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# Shifting the perspective on community-based management of education: From systems theory to social capital and community empowerment

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is both a critical analysis of an example of community-based management of education (CBM) and a call for a shift in perspective related to how we think about CBM, particularly in marginalized and low-income contexts. The example of focus that serves as the basis for critical analysis is the "Education with Community Participation" (EDUCO) program in El Salvador, which achieved fame in the late 1990s and 2000s because it formally transferred, among other things, the ability to hire and fire teachers to a committee of parents at the community level. Given its fame and the fact of its imitation elsewhere, it is important to have an in-depth understanding of how this program operated at the local level, with what limitations, and with what implications for CBM programs more generally. For the second purpose—related to shifting perspectives on CBM—this paper draws on concepts related to systems theory, social capital, and community empowerment.

## 1. Introduction

As a form of community-based management (CBM), the "Education with Community Participation" (EDUCO) program in El Salvador achieved fame in the late 1990s and 2000s because it formally transferred, among other things, the ability to hire and fire teachers to a committee of parents at the community level. While recent literature has traced the evolution of this program within El Salvador as well as its trajectory as it entered the international educational agenda, an understudied aspect of this program is the community-level experience (Edwards, 2015, 2018d).[1] However, given that this program became a widely-referenced and emulated "global education policy," it is important to have an in-depth understanding of how this program operated at the local level, with what limitations, and with what implications for CBM programs more generally.

The present paper is dedicated to pursuing these objectives. That is, it seeks, first, to present a critical and close-up analysis of the EDUCO program in practice and, second, to reflect on what the EDUCO experience means for CBM initiatives, particularly when it comes to their implementation in marginalized communities in low-income countries (just as was the case for EDUCO). To accomplish the first objective, this paper reviews the literature that exists on EDUCO's implementation, with a focus on community experiences. This literature is difficult to locate, even within El Salvador, and is almost entirely unknown outside the country. It is argued that the studies which make up this literature provide insight into the experience of average communities in the EDUCO program (more on this later).

For the second purpose, this paper draws on diverse yet related concepts in order to engage in a theoretically informed discussion of the implications of EDUCO and similar CBM programs. While these concepts will be further discussed below, suffice to say here that these concepts relate to systems theory, social capital, and community empowerment. In the end, it will be argued, first, that the experience of EDUCO and similar reforms suggest that we need to go beyond the lens of the systems framework (although it usefully highlights the technical, institutional, and political dimensions of policy implementation) to also consider the kinds of social relations that are assumed and required for CBM. Second, it will be argued that, in low-income countries, where the elite and ruling classes have little in common with the poor for whom CBM is intended (Narayan, 1999), we cannot assume that CBM will be meaningful or that it will contribute meaningfully to community development—and, as such, development practitioners and organizations, among others, should instead focus on broader notions of community development and empowerment. In all, then, the present paper is meant to be a both a critique of the EDUCO program itself as well as a critique of the kind of program it represents.

In tackling the objectives set out above, the paper moves through a number of sections. The first contains a brief characterization of CBM

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[1] This paper is a significantly adapted and extended version of Edwards (2018a). While that publication provides a critique of EDUCO at the local level, the present paper seeks to engage with the theoretical and practical implications of that critique more generally.

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and the research that has been conducted on this phenomenon in the area of education. The second section addresses further the concepts that will be used to consider the implications of EDUCO—that is, concepts related to systems theory, social capital, and community empowerment. This is followed by sections on EDUCO's history, design, and results. The history and design sections are particularly important for putting EDUCO into context and for understanding its larger meaning. The final sections of the paper engage in reflection on the program's limitations in practice as well as the theoretical and practical implications of those limitations.

## 2. Community-based management: characterization and literature review

CBM envisions the involvement of the community in various aspects of education governance at the local level. In practice, this often means that parents work on their own or together with teachers and principals (sometimes called school directors) on such issues as how the school budget is spent, fundraising, curriculum development, the procurement of textbooks, school maintenance and construction, the monitoring and evaluation of teacher performance, and even the hiring and firing of teachers (World Bank, 2007). Committees made up of parents, teachers, and principals are the most common vehicle for operationalizing this governance strategy. While the label of "school-based management" is often used to describe the use of such school councils, the term CBM is used here to emphasize the community involvement aspect.

