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The Role of NGOs in Promoting Educational Innovation: A Case Study in Latin America

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Education in Latin America and the need for alternatives

An assessment of the education systems of the countries of Latin America needs to address three central questions:

- 1 Is education contributing to increasing the productivity of the labour force in an increasingly global economy?
- 2 Is it contributing to reducing absolute poverty and to improve equity?
- 3 Is it contributing to consolidating democratic institutions?

Though conditions vary between schools in different countries of the region and within any given country, many will conclude that the simple answer to these questions is no. In spite of a long tradition of rhetoric on the importance of education to development, Latin American education systems have serious problems. The problems can be summarized by the lack of relevancy of much of what is taught, by the low quality of teaching and consequent low levels of learning, by the fact that education systems perpetuate social inequalities and by the inefficiency of education systems.

After decades of policies reportedly aimed at providing educational opportunity for all, educational opportunities are unevenly distributed in Latin America. The quality of primary education for many is very poor, while education policy and spending in the region has emphasized higher education and quality education for a few. The opportunity to learn is seriously constrained for children from lower socio-economic strata as the

urban poor and those living in rural areas are served by the teachers with least training, the worst schools and fewest grades.¹ The bias in public financing of education towards higher education, which benefits primarily middle and upper middle classes whose ability to pay exceeds actual payments for the education of their children, further worsens equity.

If the quality of education that the poor receive is deficient, this also presents a serious constraint to increasing the productivity of the labour force and to improving equity. Latin America has the worst income distribution in the world. Low-quality education for the large portion of the population that is poor also poses a challenge for the functioning and sustainability of democracy in the region. The consolidation of democracy in the region will require the participation and involvement of citizens in the conduct of public affairs. This requires motivation and competency in large segments of the population; low-quality schools mould neither.

The long-term survival of democracy in Latin America relies on an educated citizenship. An educated citizenship will establish a base of increases in productivity which will set the economies of the countries of the region on the road to economic growth. Education can also provide a basic framework of values and attitudes to the majority of the population which are essential for participatory forms of government and for the well-functioning of democratic institutions. Among those values are the sense that each person has equal dignity and therefore the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Promoting this common-value framework requires

providing each person opportunities to develop self-esteem and also opportunities to appreciate the value of others and their points of view, including those who have different socio-cultural backgrounds.

Education systems in which a few achieve very high levels of education while large segments of the population remain illiterate will not help consolidate democratic institutions. In addition, it is not enough for democracy to provide children with schooling that addresses their needs to develop academic skills. While those are important, schools must also address social and emotional domains in order to prepare for citizenship. Schools that systematically convey the messages to poor, disadvantaged children or members of ethnic minorities that they do not belong in the school (often either by excluding any reference to them and their experience in the curriculum) will end up either expelling these children from school, or producing graduates who have a hard time reconciling the realities of school with the realities of their life.

Rigoberta Menchu winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, and leader of one of the Mayan groups in Guatemala, explains how her father insisted that she should quit primary school because schools did not allow children from indigenous groups to attend school in their traditional dress. For many families, not wearing traditional dress, especially for girls, was associated with a form of dishonour.

There are three basic problems for the consolidation of democracy with the existing primary schools in Latin America:

- 1 Students learn too little of the intended curriculum.
- 2 Schools reinforce social disparities.
- 3 Curricula lack explicit attention to the social and emotional domains.

In many instances the 'hidden' curriculum is one that teaches apathy, hopelessness or resignation to wait for the central government to solve the most immediate problems of the child. Most children are learning too little in primary schools, furthermore schools do not seem to contribute to reduce

social inequities, as the opportunity to learn is smaller for rural and poor children.

A study in a sample of rural schools in Honduras found that 1253 children who were given a multiple-choice test measuring basic reading ability obtained, on average, 44 per cent of correct responses in grade 1 and 36 per cent of correct responses in grade 3 (McGinn *et al.*, 1992). Data from Chile show that while students from families in the highest quintile of the income distribution score 80 per cent of the questions in the test correctly, students in the lowest quintile only score 40 per cent of them correctly (Schiefelbein 1991). A test administered to 3248 primary school students (in grade six) in a random sample of Mexican schools shows that on average they scored only 48 per cent of the items correctly in a curriculum test of basic subjects (Guevara, 1991). Students in Mexican private schools obtain higher scores (65 per cent) than their counterparts in public schools (47 per cent).

