings encourage students to respect the opinion of others; an issue which, in my opinion, will definitely extend beyond the school premises to include the whole community.

Last but not least, multigrade education will increase access to schooling since it has the liability to reach students who live in remote areas, and whose social obligations might prevent them from continuing their education, especially in the case of girls. Virgilio Juvane, Education Adviser, Commonwealth Secretariat and Coordinator of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), pointed out in the Southern African Multigrade Education Conference in 2010 that multigrade education could be the solution because it allows for more schools to operate in rural and remote areas, which means that more students will be provided with education and less teachers will be needed. However, he asserted that “it’s not only about providing education for all, but also about providing the best quality.”

#### **VIII-Effects of multigrade schooling on student’s performance:**

Concerning cognitive and non-cognitive effects in multigrade classrooms in contrast to monograde ones, there was no consistent research findings for the cognitive part. Some studies have proved greater effects for multigrade schools, others for single-grade ones, whereas others found no difference. Veenman (1995), for instance, found no difference in both the cognitive and the non-cognitive results, as did Galton and Patrick (1990) who mainly focused on the British context, as well as Mason and Burns (1997), even though they criticized Veenman’s null finding for his ‘artifact selection of bias’ which favored multigrade classrooms. On the other hand, C. Pratt and K.Treacy (1986) stated that the overall estimation of findings on non-cognitive outcomes – including the ability to make friends, positive interaction and demonstrating independence and self-confidence, was more consistent. In general, multigrade classes either scored higher or equal to monograde ones. In fact, there was no single study that found any non-cognitive asset for single-grade classes. Moreover, Miller (1990) reviewed the findings of 13 case studies concerning academic achievement in monograde and multigrade classrooms. The data clearly supported the latter as an ‘effective’ and ‘viable’ alternative to monograde schooling. If this is the case, I share Miller’s wonder as to why then we do not have more multigrade schools. In fact, the norm is not necessarily the best thing.

#### **IX-Multigrade education in developed countries:**

In most ‘industrialized’ countries, multigrade education is chosen to be adopted as a powerful pedagogical means for developing learning skills. The introduction of ‘vertically grouped’ classes in Sweden in the 1970s was through a bill that advocated “age integration” for the sake of promoting the skills of the learners. They even prepared new adapted curricula to suit the multigrade setting (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). Moreover, in Finland, multigrade schools are very common. They developed their curriculum and teaching strategies to fit that system (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). In Australia, multigrade schooling is applied throughout the early elementary stage because they believe that it is “the best form of education for children” (Birch and Lally, 1995). Also in Canada they contend that multigrade classrooms provide a challenging, stimulating learning environment that promotes quality education (Little, 2006). As for England, although many urban and rural schools introduced ‘vertical grouping’ in the late 1960s and early 1970s as one of the main elements of a massive pedagogical reform, it was sustained later for a different reason. For in the 1980s multigrade schooling was adopted in other schools because of ‘necessity’, due to the falling rolls (Bennet et al, 1983). In fact, in developed



countries, lots of studies were conducted to examine the cost effectiveness of multigrade schooling compared to the monograde system. It was concluded from the findings that the cost of multigrade education is often higher (Little, 2001). Yet many of these countries have chosen to adopt it, mainly for pedagogic reasons and in very rare cases for social and geographic justifications.

### **X-Multigrade schooling in developing countries:**

Multigrade schools in the 'Third world' take varied forms. We will mainly go through the most prominent three types.

#### **1. Quranic schools:<sup>1</sup>**

Many people would be surprised to know that this type of schooling is not out-dated. Several forms of contemporary Quranic schools do exist in many African and Asian countries. In Morocco, for instance, almost 80% of the children attend these schools, at least for a portion of their life (Wagner, 1999). Moroccan Quranic schools reflect social change, especially in the use of female teachers and the inclusion of female students (Helen Boyle, 2004). In Somalia, 40 % of those who attend Quranic schools are girls (Wikipedia). Moreover, it was estimated by the UNICEF that 40% of the students in Senegal go to this kind of school (Boyle). As for Nigeria, especially in the north, Quranic schools are actually competitive with the public ones (Reichmuth, 1989). Moreover, two thirds of the 80% Nigerian students attending Quranic schools are girls. The majority of these students come from poor families. In Oman, there are state-run as well as private Quranic schools that cater for about 12,000 students. Nowadays, these schools are for many Sudanese children their first learning experience.