Since the early 1990s, CBM has been a very popular governance model that has been pursued widely in international development and has been enacted in many countries. In part, its popularity stems from its underlying theory and design, through which it promises to increase community participation (via the committees mentioned above), to improve teacher accountability (by giving school committees the responsibility to monitor and/or contract teachers), to engender greater efficiency (by allowing school committees to use discretionary funds to purchase only what is needed), and to enhance educational outcomes (such as student achievement and student retention, thanks, for example, to the increased investment students and parents will feel as a result of their participation in school governance and as a result of improved teaching that is itself a consequence of enhanced teacher accountability) (Edwards, 2012; Edwards and DeMatthews, 2014). It has been promoted by a wide range of multi- and bilateral development institutions, as well as by influential think tanks, including the World Bank, UNESCO, the Global Partnership for Education, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, and the United States Agency for International Development, to name only a few. Since the 2000s, CBM has even been promoted in conflict-affected contexts as a way to draw on local capacity in the context of weak or absent state support for education (Edwards and Higa, 2018).

In recent years, two rigorous literature reviews have been conducted that were focused on CBM (Carr-Hill et al., 2015; Westhorp et al., 2014). As a result of the methodological preferences embedded in their definitions for rigor, these reviews focused overwhelmingly on quantitative studies that examined the impacts of CBM on various outcomes, such as student achievement, pupil retention, teacher attendance, etc. In light of the widespread popularity of CBM, it is noteworthy that Carr-Hill et al. (2015) conclude that they were not able to produce "any robust conclusions on the conditions necessary for positive impact [of CBM]" (p. 8). While there certainly were studies that reported positive impacts of CBM, the results were not consistent across studies, thus confounding efforts to generalize lessons. Westhorp et al. (2014), for their part, conclude that school councils are more likely:

(a) to hold staff to account, and to be accountable in their own roles, where their role is clear, they have formal authority, and they are adequately resourced to do so; (b) to be held accountable to communities where parents directly elect their representatives on school boards or councils, when those elections are conducted openly and effectively, and when there are sufficient parent representatives to balance the power of other stakeholders; [and] (c) to be effective when significant power differentials do not exist between committee members and social norms do not inhibit the exercise of community power (p. 4).

It should come as no surprise that school councils function better when their authority is clearly delineated, when they have sufficient resources, when their representatives are elected, and when there are not social norms that prohibit some members (usually women) from participating.

The problem, however, is that these conditions are not usually found at the community level, as multiple qualitative studies have shown. Consider, for example, that hiring decisions (in the few cases where they have been devolved to communities) have been removed from community control through patronage politics (Altschuler, 2013), that administrative responsibilities at the school level which entail paperwork and control of the budget are assumed by teachers (Altschuler, 2013; Gershberg et al., 2009), and that school council autonomy is interrupted by overlapping assignment of responsibilities across levels of government (Chikoko, 2008) or is undermined by the power vested in higher levels of government (Carney et al., 2007). Moreover, local elites—i.e., members of the community who are resource rich or relatively more well-off—use school councils for their own political and personal benefit (Carney et al., 2007; Okitsu and Edwards, 2017; Prinsen and Titeca, 2008; Pryor, 2005). This is all in addition to the fact that women frequently are not able to participate due to family obligations or because they do not feel comfortable participating in school councils (Gershberg et al., 2009; Rose, 2003; Swift-Morgan, 2006).

In practice, as a result of the shortcomings mentioned above, the functioning of school committees diverges from what is expected. At times, corruption is found to occur, in that school funds are spent inappropriately (Prinsen and Titeca, 2008). Often, school councils become nothing more than means for carrying out school construction and maintenance, buying school supplies, and collecting donations from the community—all of which are commonly initiated at the behest of teachers or school directors (Chikoko, 2008; Edwards and Mbatia, 2013; Gershberg, 2002; Gershberg et al., 2009; Rose, 2003; Swift-Morgan, 2006). Although CBM might be associated with increased visits to schools by parents and some additional attention to the monitoring of teacher attendance (Gershberg et al., 2009), it stands out that qualitative studies do not find teacher accountability by communities to arise in practice (Rivarola and Fuller, 1999; Gershberg et al., 2009), likely due to the educational differences, social distance, and cultural power differential between marginalized parents and teachers (Suzuki, 2002).