While it is true that most of the children of school-going age are enrolled in primary school at some point in their lives in the region, there are, however, great disparities between and within countries in the region in how many children are left out of school. Furthermore, for those who are enrolled, there are also great disparities in the opportunity to learn for children from different socio-economic backgrounds and for those living in urban and rural areas. As a result, while many enroll in primary school at some point in their lives, many enroll in schools that put them at such disadvantage – compounded by their own social disadvantage – that school failure is the most probable outcome: many of these children learn little, repeat several times, and eventually drop out of school.

It should not be surprising that proportionately more people in rural areas have no access to schooling, as those are the areas least served by the State in providing education. Many of the schools in rural areas have teachers teaching more than one grade (a rare phenomenon in urban schools), and have teachers with less training, supervision and access to materials. Many of the rural schools also do not offer all grades of primary education. In 1987 in Colombia 23 per cent of the urban teachers

were untrained vs 39 per cent of the rural teachers; in Honduras the figures were 15 per cent vs 46 per cent, in Nicaragua they were 32 per cent vs 74 per cent.²

In Peru the proportion of trained teachers (*maestros titulados*) in primary education ranges from 95 per cent in Arequipa (where the reported repetition rate is 11 per cent), or over 70 per cent in Lima (repetition rates around 10 per cent), down to 20 per cent of trained teachers in Madre de Dios (repetition rate 46 per cent).³

In addition to the problems of access and equity mentioned, schools in Latin America are often better at preparing children to adapt to authoritarian styles of government than at developing critical thinking and social skills necessary for citizens to promote democratic forms of government.

Against this background a legitimate question is whether it is possible to find alternative models to provide quality education to the poor. The case of the Fe y Alegría (Faith and Joy) Schools shows that innovation is indeed possible. This is significant because public education systems are so trapped in day-to-day routines, or suffer from a certain 'system fatigue' that makes them more apt at maintaining the status quo than at changing. As we have seen, the status quo in education will not produce the critical mass of well educated citizens that can sustain democratic forms of government in the long run. This chapter reviews the performance of Fe y Alegría and draws some lessons as to why this innovation works.

Fe y Alegría

Fe y Alegría (Faith and Joy) is a Non-Government Organization which provides formal and non-formal education at different levels in 12 countries in Latin America. Started in 1955 as a project of Fr. José M. Velaz to educate 100 poor children in a room in the house of a construction worker in Caracas, it began to expand to other countries in the region in 1964. By 1992 they had expanded to

Table 3.1. Summary of the history of Fe y Alegría and students and centres in 1992.

Start date	Country	Centres	Students
1955	Venezuela	103	97358
1964	Ecuador	38	29670
1965	Panama	8	13396
1966	Peru	43	43733
1966	Bolivia	138	147535
1968	El Salvador	16	48409
1972	Colombia	76	99109
1974	Nicaragua	21	16784
1976	Guatemala	23	8584
1980	Brazil	31	4908
1991	Dominican Republic	5	2600
1992	Paraguay	7	710
Total		509	512796

Source: Fe y Alegría. Movimiento de Educación Popular. Asunción. 1992.

an organization active in 12 countries reaching 512,796 students in 509 centres. Table 3.1 summarizes the history of the expansion of Fe y Alegría.

Fe y Alegría's prime mission is to provide quality education to the poor as expressed in their motto 'Where the asphalt road ends, where there is no water, electricity or services, there begins Fe y Alegría'.

Most of Fe y Alegría's work is in the formal education system. Their basic operating principle is to create partnerships between the organization, the State and the local community to provide quality education to poor children. In formal schools the Ministry of Education typically pays for the salaries of the teachers, the communities participate in the construction and maintenance of the school, Fe y Alegría trains and supervises the teachers (in some cases it also selects them), manages the school and co-ordinates activities so that the school operates as a centre for community development.

Most of the students in Fe y Alegría schools (56 per cent) are in primary education, a third (30 per cent) are in secondary education and a minority are in pre-primary or day care centres. Table 3.2 presents the number of students in Fe y Alegría by level and country in the formal education system in 1991.