Generally speaking, the community values these schools and most parents prefer them. These schools are viewed as tools for building the child's moral character. In Kenya, for instance, 'Dugsi' is the most reliable formal education among the impoverished. Moreover, it offers the cheapest access to education. It is also supported by the community. As for the Quranic schools in Chad that are found in villages and remote areas, they accept students from far away destinations. These students normally support themselves. This is very much similar to Indonesia, where almost 20 million children attend 'pesantrens'. Students support themselves by working, which is considered as a means to establish strong bonds with the society where they live, and "to feel part of the dual cultural galaxy of Islamic Indonesia and the Islamic Arabic speaking world" (Boyle). Furthermore, whereas Kuwait and Bahrain have forgotten the old remnants and cherished the new riches, the United Arab Emirates still supports Quranic schools and values their role in maintaining the moral values of the community. Hence, the significance of Quranic schools, as we shall also see, lies mainly in their current social role as much as in their traditional roots.

Traditionally, in urban and rural areas, parents used to send their children to Quranic schools to study the Quran. It was considered a very prestigious accomplishment. According to Yunan Labib Rizk (2001), the Quranic schools in Egypt – *kuttab*, "formed an intrinsic component of the village social structure and ingrained rural customs and traditions." He also asserted that the peasants preferred these schools more than the governmental ones, "with their formidable

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<sup>1</sup> See references for URLs.

rules and regulations which kept their children locked up even when they were badly needed by their families to help out in the fields.” For the poor, the *kuttab* was a means to social mobility as well (Boyle). We can infer that studying in these schools was considered a form of cultural capital that Pierre Bourdieu talked about. It was almost part and parcel of the life of the whole community. It was supported, administered and supplied by the community. At this point, as far as I can see, Quranic schools were deeply rooted in the functional perspective, where the school institution and the community were ‘interdependent’.

Learning in that type of school was a kind of one-on-one coaching or in small groups. The typical Quranic school “consisted of students of varying ages, mostly males from about 7 to 20 years” (Boyle, 2004). Moreover, assessment was informal; mainly through demonstration of mastery, and talented students studied extra subjects. According to Boyle, this kind of ‘old’ education “had already put into practice many educational ideals that are considered relatively progressive in today’s ‘modern’ educational system in the U.S. and Europe.” This reminds me of Dewey who was also trying to revive some old ideals.

Gradually, during the colonial and post colonial eras, the colonizers as well as some post-colonial governments have started to implement ‘modern’ western educational systems. In order to gain consensus, both colonial and post colonial governments have tried to propagate certain ideas and to provide justifications based on the pretext of ‘modernization’. According to Hefner (2006), post-colonial rulers often inherited the “vision of their colonial masters, viewing madrasas as backward institutions much in need of reform.” On one hand, in some countries these ideas prevailed and became dominant, and people started to send their kids to public schools which they thought would prepare them for life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. People also realized that their consent would guarantee the employment of their children when they grow up. This happened in Turkey, India and Tunisia.

Subsequently, there was a kind of counter movement against such westernization in many countries, especially in Africa. Those communities have been “reluctant to send their children to the emerging public school system as that system was associated with the colonizer and /or Christian traditions. So they tended to keep their kids in Quranic schools” to remain faithful to their own religious traditions (Boyle). This was the case in Nigeria, where there was a strong resistance to western-style education even if it taught religion as a subject (Masooda Bano, 2009). Also in Mauritania, Quranic schools have been viewed as the means to preserve their own traditions, cultural identity and national unity. Even the very few French schools that were available in nomadic areas had difficulty attracting students. Wagner (1999) relates this to the ‘sacred’ value of Quranic education, which he believes “provides an additional stimulus for learning that many secular schools cannot boast of.” In Somalia as well, according to Christian Balslev Olesen – former UNICEF representative in Somalia, “Quranic schools have a long reach as they are found even when there is no formal school due to the fact that they are a well-integrated part of Somali culture” (Norgaard, 2009). Many sects of the Somali society have even rejected the textbooks that were provided by the UNICEF, although the government has affirmed that they include nothing against Islamic beliefs. This has definitely created conflict.

Currently, since many public schools started to teach Islamic religion, Quranic schools had to respond to the changing societal needs in order to survive. Accordingly, they introduced a wider range of subjects as mathematics, philosophy, natural sciences, medicine, law, grammar and literature. This happened in Cameroon, Mali and some areas in Mauritania. There appeared

also many Quranic preschools that are said to prepare students for formal education. They “teach children how to learn in a structured setting; respect the teacher, .... be a moral persona and a good citizen” (Wagner, 1999). It actually prepares them to conform to the norms of the society, as members of the Islamic community, or as in some cases – as we shall also see, to abide by the rules of the ‘dominant group’, whether for political, economic or social reasons.