Additionally, it is important to point out that the discussion of school councils assumes that their existence and means of operation are known by community members, which, it has been shown, it not always the case, a fact that undermines the possibility of their success (Edwards and Mbatia, 2013; Pryor, 2005). Thus, beyond taking into account the constraints of lack of time or inadequate capacity that more poor members of a community might face (Gershberg et al., 2009), the issue of basic knowledge of CBM mechanisms needs to be addressed. The same can be said about government support and training—which is also frequently found to be lacking (Edwards and Mbatia, 2013; Gershberg et al., 2009). Given these issues, some studies have pointed to the importance of preexisting social capital when it comes to implementing CBM (Altschuler and Corrales, 2012; Gershberg et al., 2009; Pryor, 2005), a point to which this paper will return in relation to EDUCO.

Overall, some literature speaks to the possibility of CBM to work well, as in the case of Westhorp et al. (2014) in their rigorous review of studies on CBM. However, despite this possibility, in-depth qualitative research at the community level reveals the many issues that prevent CBM from working as envisioned. Moreover, as noted in the

introduction, the contention of this paper is that, even where CBM is implemented well and effectively, CBM is not likely to be very meaningful in terms of its ability to lead to community empowerment or substantive and positive social change. The basis for this argument is supported both by the literature discussed above and the by the theoretical discussion the next section.

## 3. Systems theory, social capital, and community empowerment

In explaining the success or failure of CBM, authors often point to different dimensions that Gillies (2010) has brought together under the label of a systems framework for examining policy implementation. These dimensions include the technical, the institutional, and the political. The technical dimension refers to the design of a policy or program. The institutional dimension draws attention to (a) organizational capacity, or the "core ability of organizations … to implement the specific changes" (p. 38); (b) organizational resources, meaning resources of a financial, material, or human nature; and (c) institutional framework, or the "existing policies, procedures, norms, incentives, and mental models that may support or encourage reforms" (p. 39). Finally, the political dimension speaks to issues at both the national and local level such as leadership, politics, and the influence of vested interests. Not surprisingly, each of these dimensions is present in the literature on CBM. Indeed, as noted in the previous section, when it comes to the technical aspect, authors have highlighted, for example, the importance of ensuring that CBM programs are well designed, with clearly defined roles for those involved. In terms of the institutional dimension, it was revealed that, at times, teachers assume the functions that should be performed by parents due to a lack of capacity or skill on the part of the latter. The importance of the institutional framework was highlighted since overlapping roles across levels of government can jeopardize the functioning of CBM arrangement. And of course, politics has frequently been an issue in CBM, with researchers emphasizing the presence and influence of patronage networks, elite capture, and gender discrimination, not to mention the reluctance of higher levels of government relinquish power.

The systems perspective is useful because it draws attention to a number of relevant dimensions and the ways that they interact to support or undermine the implementation of a particular policy. However, in addition to acknowledging the usefulness of this perspective, it is also important to recognize its limitations. It is argued here that a primary limitation—and one to attention should be drawn when applying the systems framework to the community level—is the absence of a focus on social relations and social capital. Of course, while it is not new to suggest the importance of social relations and social capital, it is the case that development initiatives often focus on technical interventions without considering the social contexts into which they are introduced. Recognizing this, Woolcock (2001) states that it is important "get the social relations right."

Although (neoclassical) economists have tended to focus on social capital as "social skills, or capacity to negotiate solutions to joint problems," and although social capital as capacity is important when it comes to community-managed programs, scholars have, since the 1ate 1990s, developed three terms for differentiating among types of social capital (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004, p. 654). These terms allow us to go beyond the view of economists—who tend to focus on individual social capital— to draw our attention instead to community dynamics. Namely, these terms are bonding, bridging, and linking capital (discussed further later). In that they complement the systems perspective, by adding the dimension of social relations within and across communities and other levels of government, they are seen as useful. However, as will be demonstrated in this paper, while they can help to illuminate otherwise ignored dimensions of social relations, these concepts are also seen to be insufficient because they focus on describing the status of community relations but do not enable us to think about how to transform those relations. This is a key limitation when it comes to thinking about community-level initiatives in marginalized communities in low-income countries because without considering how to develop social capital, and without working towards that, it is unlikely that programs such as CBM will be meaningful or will meaningfully contribute to community development, in the sense of addressing the structural relationships that contribute to community marginalization in the first places. On the contrary, in marginalized circumstances, CBM-type initiatives may deplete or simply redirect what capacity exists at the community level, thanks to the demands on parents for participation in managerial activities, and without much effect.