While Fe y Alegría covers a very small percentage of all children enrolled in school in each

Table 3.2. Students in Fe y Alegría schools in 1991 by country and level.

	Day care	Pre-school	Primary	Lower Secondary	Higher Secondary	Total
Bolivia	120	7606	40780	23809	16577	88892
Brazil	6384	6679	3998	50	0	17111
Columbia	9009	1514	30150	3687	5126	49486
Ecuador	0	1939	12325	1917	310	16491
El Salvador	130	89	5644	1143	0	7006
Guatemala	0	1160	4938	768	0	6866
Nicaragua	0	1048	5578	1847	518	8991
Panama	0	0	0	520	0	520
Peru	0	144	25426	19189	0	44759
Venezuela	0	7057	39881	13288	1260	61486
Total	15643	27236	168720	66218	23791	301608

Source: Fe y Alegría Internacional. Estadísticas 1991.

country, it offers a successful model of providing quality education to the poor with the potential to inspire others in the larger education systems where it operates. In 1991 fewer than 3 out of every 1000 children on average who were enrolled in primary school attended a Fe y Alegría school in the countries where this NGO works. The organization is most expanded in Bolivia, where 3 of every 100 children in primary school attended a Fe y Alegría school, and in Venezuela, the country where the organization started, where 1 out of every 100 children enrolled in primary school attend a Fe y Alegría school.

Enrollments in Fe y Alegría have been growing at a moderate rate. Between 1990 and 1991 enrollments in primary education increased by 3 per cent, in lower secondary by 2.7 per cent and in higher secondary by less than 1 per cent. Enrollments in pre-school expanded by 46 per cent between 1990 and 1991, reflecting substantial growth in each country, but particularly in Brazil.

Fe y Alegría defines itself as a movement of integral popular education. Their primary objective is to provide education for life that provides socially disadvantaged children with opportunities to increase the quality of their life.

The organization is structured around principles of functional autonomy of the countries, regions and centres within broad principles and objectives. In most countries there are three organizational levels, a general directorate, regional directorates and schools. The general directorate sets broad guidelines, communicates with the rest

of the national federations in the network, develops financial plans, raises funds and supervises the activities of the organization. Regional directorates assist the schools in designing specific plans and linking them to the broad vision and guidelines established by the national directorate. The schools have autonomy to interpret the national guidelines in the formulation of their specific plans and projects; they also administer their staff and budgets. Budget formulation, for example, is pretty much a bottom up exercise; it starts with the budget requests prepared by each school, which are consolidated by the regional and national chapters. In general there is more administrative autonomy in the Fe y Alegría schools than in their counterparts in the public sector.

While the movement was founded by the Society of Jesus, many other religious congregations participate and most of the teachers are not ordained personnel. In 1991 only 6 per cent of the teachers and principals were members of a religious congregation.

The national chapters of Fe y Alegría are legally registered as private non-profit organizations. It is an institution of the Catholic Church sponsored by the Society of Jesus. The national chapters have agreements with the Ministry of Education. They are also part of a federation – Fe y Alegría Internacional – which is recognized as consultative member of UNESCO and UNICEF.

The establishment of a community of parents is an important feature of all schools in Fe y Alegría. The following notes from one of the teachers of a Fe y Alegría school in Venezuela illustrate the

type of relationship that these schools have with the community:

We pay attention to the community in the very examples used to teach reading, and in the contents of all the other subjects. We teach knowledge in its context, acknowledging the elements of oppression, but also those of resistance of the popular groups, we rescue popular culture ... with this kind of planning the parents can easily become teachers as they can help reconstruct the story of the *barrio* or describe the village where they came from or narrate episodes of the history of Venezuela ... We have also transformed the parent-teacher meetings, we have gone from boring meetings in which parents were just given the grades of their children to encounters in which students participate telling their mothers about their problems and sharing their progresses ... Experience has shown us also with how much responsibility mothers can fill in for an absent teacher, this requires frequent communication between teachers and parents ... At the same time the school becomes the centre of celebrations for the *barrio* and shares in the *barrio's* successes and problems ... the school participates with the community in the celebration of the anniversary of the *barrio*, the week of the school, Christmas, Holy Week. Christmas, for instance, provides opportunities to develop special activities in the subjects of Language, Social Studies, Religious Education, Work Education and to organize with the neighbors and parents community nativity sets, street decorations for midnight mass, confection of sweets.⁴

This suggests that in their links with Fe y Alegría school communities go beyond supporting school activities: the school becomes a centre of community development. This is also illustrated in the case of Peru.

