

CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Joseph Berninger
Jeffrey Berninger
Cooperative for Education
2730 Hyde Park Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45209

COED Final Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I've been very fortunate in that I've been able to work with over 100 NGOs, donors and governmental organizations in Guatemala over the past eight years. At the conclusion of this study I realized that COED was up with the best. COED's work is consistently good, the programs are well-designed and focused, they're designed to be sustainable, they show proof of impact, and their staff is very professional. I would like to say that COED is one of the two best organizations I've worked with in Guatemala -- certainly in the top 5%.

Organizational Efficiency

COED programs are simple conceptually, but quite complex from an administrative standpoint simply because of the sheer numbers. Working with 193 schools in 13 different departments, with over 32,000 students using over 150,000 textbooks, while at the same time managing 43 computer labs, a scholarship program and a teacher training program is quite an undertaking.

From the programs that I studied and the people that I met, COED is incredibly well organized and has the administrative processes, computer systems and program documentation in place to manage these large numbers. I do have to give credit to the consistent professionalism of COED's in-country staff. They know their job, they know their procedures, they believe in what they're doing, and they are tremendously courteous -- which I believe is behind the success of the partnerships that they have with the schools and their staff. The organization is run like a well-lubricated business -- quite unusual in the nonprofit world.

I am impressed that COED can manage this family of sophisticated programs on less than a 10% overhead and fundraising cost basis. To me this speaks of true organizational efficiency.

Program Sustainability

I have never seen another NGO use the successful formula that COED has developed. To begin with, the sheer quantity of books COED purchases each year allows the organization a very advantageous purchasing price point.

By 'renting' books and computer access to middle school students over a 4 to 6 year lifecycle period the initial investment is recouped - allowing the funds to be reinvested in new sets of books as the old books/computers become outdated or tattered. This means that in a static state, the program is sustainable.

One very important thing that may be overlooked by donors, however, is this means that each donor's new investment in a program is not being used to replace old books -- their investments are being used to provide textbooks for new schools joining the program allowing for an increasing number of student beneficiaries. This is the way development should be -- but you don't see this very frequently. Usually donor funds are used up in programs and need to be continually replaced by new donor funds to maintain the program. This is not the case with COED

Impact

Another thing that I was impressed with was that each of the staff and executive members of the organization was concerned about impact. They were concerned about refining the definition of impact, they were concerned about increasing impact, and they were concerned about identifying better indicators to help them interpret more accurately the impact which their programs are having.

An example of the reach of COED's impact is shown in a study that I received. In 2006 a local university, Francisco Marroquín University in Guatemala City, conducted an independent evaluation of the textbook program and discovered that in the 10 middle

724 Via Santo Tomas
Claremont, CA 91711

6ª Avenida 1-40 zona 14 - Edificio Bonaire 1001
Ciudad Guatemala, Guatemala 01014
<http://www.csd-i.org/>

202-657-4760
909-532-5135

Washington, DC
Los Angeles

011-502-5411-4978
011-502-2366-4313

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schools involved in the study, the student dropout rate was reduced by 46% in the first year by COED's provision of textbooks over students who did not have access to the textbook program.

"In the first grade of secondary education, the drop-out rate declined approximately 46% (average among the ten schools) from 7.78% to 4.24%. In the second grade (of secondary school) among the ten sample schools, the drop-out rate declined from 4.35% to 2.07%. The decline in the drop-out rate among the students in the third grade (of secondary school) (declined) from 3.39% to 2.46%.

Our researchers also noted that, during the assessment period, enrollment rates at the sample schools increased significantly (by 26.28% in the first grade of secondary school, 49.69% in the second grade, and 37.77% in the third grade)."

Scale

One of the unfortunate side effects of development is the fact that there are so many small NGOs working with small numbers of people. They might be helping one community, but they're not really having much of an impact on an aggregate regional problem. They haven't either the vision or the skill to take their concepts to scale.

COED has done an excellent job of taking their concept to scale. COED is currently working in one half of Guatemala's departments and making a consistent and meaningful difference in the lives of over 32,000 middle school students who move through the program every three years allowing another set of students to enter this revolving and continuous program.

I just haven't seen other NGOs in Guatemala with a scaled-up, sustainable, impact-oriented program such as COED's.

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Appendix: Interview and Visit Details

Dear Joe and Jeff,

I am pleased to present you with the final report of my study with COED that was conducted over the past 12 months.