The way Quranic teaching is sometimes propagated makes it easily associated with extremism. “Sending our kids to Muslim schools must not only be a way to protect them from...temptations present in public schools”(Mujahid, Sound Vision website). Many people like Mujahid are looking for positive learning outcomes that are closely related to the Islamic social context and code of behavior. In Morocco, on the other hand, they highlight the role of Quranic schools in the community through “the discipline and punishment involved in the course of Quranic training that socialize children into the accepted Islamic code of conduct” (Jarmo Houlstonen, 1994). Although many people relate these Quranic schools to terrorism – as in the case of Pakistan, there are few studies that proved otherwise, and that the US was behind glorifying the idea of *jihad* in the curriculum that they designed for Pakistani schools, to serve their own ends. For according to Zahid Ahmed (2009), after the Soviets departure from the region, and the September 11 incident, the Americans turned against these Pakistani schools which they used to fund to help them in the Afghan war against the Soviets. Actually, they have been using these schools to propagate their own policy and agenda.

Recently, there is another issue receiving a great deal of attention worldwide. It is about Senegal, where the Human Rights Watch has documented this year the physical and psychological abuse to which the children who attend Quranic schools are subjected. They are enslaved and forced by their teachers – the *marabouts*, to go street begging. They are deprived even from the education that they are supposed to be getting at these *daaras*, and when they are caught playing or studying, they go through severe punishment. Consequently, these kids applied the rational choice theory and escaped to go begging and take the money for themselves. This situation happened because these children live far away from school. There is another kind of Multigrade school – which we will discuss right now, and which could have prevented such problem from happening in the first place.

## **2. Mobile schools:**<sup>2</sup>

They mainly serve remote, pastoralist and nomadic communities, who are always on the move searching for water for their families and their cattle. The mobile school project aims to increase access to education in these underserved areas. In Kenya, nomadic pastoralist communities constitute 80% of the whole population. As they cannot go to school due to their unsettled conditions, the Millennium Villages Project (MVP) has managed to bring the school to them. In 2008, the first mobile school reached Kenya’s pastoralist areas. 10,000 learners have registered this year in 24 mobile schools. In fact I inferred that the project has gained its sustainability due to government support and funding. Schools structures are temporary; as a trunk or branch of a tree, and the materials are portable so that they can be easily transferred

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<sup>2</sup> See References for URLs

by the teacher from one place to another by camels. This stuff includes mainly the blackboard, books and tent. Climactic changes have made it impossible for starting the permanent schools established by the MVP, even though they have dormitories for boys and girls. In addition, families need their children to help them with domestic chores. Mobile schools have also helped the children who belong to nomadic fishing communities in Mali, the pastoralist communities in Darfur, and provided education to 1260 kids in refugee camps in the earthquake zone in Haiti. In fact, the snack meal that is given to the kids on the school day is probably the only meal they get.

In Iraq, the government constructed these ‘movable buildings’ to allure the local residents of the Southern marshes to return home, now that the marshland’s water began to flow again. They did not build permanent schools because when the water reaches the marshes as expected, they will be submerged in the process. Those ‘movable schools’ can be installed in one week and disassembled in two days. Moreover, they need no maintenance because they are made of durable plastic and aluminum, as was mentioned by Nameer Warid Hassen, Engineering Director at the General Directorate for School Buildings. However, these schools will not be for free, so I doubt if they will work out as these communities are so poor, and they need their children to work to meet the family needs as was said by a local resident.

Mobile schools in India are mainly found in the slums of the cities, where access to education is closely related to mobility. In fact, it is very difficult for any means of transportation to reach the slums that are normally very far from schools. In addition, there are other cultural, social and economic barriers that prevent the kids living there from going to school – as lack of necessities like water, and documentation like birth certificates, and some of these children are either working or taking care of their younger siblings or responsible for house chores, and some of them are even living on the streets or on construction sites. They actually reward the students who attend regularly with candy, uniform and stationary. Some of these mobile schools are referred to as ‘moving schools’. They are built using cheap local materials. They can be even pulled by a tractor to wherever it is needed. This means that it can be locally constructed with a minimum cost. In fact, this can be easily replicable in our own country in the most deprived areas, even in every alley.

Other types of mobile schools that NGOs together with the Indian government established are mobile bus classrooms. The ‘School-on-Wheels’ – which is a bus furnished to be used as a classroom, travel to students at a designated place and time that suit their life style and work demand. Children are allowed to bring along their younger siblings. The bus is also used to take the children on field trips, and sometimes is used as a pick up and drop off facility. This has been also applied in many other countries including the rural parts of Chile. The effective role of the community in the success of such projects brings us to the last form of multigrade schools.