Generally, when we open a school we begin using bamboo mats, until we can find funds to build. The contribution of the community is significant, they help leveling the ground, finishing and maintaining the building. However, the community also participates in other ways.

The community participates from the time in which their leaders approach the Fe y Alegría organization to establish a school. Once they request it, we have a meeting with all people living in the community in which we explain the objectives of Fe y Alegría and our intention that an integral education requires their active participation. If everyone agrees we sign an agreement and begin the new project. The first task of the community is to donate the land to Fe y Alegría for the construction of the school.

However, the formal education of the students is not our only objective. The school is an opportunity

to be present in the *barrio*. Every student in the school lives in the community and we attempt to make the school a center of development of the *barrio*. The religious congregations that manage our schools live in the same *barrio*, building a house in the same land of the school. They also participate in community activities and support grassroots organizations. Slowly a number of programs develops from our schools: health programs, food programs ... support to the leaders of the organizations of mothers.⁵

Fe y Alegría maintains intensive efforts to train teachers and produce education materials, leaflets and pamphlets, outlining the philosophy of this movement addressed to educating staff working in their schools about the philosophy of the organization. Many of these are the result of periodic meetings maintained by representatives of the national chapters, who also develop their own materials for the national network of schools and exchange them through the regional network. These materials emphasize what Fe y Alegría *should be*, and provide new teachers with an ongoing vision of the philosophy and aims of the movement.

The educational proposal from Fe y Alegría to the schools is summarized in the fact that schools should become educational community centers. These centers will be sustained in a number of principles and practices to guarantee the students an integral education of quality with the following features:

- Education emphasizing the learning processes and contents that originate in reality and in life
- An active, critical and creative pedagogy
- Education in productive work
- Education in Christian values
- Education that confronts with the community problems of life
- Education in participation
- Education that fosters a permanent learning process
- Education committed to a new model of man and society. (Fe y Alegría, 1992).

The national chapters also produce information pamphlets for the larger community which present the objectives of their schools and the activities that are developed in the country and which aim to mobilize and maintain local support.

A large area of effort of the national directorate in each country is to train teachers, with much emphasis on in-service training and in field-based training tied to the development of a project of school improvement. In Venezuela Fe y Alegría

has created its own teacher training institution; in Bolivia, teacher training offered by Fe y Alegría was so highly valued that during several years the government requested that Fe y Alegría trained all teachers in the system, including those in public schools.

More recently, some of the national chapters are producing documents to stimulate national dialogue about the directions of education reform. The Venezuelan chapter, for example, is producing a series of booklets discussing education in this country, education quality, popular education, didactic experiences in language, in mathematics, in social studies, experiences in teacher training and in education projects.

There is no systematic evaluation available comparing the results of Fe y Alegría to those of regular public schools.⁶ Anecdotal evidence suggests that their schools are generally recognized by parents as providing better education to their children than public schools. A study of the programme in Guatemala found that 85 per cent of the students who enter pre-school in Fe y Alegría complete six grades in seven years, in contrast with 34 per cent completion rates in the same period in government schools (Diaz, 1989, p. 67). A study of the programme in Venezuela concludes that costs per pupil are 30 per cent higher in Public Schools than in Fe y Alegría schools (Navarro, 1994). In Bolivia, the World Bank *Poverty Report* indicates 'some observers estimate that the number of public schools managed by the Catholic Church would double if the government approved all community requests for their services' (World Bank, 1990, p. 86).

An example of how Fe y Alegría works: Bolivia

Fe y Alegría started in Bolivia in 1966 and it has since expanded into what is perhaps the most developed of the national chapters of the regional federation.

Since the beginning the Ministry of Education agreed to pay the salaries of teachers and principals in Fe y Alegría schools. Though in theory the

government agreed that Fe y Alegría would select teachers, this has not proven feasible due to pressures of the government and the unions; however, Fe y Alegría selects the principals on the basis of training, experience and commitment to the mission of the organization.