In August of 2009, I embarked upon a study with COED looking at operational efficiencies and programming impact. I had the opportunity of interviewing and traveling with accounting, development, computer lab, textbook, CORP reading program, evaluation, teacher training, and scholarship program staff -- as well as having access to the organization's executives.

My first meeting was with COED accountant **Karolina Alvarez** who described the accounting system and the inter-relationship between the US accounting office and the Guatemala accounting office. She said that their relationship is good and that the Guatemala staff work efficiently. She had made the trip to Guatemala to work with the local staff for a week in improving their understanding of accounting procedures -- some of the accounting procedures had been modified so she wanted to work with the staff in order to make using the new procedures easier. One of her main goals of the trip was to reinforce that they were an important part of the organization and to make sure that they understood and realized they were part of the big picture that is COED. The local staff also had questions and needed clarification about specific reporting that the Cincinnati office was requiring of them. She said the local staff were happy that she'd come down to do this.

Ann Dempsey, Development Manager. Ann provides coordination between donor research and strategies, and in managing grant writers so that they are in line with current priorities. She also maintains an awareness of donor deadlines, funding cycles and manages relationships with foundations. She expressed her enthusiasm about COED's mission: education is the solution. She feels that COED does a good job of breaking the cycle of poverty through high quality educational programs that are sustainable, continuous projects. She also described different donors that COED works with, and their strategy for approaching donors in order to match individual donor funding levels with the funds necessary for COED each year.

She expressed that working between two countries is more difficult than working in one centralized office but that she gets good support from Guatemalan staff for her projects. For example, she's currently working with Gaby Amado on collecting baseline data on their beneficiaries so that she can incorporate measurable results into her proposals. She then gave me a quick overview of the different programs that COED has in Guatemala, what regions they work in, and the scale of their programs.

Joe Berninger and Jeff Berninger. Jeff and Joe did an excellent job of giving me a 'scoped out' presentation of the organization. They helped me to better understand the philosophy of what they're trying to do in breaking the cycle of poverty by bridging the gap between elementary school, middle school and high school in Guatemala. They described how their initial philosophy was based upon the fact that many children in Guatemala drop out of school after elementary school. Their theory was that if they could provide opportunities and quality improvements for middle school students, children might be encouraged to stay in school longer -- and consider entering high school.

They gave me a list of different staff members they felt would be useful to talk to. They expressed interest in continuing to fine tune program impact -- and in gaining a better understanding of the best indicators that they could use in determining impact and the success of their programs. They also gave me a historical perspective on how the programs have grown from simply the textbook program and into computer labs, teacher training, scholarships and libraries. They expressed how one study that they had done showed that dropouts decreased by 46% after introducing books into middle schools.

Howard Lobb, Director of Technology and Communication Programs. Howard gave me a detailed accounting of how the different COED programs function and exact numbers of beneficiaries in each program. He also spoke about measuring impact and refining the indicators of impact which they're using. He described their 43 computer labs and the fact that they have different programs in 194 schools impacting over 32,000 students. He described in detail how the revolving fund works for both books and the computer labs.

He explained how the computer labs aren't simply providing computers to schools but are also providing the 'Future Kids' curriculum that allows them to integrate a project-based learning program into the learning process. He discussed how they provide maintenance

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for the labs, supervision, and teacher training in how to use the curriculum. Students learn teamwork and how to use Excel, Publisher, and Word through researching their communities online, starting imaginary businesses, and doing a project designed to reinforce their cultural heritage.

All in all, the benefits of the computer labs are that the students are able to develop computer skills and thinking and logic skills, while reinforcing the basic education which they're receiving. He also expressed evidence of success of the sustainability of their programs -- how the revolving fund program was working, and how it allowed them to renew books and computers every 4 to 6 years.

Gaby Amado. Gaby works on two kinds of projects. One is programmed interviews designed to get quantitative information from students, parents and teachers. This information is useful in establishing baselines allowing them to measure change in order to interpret the impact that the programs are having.

The other program that she works on is collecting compelling stories for use in newsletters and proposals. One technique that she uses is to visit students in their homes and have unstructured conversations.

She described some of the schools that she works with and invited me to accompany her on a series of interviews.

In the schools I was able to talk to students involved in different COED programs and talk to their teachers and the school principals. I learned more about the practicalities of the book and scholarship programs -- and the positive impact these have had on both the schools and on the students themselves.

In Santiago we met with principal Juan Jose Caxaj. He expressed to me that before the COED program it simply hadn't been possible for the school to buy computers. With 190 students the school's one computer was used by students 12 hours a day -- in pairs -- so that each pair could have 15 minutes of computer use per week. Through COED's program they were able to afford a computer lab to serve their students. At his school I was also able to meet and speak with several of the scholarship recipients.