### **3. Community schools:<sup>3</sup>**

They serve to make education available for people and in regions often unreached by the prevailing education system. Community schools are available in 17 countries, 7 of which are in

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<sup>3</sup> See References for URLs.

Africa, serving a significant amount of children: a million in Bangladesh; 30,000 in Ethiopia; 370,000 in Honduras; 30,000 in Zambia; 231,000 in Mali; and a million in Colombia, through the Escuela Nueva Program. As a matter of fact, the information that was found about community schools proves that they are much more viable than the public ones in terms of assuring completion of schooling.

The impact of community schools led to governmental recognition, realizing that these schools can complement the formal public education system. Its success in Upper Egypt, for instance, made the government and other organizations implement some of the mechanisms and best practices of this outstanding model in public schools. One of the main elements that contributed to this success is the fact that Egyptian rural areas “are notable for their community education” (Malak Zaalouk, 2004), as we have seen earlier. Another factor is decentralization. Running these schools depend mainly on the collaboration between NGOs, communities and local governments; the fact which assures their sustainability. I think the education sector should consider this endeavor which has proved quite successful in the communities where it was applied.

As for Mali, the success of its community school program was mainly due to the growing interest of the children in education after watching their parents learn through the NGOs sponsored and community managed programs. In the majority of the villages there were no schools. Community schools were established in Mali in 1991. Since they use cheap local materials, the construction of the schools was not only “financially affordable by a typical village, but it also made the school seem less of a foreign body within the community” (Helmores et al, 2007). The fact that the whole society is involved in running them reflects a great will in educating their kids and in being active participants in the development of their society. Changes in curricula were mainly to ensure the survival of the schools against village-life requirements. Thus they chose subject matters closely related to village life management and basic business skills. This demonstrates a great awareness of social foundations. I believe this integration of social foundations in education made the people more involved in, and committed to, the betterment of the community schools.

As for Ethiopia, which has the largest primary school age population – 13.6 million, 85% live in rural areas where it is very difficult to have access to education. Even the schools that existed are old, and poorly ventilated. Now with the establishment of community schools, a growth rate of 96% was achieved within 6 years. This was done mainly through ‘Save the Children’ and USAID together with community participation. The real issue is whether this participation can attain the same ends without substantial, external assistance. I believe if they maintained a well-structured program, a clearly-defined vision, supported with on-going modification, improvement and expansion, it can be sustainable (Helmores et al, 2007).

Community schools can have a great effect on the society. A community school is a kind of a ‘transformative response’ where they help effectively in “promoting the transcendence of disadvantage, poverty and marginality, rather than the acquiescence in its existence and adjustment to its conditions” (Helmores et al, 2007). This is closely related to Maxine Greene’s

conception of freedom. It calls for a kind of movement towards change for the development of all societies, towards taking action to provide education for all.

### **Conclusion:**

Children from rural areas are denied access to education which perpetuates cycles of poverty, poor health and malnutrition. The children work from an early age to support their families and are never educated in a safe clean environment. If they had access to an education they could break this cycle and gain opportunities for their futures.

*EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2004.*

Education for All (EFA) as a universal movement instigates the accessibility and quality of learning for all people of all ages. Moreover, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) has emphasized that every child has the right to have an equal opportunity in education, while preserving his/her human dignity (Article 28). In fact, most of the current shortfalls in achieving EFA goals are found among marginalized communities that cannot even have access to schools, which in most cases do not exist in the first place.

As we have seen, public education in developing countries – which is mainly monograde, cannot reach the marginalized communities. This has been seen in communities who live in remote, pastoralist or nomadic areas. It was also spotted among communities where children, especially girls could not attend schools regularly either for taking care of their younger siblings, or for helping out their families through working or doing housework. We have also seen others who were deprived of learning because they were affected one way or another by the prevailing health problems among their communities.

Moreover, many developed countries apply multigrade education, as we have shown earlier, based on a pedagogic choice related to its effectiveness. Thus it has been proved that it provides high quality education that promotes the learner's skills and potentials. In addition, we have seen multigrade education working best in developing societies through well-designed projects like mobile and community schools because it suits their social obligations and needs, and because it promotes their development as well. In fact, community participation and awareness was the key to achieving these goals.

There is no one best system that fits all. Therefore, communities should apply the system that best fits their social needs and requirements. Furthermore, it does not have to be applied throughout the whole country. It can differ from one village or city to another, depending on the circumstances of that village or city. This entails flexibility in addressing local needs, the fact which will promote some sort of a community spirit.

Accordingly, multigrade education could be a successful alternative to 'reach the unreached', and to achieve access to, as well as quality in education for all.

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