Early on in its work in Bolivia, Fe y Alegría identified that low levels of training of teachers were a constraint to providing quality education. In 1972 they began a programme of in-service teacher training. These courses provided theory in pedagogical methods and follow-up in the classroom by a training team. Training took place on weekends or during an intensive week. This training was opened also to teachers of the regular public schools and between 1972 and 1977 this programme had trained 33 per cent of all primary school teachers.

With the reinstatement of democracy in 1982 Fe y Alegría became a source of dynamism in public education. However, shortly after that they decided that they had expanded too much at the expense of quality and chose to focus training only on the schools of Fe y Alegría and to initiate a series of pilot projects of teacher training.

Fe y Alegría introduced a number of innovations in education in Bolivia: personalized instruction, which structured the curriculum in didactic units, and reading and science corners, providing opportunities for each child to progress at his or her own pace. This programme lasted between 1972 and 1976 when it was interrupted due to lack of funds for teaching materials and school libraries. There was also some resistance from teachers because it required more work.

It is also common for Fe y Alegría schools to have older students help with the education of younger students; this has become very useful in recent years as teacher strikes have increased due to the reductions in teacher salaries and it has allowed keeping schools open when teachers are on strike. Another innovation was the development of centres of education and production. They have the best workshop to produce prostheses in Bolivia.

Still another innovation was the project for Parents and Children (Programa Padres e Hijos) started in 1984. This was a programme implemented

largely throughout the schools run by Fe y Alegría for parents of children in those schools. The programme consisted of a series of workshops to address different problems influencing the quality of family life, such as: communication, family relations, alcoholism and drug addiction, family and media. The main objective of this programme is to assist dysfunctional families through parents education and counselling. The workshops are based in an active and participatory approach to promote adult learning. In 1991 this programme was functioning in three departments in Bolivia, in 27 groups reaching 945 parents and approximately 3780 children.

In 1992 Fe y Alegría Bolivia was developing a model of rural education – boarding school. In these houses (called Houses of Knowledge) community members participate in bringing food and supplies, a mother from the community helps with cooking and organization. In these boarding schools there is a school council, students participate in the establishment of the rules of the community and in a committee to maintain discipline. There is a school garden where students cultivate vegetables and fruit.

Another project involving some 200 teachers in Fe y Alegría schools produced 90 prototype textbooks for primary school. These are books that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of Bolivia, that rescue the heritage of each region and that reflect the reality with which the students are familiar.

In 1977 Fe y Alegría conducted an evaluation which suggested that they had expanded too much, losing in quality and depth; in 1982 they decided to give priority to quality over expansion.

The relationship between the school and the community is a cornerstone of the functioning of Fe y Alegría. At the beginning parents participated in the construction of the school but since 1968 they participate through the *barrio* associations. The school also contributes with the community in projects of health, potable waters, sewage.

Funding comes from a number of sources. The Ministry of Education pays the salaries of teachers and principals. A small student fee – the same as that which students pay in public schools – pays

for regular teaching materials. The national headquarters prepare project proposals which are submitted to international agencies for funding. In other countries, but not in Bolivia, there are also yearly national raffles which generate local funds for operating expenses.

In 1992 Fe y Alegría operated in eight of the nine departments in Bolivia. Their main programmes include formal education at the pre-school, primary, secondary and technical levels. They also have an extensive programme of radio education, several programmes of teacher training, the programme for parents and children, programmes for community development, day care centres, health programme and a programme of religious education.

The administrative structure includes a staff of sixty. Seventeen persons work at the national headquarters, and two to five people work in the co-ordination offices in each department. There is extensive co-ordination and communication among the schools in this network. Teachers of each cycle in nearby schools meet and plan once a month. Departmental co-ordinators visit schools frequently.

Fe y Alegría has fed the public education system in a number of ways: training teachers, producing teaching materials for teachers and students; the programme of radio education was launched as a pilot project with USAID financing.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that graduates from Fe y Alegría schools have better mastery of basic skills: reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, they have had better opportunities for emotional development, their teachers have paid attention to the development of their self-esteem, students usually come to schools Saturdays and Sundays to play in the sport yards, the school seems to meet their social needs. In most of the schools there are youth groups which work on special projects such as Christmas activities, field trips, sports, cultural events.

