



# Education in Emergencies: The success story of the Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ in Colombia

Coming in the first half of 2009

# “Education in Emergencies: The success story of the Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ in Colombia”



Over the last seven years the Escuela Nueva Foundation has developed and successfully implemented an effective model for providing high quality education to children displaced by violence and other emergencies, and for reintegrating them into the formal education system. What started as a small pilot in Soacha, Colombia back in 2003 became national policy a few years later and has the potential to change education for vulnerable populations around the world.

Finally the experiences of those seven years have been summarized and systematized in the book **Education in Emergencies: The success story of the Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ in Colombia, published by Escuela Nueva Foundation**. This book is for practitioners and policy makers looking for new ideas and perspectives, and anyone interested in education, emergency relief, and development.



Key elements of the book are:

- Main building blocks of the learning methodology.
- Origin and history of the **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™**.
- A detailed description of the pilots from 2003-2006 and their results.
- The key actors and their roles in implementation.
- Implementation challenges and lessons learned.
- Thoughts on sustainability and building scale in diverse contexts.

The Escuela Nueva Foundation is a non profit, non governmental organization founded in 1987 in Colombia by the authors and creators of the Escuela Nueva educational model. It is led by one of its founders, Vicky Colbert, who has been recognized in the field of social entrepreneurship for her vision and leadership in sustaining and innovating the Escuela Nueva model over three decades.

Vicky has been recognized as *Outstanding Social Entrepreneur* by the Schwab Foundation, *Leading Social Entrepreneur and Senior Fellow* of Ashoka, and has been awarded with the *World Technology Award in Social Entrepreneurship*, the *Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship* and the first version of the *Clinton Global Citizenship Award*.

She was also appointed by Ex President Bill Clinton to serve as an Advisory Board member of the Education Working Group in the 2007 Clinton Global Initiative and is a partner of CGI's Education Partnership for Children of Conflict.



## The Challenge:

Despite various intervention approaches, more than 27 million children in conflict areas around the world still have no access to schooling or quality education. With more than two million internally displaced people as a result of armed conflict, Colombia has one of the largest migrant populations in the world. Hundred of thousands of children are suffering due to violence, extreme poverty and inadequate social services. Various barriers to education limit their chances of improving their situation in the future.

The integration and education of these vulnerable children is a major problem. According to a 2006 study by Save the Children, it is estimated that there are close to 1 million Colombian, between the ages of 0 to 18 years, living in a state of displacement. 85% of previously enrolled students did not go back to school after the displacement took place. This humanitarian crisis calls for the implementation of public policies that protect children and provide adequate and flexible educational alternatives.

Most conventional schools are not fit to deal the needs of displaced children and therefore fail to attract and retain them. The key assumption is that children learn at the same pace and have a similar knowledge base. They are usually frontal, teacher-centered with whole class instruction where knowledge is transmitted. In addition, conventional schools give more emphasis to academic results and have a limited space for personalized attention, dialogue and social interaction among students.

The urgently needed development of social skills, such as conflict management and acceptance of diverse opinions, is neglected and there is no room for helping students deal with their personal problems.

# The Solution: The Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™

In 2001 the Escuela Nueva Foundation analyzed the situation of children affected by emergencies and displacement in Colombia. Based on the principles and child-centered pedagogy of the proven Escuela Nueva educational model, the **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles Program™** was developed to meet the special needs of this group of children.

Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™ are places of learning located within local communities, comprised of groups of between 12 and 15 students that work together with the aid of a “youth tutor” who facilitates learning and provides personalized attention. They operate off-site from mainstream, formal “mother schools”, but are officially linked to them through shared academic calendars, grading systems and extracurricular programs. Children are officially enrolled in the “mother school”, but study in these **Learning Circles™** and receive classes in community centers, local churches, and family homes until they are prepared to transfer to the “mother school.” This Program is not a parallel system; it is integrated into and recognized by the Ministry of Education to ease the transition from the streets to school.



The **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles Program™** offers:

- A flexible learning and promotion process accounting for diversity and different learning rhythms
- An emphasis on cooperative learning and basic life and social skills
- An enjoyable learning experience
- A safe, caring and protective environment
- Personalized attention and care to strengthen self-esteem

The **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles Program™** helps students transition back into the official education system by providing them with the required social and scholastic skills. It contributes to conflict management, developing habits of peaceful coexistence, constructive behavior and social integration. The Program has demonstrated improvements in coverage and academic achievements on national standardized tests, and has strengthened democratic behaviors, peaceful coexistence and self esteem of students.

According to the results of the application of UNESCO tests in 2004 and 2005, in only 6 months of operation the **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles™** achieved 100% enrollment, increased children's self esteem by 18.5% and obtained the highest level of improvement in both language and math, placing children of the Learning Circles™ 13.9 and 17.3 points, respectively, above the national average.



## The Roll-out:



Convinced of the potential of this new methodology, the Escuela Nueva Foundation (ENF) persuaded USAID to fund the first pilot project in the commune of Altos de Cazucá in Soacha in 2003. The Ministry of Education of Colombia and the International Organization for Migrants also supported this initiative. In the second pilot phase, ENF involved the Norwegian Refugee Council and the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Refugees. Local NGOs were trained to become implementers of the model.

Ever since, the Escuela Nueva Foundation has promoted and expanded the program with the help of organizations such as UNICEF, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and others. Today the **Escuela Nueva Learning Circles Program™** is part of a continuing national dialogue around the problems of violence and social alienation. ENF's successful strategy has become national policy and is now being expanded nationwide with the support of the Ministry of Education.

ENF continues to push for the necessary investments in areas with the greatest potential for return in economic development, peace building and educating the nation's future citizens.