Carolyn Johnson – CORP Program. Carolyn explained that the Culture of Reading Program (CORP) is a program to train primary school teachers to teach reading. Carolyn's counterpart in Guatemala is Anna Carolina Luna. One technique that the teachers use through this program is to read their students a book one day, and the next day the students have the opportunity to act out the story, and then describe to the teacher what the book was about in their own words. They then re-write the story, illustrating every page, and staple the sheets together into a book of their own -- reinforcing comprehension and self-esteem.

Anna Carolina had spent several months training the teachers at this particular school in Magdalena Milpas Altas and Carolyn had come down to evaluate the progress.

Angel Bamaca, Educational Supervisor. I met Angel in Tecpan at the Instituto Experimental de Tecpan, where I was introduced to Edgar Costop, the man in charge of the computer lab at the school. I was able to observe two computer classes, interview students and interview Edgar.

Angel explained that the COED program with the school included teacher training (of Edgar), supplying curriculum materials, an educational program (Future Kids) and computer maintenance. These were seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students. 14 groups of students (a total of 580) use the computer lab each week.

Through the Future Kids program, students do a final project each year, which they work on for 8 weeks. For example, the students that I observed would over the next eight weeks be working on developing a business using the full range of computer resources that would help them form their business, define a product, analyze costs and prices, investigate markets, promote their product and develop a webpage. Students had been developing businesses for clothing, hats, motorcycle sales, and party supplies. Today they were working on multimedia presentations for their business concepts that they could use in sales meetings.

The final project that the students worked on the year before was an environmental project (Don't Contaminate the Planet) that had three components - one was developing a recycling program, the second was developing the ability to work as teams in a tree planting

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campaign, and the third component involved 100 students cleaning up trash in their hometown. These ideas also help to develop skills in using PowerPoint, Word, Excel, and Publisher by integrating real service projects with reports developed in the computer lab.

Only 20% of the students I interviewed have computers at home - the others were forced to pay an hourly rate at an Internet café in town. So the computer lab is a great benefit for them.

For the balance of the year, when they're not working on a final project, they use 'Future Kids' real-world exercises to learn in an integrated fashion about the different computer programs and resources that they would need to use as their education progresses -- and in a future job.

Milton Ramos Mendez, Textbook Program. Milton manages the textbook programs for COED at 34 schools. He explained that he is in charge of administering the program for each school, and in maintaining the records of the students and their books. He's also in charge of an educational orientation for the teachers that helps them to strengthen the process of learning. He also is in charge of establishing the financial relationship with the school. Before the books are issued he gives a presentation about the COED program to the students.

We travelled to Patzun to meet with Principal Efrain Salazar at the Colegio 20 de Mayo. This is their second year in the program. In essence, students rent four textbooks for a year for approximately \$10.00 total -- or 13% of the retail cost of the books. With approximately 220 students in the school, the school needs to collect approximately \$2,200.00 from the students per year.

I was able to observe several classes and speak with both teachers and students. I asked Milton what they did for educational materials before they enrolled in the textbook program two years ago. He explained that each teacher collected whatever resources they could; it could be materials that they received in a workshop, it could be that they had kept materials from their own education, or it could be pictures from newspapers and magazines. The problem with this approach was a lack of consistency between different teachers in presentations to their classes, and also a lack of quality of the materials. An additional problem was that students couldn't take these materials home to study with them. They simply had to rely on their notes to study with at night. The students love their new books and expressed to me that there are a 'lot of interesting things in the books.'

I was impressed by how incredibly organized Milton was. I accompanied him for his first visit of the school year to renegotiate that year's relationship and set up the payment plan. He had all the right forms ready to go and obviously had developed a good rapport with the principal from prior visits.

Holly End, Director of Development. I met briefly with Holly at the end of July, 2010. Holly was in Guatemala to produce a video about their programs -- and about their sustainability and impact. I shared with her thoughts about the programs that I've visited and how impressed I was with how they have been developed to be sustainable -- and how the different staff members had demonstrated to me how the sustainability was working. I also expressed to her how impressed I was with the seriousness with which staff members addressed program impact -- across the organization.

In ending, I would just like to thank you for the pleasure of having had the opportunity to work with you, and let you know that I was impressed with everything that I saw and experienced. Please don't hesitate to contact me again in the future.

Sincerely,

Tim Magee
Executive Director
Center for Sustainable Development