In addition to emphasizing the mastery of academic skills, the Fe y Alegría schools emphasize values education, honesty and solidarity. Graduates develop meaningful attachment to their school; in some cases there are alumni associations.

The director of Fe y Alegría in Bolivia indicates that there are four dimensions of their education projects:⁷

- Economic: they must provide graduates opportunities to earn a living.
- Political: they support grassroots organizations so that people become aware of their rights and can organize themselves to protect them.
- Cultural: they promote cultural and ethnic identity.
- Religious: they provide a transcendent dimension, to motivate individuals throughout life.

Lessons learned

This section proposes a model to explain the success of Fe y Alegría. The model should be understood as a working hypothesis. A rigorous testing of this hypothesis would require the study of more innovations, including not just successes but failures, and systematic measurement of comparable outcomes including measures of student learning and other gains.

The importance of a sense of mission

Fe y Alegría has a very clear sense of mission. We could call this the 'spirit' of the innovation; it glues the different components of the innovation together, including the technologies and the people involved (teachers, trainers, administrators, students and parents). This vision articulates why the innovation makes sense. It reflects an understanding of the main problems of education and how the proposed set of activities will address the problem. Beyond the level of resources, or an adequate technical design, this vision works as a force that motivates the people involved to commit to the innovation, that gives their participation in the innovation meaning in the frame of their own personal values and beliefs.

This spirit of the innovation is in part shaped by the deep personal commitment of the innovators.

It gives the innovation meaning in terms of broader values, such as those expressed in religious systems or political ideology. Easily found among those who design the innovation and first put it to work, it can escape the innovation quickly, especially as it increases in scale.

Fe y Alegría emphasizes that the teachers in their schools should find in their teaching a way to achieve religious transcendency. The spirit of the innovation is often captured and transmitted in symbols and rituals. For instance Fe y Alegría has a logo that is widely recognized in the region: a heart with the silhouettes of three children. The motto 'Where the road ends there begins Fe y Alegría' also captures the philosophy of educating in places that government provision does not reach. Celebrations and group dynamics are often incorporated as part of the training programmes or of the programmes of outreach to the community; they all convey the special mystique of the innovation. An indicator of a live spirit of the innovation is the clarity with which participants in the project at different levels can communicate what the innovation is about, what it is trying to do and how it is doing it and why that is important to them.

A central element in the 'spirit' of Fe y Alegría is the desire to focus on socially disadvantaged students and to provide them with skills and attitudes that will increase their sense of control of their environment, a necessary condition for democracy. This is expressed in the emphasis in development of self-esteem, in incorporating the culture of the students into the curriculum, in providing spaces for participation (student participation, teacher participation, community participation) and in expanding the links between schools and communities.

The importance of the role of the community

Fe y Alegría gives the community of parents a larger role than traditional schools do. This involves explaining to parents what the innovation is trying to do for their children, requesting support from parents and ensuring that the school

in turn supports community activities or community development. In a very real sense Fe y Alegría opened the school to the community, not just to ask for their help with school repairs or student fees, but to identify new ways in which communities could help schools carry out their new mission, and also to identify new ways in which the school could support the community. (For instance, in Fe y Alegría the schools are a centre of a number of education programmes for parents and members of the community.)

A very direct way in which the schools in Fe y Alegría connect with their communities is that the curriculum attempts to recognize and build on the community where the students live. Teacher training emphasizes using examples that acknowledge the diversity of student backgrounds and allow students to use non-standard forms of language in school, or to tell stories which reflect diverse home and family experiences. In this way the school sends a very direct message to parents and students that it is not educating to develop an 'ideal' child who may or may not conform to their own reality, but that it is trying to reach them, recognizing their uniqueness and diversity.

In a very real sense this innovation tries to place the schools where they belong, in the community, and to promote mechanisms for community involvement in running the school. This is very important for the support of democracy as it promotes local participation to solve local problems – education. In addition this presents an alternative 'hidden curriculum' to children in schools, emphasizing local action and participation in development.

The importance of democratic leadership

The successful implementation and expansion of Fe y Alegría relies not just on good management, but on good leadership. Each new school added to the programme requires the re-creation of the vision of the innovation; this calls on leadership

supportive of participation at different levels. The creation of spaces for local leadership in turn relied on democratic leadership at higher levels. At the higher levels the innovations seem to have benefited from skilled social entrepreneurship, individuals with the ability to articulate the vision that turns challenges into opportunities and that motivates others to join the project. It is possible that the freedom that results from a small-scale organization explains the continued level of commitment and energy found among top leaders of Fe y Alegría; senior executives in larger and more bureaucratic organizations such as Ministries of Education seem to wear out much faster. It may be easier in a small organization than in the Ministry of Education to communicate a vision and to translate it into action.

The innovation engaged teachers in the re-creation of the vision, of the spirit, of the innovation, by providing opportunities for teachers at the school level to design their own education projects. To the extent that teachers themselves experience more direct control in influencing decisions about how their school operates, they are more able to respond to increased community participation, and to be effective role-models for their students of active participants in their communities.

The importance of strict and lean management

Leadership and vision are important, but the importance of organization and management should not be underestimated. Fe y Alegría has little room for inefficiencies; it has a tight budget and reduced personnel, so resources have to be stretched to the limit.

Fe y Alegría has its own organizational structure, very small and efficient, responsible for implementing the different components of the innovation. There are fewer organizational levels and fewer administrators per staff in the Fe y Alegría system than in the public education sys-

tems in the countries where they operate. This means that costs are smaller, but places greater burdens on administrators in *Fe y Alegría*. This may also be the reason why *Fe y Alegría* needs to rely on more democratic and participatory forms of management; there just aren't enough administrators and supervisors to run around checking that teachers are doing their work. The fundamental difference between the management structures of *Fe y Alegría* and those of public education systems reflects a different vision of teachers and schools: in *Fe y Alegría* the school and the community are at the centre of the system – that is, where the action takes place, where initiative is needed. Administration is a thin layer built around this to provide co-ordination and communication and to help achieve some scales (in fund-raising, for example). In the traditional system, the centre seems to be the Ministry of Education and the school is perceived as an appendix responsible for the implementation of initiatives decided upon at the top; this requires more personnel and different management styles to supervise that policies and regulations are followed.

The role of resources and the crucial role of donors

The implementation of the *Fe y Alegría* programme requires funds to finance the schools, textbooks, training and other inputs that brought the mission of the innovation alive.

It is significant that *Fe y Alegría* evolved at some distance from public funds; public funds became available and important once the innovation had proven itself. It is possible that innovation is more likely when removed from government, or that the particular styles of government reflected by Ministries of Education in Latin America have not been too conducive to innovation.

Fe y Alegría developed initially as a private initiative; different funding arrangements have since evolved in different countries. In most coun-

tries a number of agreements with governments secure public funding; in Venezuela, for instance, 80 per cent of the programme budget is transfers from the Ministry of Education. In the case where *Fe y Alegría* expanded most (Bolivia), funding from international agencies is significantly larger than in the other countries where the programme operates.

The role of diplomacy and social marketing

The long-term survival achieved by *Fe y Alegría* demonstrates great sensitivity and skills to handle the conflicting political interests that interface in the education system. The critical need is for diplomacy and gamesmanship at the co-ordinating level of the innovation, but political sensitivity is also necessary at the local level.

In talking to the chief figures responsible for *Fe y Alegría* one gets the impression that they are not only motivated educators and people with a clear sense of mission, but also skilled politicians. They can understand the politics of the education system and how the project affects those politics; they can communicate, bargain, and negotiate at two political levels: politics of the project environment and politics inside the project. The project environment involves the Ministry of Education, the international donors, the community, the local politicians, political parties, and other interest groups. Internal politics are those that arise among people working in the project, and which increase as the project goes to scale. Handling the politics of the environment sometimes requires building support and coalitions relying on mass media to reach different groups and communities. A clear communication strategy within the programme is also a necessary condition to maintaining the quality of the innovation and to handling of internal politics; this includes the use of formal and informal channels of communication to provide feedback from the schools to the higher levels of project management, and it involves also effective

communication systems from higher management levels to teachers and local managers.

An important objective of a communication strategy is to insure a shared understanding, among all participants in the innovation and its supporters, of what the innovation is about, what it is trying to do, how it is trying to do it and why that is important. In other words, this strategy should attempt to communicate the 'spirit' of the innovation.

The role of initial technical design, learning by doing and networking

The Fe y Alegría concept has evolved over a large number of years. The periodic meetings of educators involved in the project within the countries and of the national co-ordinators of different countries allow opportunities to exchange experiences and improve the initial design of each component. For example, the radio education project developed by Fe y Alegría Bolivia permitted the learning of lessons that have been useful in the expansion of this initiative to other national chapters of Fe y Alegría, most recently to Venezuela.

This is an important lesson to projects of school improvement which overemphasize the role of technical design and planning, leaving little room and resources for experimentation and few opportunities to exchange information that can lead to learning by doing.

However, good programming becomes an essential condition to maximizing the achievement of targets with limited resources and time. Good programming requires careful specification of the components of the innovation. It may make sense to differentiate at least two stages in the lives of innovations, one where refining the innovation is the most important goal (getting it right) and a second phase in which having maximum impact is most important. These two phases do not represent a clear dichotomy but two moments with different emphases in two objectives which are present at any time during the life of the innovation.

The role of teacher training

The methods used by Fe y Alegría to help teachers acquire effective skills to enact the vision of each of these innovations in the classroom all seem to involve three components: emotion or affection, cognition and action. The first is an attempt to motivate the teacher to want to learn new skills, to share the spirit of the innovation. Many of the materials produced by Fe y Alegría for their teachers aim at this motivational and emotional level; they emphasize the transcendent features of this work.

The behavioural dimension of teacher-training provides opportunities to practise the new teaching styles or to watch other teachers do it; this is done in the workshops for training or in practice sessions in schools selected for this purpose.

Conclusions

Providing universal quality education presents enormous challenges, challenges which public education systems alone have not been able to meet. Non-Government Organizations can be a source of change in the search of alternatives to meet these challenges, and the State can establish productive partnerships with NGOs to maintain its responsibility to insure access to education, while expanding the range of modalities of delivery.

The case of Fe y Alegría demonstrates that NGOs can promote the participation of civil society and complement state efforts, and that they can also play a helpful role in demonstrating how to deliver quality education. Of most importance is the fact that this NGO is not in competition with the State, nor does it relieve the State of its obligation to finance basic education of the most disadvantaged children.

The long-term consolidation of democracy in Latin America will require important shifts in the education systems of the region. The problem is not so much with what schools are doing at the moment, but with what they are failing to do. They

are teaching too little to students, they are perpetuating social disparities rather than reducing them, they are not equipping large numbers of children for productive work and democratic citizenship. More of the same will not allow democratic institutions to prosper. The consolidation of democratic institutions creates possibilities for new forms of collaboration with NGOs, which in the past were antagonistic to authoritarian regimes.

Is change possible? Fe y Alegría demonstrates that it is indeed possible to provide quality education to the poorest children of Latin America. The quality of the education provided stems not just from the increased levels of student achievement, but from providing alternative educational processes fostering the social and emotional development of disadvantaged children.

The programme of Fe y Alegría in twelve countries shows that it is possible to mobilize teachers and communities into providing education of quality and for life to the most disadvantaged. This programme is a successful model of partnership between the government and the private sector which has survived fading and political changes. The schools of Fe y Alegría, expanding continuously, are a helpful reminder to ministries of education, which sometimes suffer from system fatigue, that poor children can learn and that it is possible to teach them well.

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Notes

- 1 Many schools in rural areas in Latin America are 'incomplete' in the sense that they do not offer all grades of primary education, they may only offer first-grade (one grade), or the first two or three grades.
- 2 Derived from Table 22, page 53, UNESCO-OREALC.
- 3 These figures are for 1985, Tovar 1989.
- 4 Translated from 'La integración de la escuela a la comunidad. Una característica de la educación popular'. Presented in *Encuentro Nacional de Educadores*. Maracay 1988. pp. 2-4.
- 5 Jesús Herrera. Personal communication. 1 March 1993.
- 6 Interview with Gabriel Codina. La Paz. December 1992.
- 7 At the time of this writing (1996) USAID was financing an evaluation carried out by the Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación in Santiago, Chile, comparing public schools with Fe y Alegría schools in all countries where the programme operates.

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