As such, an additional suggestion of this paper is the need to combine the social capital lens with the perspective of community organizing and community empowerment (Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Warren and Mapp, 2011). Community organizing literature helps to think about how to develop the social capital necessary for CBM initiatives while also highlighting their shortcomings, that is, while pointing to the need to go beyond technical and narrowly-focused forms of community involvement. This need is underscored by the fact that, while governments certainly have the ability to stimulate the development of significant levels of social capital, doing so is uncommon where there is extreme inequality and where the ruling and elite classes of society have little in common with those in marginalized communities (Narayan, 1999). For reasons that will become clear, the previous comment belies the commitment here to go beyond an intellectual consideration of how social capital can help to facilitate such community-level reforms as CBM to reflect, ultimately, on how communities can develop the kind of social capital that enables them to mobilize and to push for reforms that go beyond isolated, technical solutions. In short, given the focus of this paper on the marginalized and neglected contexts into which CBM tends to be implemented in low-income countries, the suggestion being advanced is that we need to shift from a focus on community involvement to community empowerment. More will be said about this in the implications and conclusion section.

## 4. EDUCO's history: from civil war to global education policy

The origins and trajectory of EDUCO have been addressed in multiple publications (Edwards, 2015, 2018c, 2018d; Edwards et al., 2015). In short, EDUCO emerged first as a pilot program in 1991 and then later that year was supported by a World Bank loan. Significant financial and technical support from the World Bank and other international organizations would continue during the 1990s and 2000s. At the outset, EDUCO was an attractive program because it met the constraints that actors at various levels faced. For the Ministry of Education, the program was desirable, first, because it helped to expand educational access in rural areas, areas which were hardest hit by the civil war (1980–1992), and, second, because it represented an innovation that would help "modernize" the education sector, as the sector was being pressured to do by the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development. For the World Bank, the program represented an opportunity to experiment with an extreme form of decentralization wherein teachers would be hired and fired by the community. Doing so was of interest to the World Bank because it knew that this model—if it was successful—would be lucrative, because the World Bank could sell the idea to other countries in need of loans or technical assistance. Contributing to the bankability of this model was the fact that decentralization and community participation were key ideas in the international development industry during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Edwards and DeMatthews, 2014).

Additionally, it needs to be noted that, at the local level, the EDUCO model built on years of community experience providing education. In the context of civil war (1980–1992), many communities had to organize to offer informal education to their children, since teachers frequently refused, for reasons of personal security, to travel to or work in non-urban areas. In practice, an individual, often with nothing more than a primary level education, would teach classes in exchange for

donations from community members.

But this is only part of the picture at the local level. During the 1970s and 1980s, the tradition of popular education was combined with democratic organization in those communities affiliated with or controlled by those groups who opposed the government—with these groups collectively known as the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) (ADES, 2003; Alvear Galindo, 2002; Cruz, 2004; Hammond, 1998; Montgomery, 1995, pp. 119–122). Popular education is an approach to education that is connected with liberation theology and the teachings of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, both of which stress the need to critically interpret the world, to identify sources of oppression, and then to act against them, with an emphasis not on individual sin but rather on systems that benefit certain groups and marginalize others, such as capitalism. The key point here is that many communities in the northern part of El Salvador, where the FMLN presence was strongest, had many years of experience from the 1970s onward that helped to build social capital. This social capital was facilitated by the Catholic church as priests would organize and work with rural communities during the 1970s. This social capital was arguably further strengthened in the 1980s, during the civil war, as communities not only mobilized to combat the government and its death squads but also experimented with community level government and cooperatives in multiple areas (e.g., agriculture, fishing, etc.). Even though many Salvadorans were forced to flee to refugee camps, they continued to organize themselves democratically and to practice popular education (ADES (Asociación de Desarrollo Económico Social, Santa Marta), 2003; Edwards and Klees, 2012). Thus, when it came to EDUCO, though many FMLN-affiliated communities were resistant to the program (for reasons explained in the next section), they nevertheless had previous experience with community organization and self-governance that had already prepared them for CBM. Of course, this previous experience also confounds claims that attribute higher education outcomes to the EDUCO model, since many of the communities where EDUCO was implemented benefitted from prior practice with community management that had nothing to do with EDUCO (Edwards and Loucel, 2016).

## 5. EDUCO's design: neoliberal community-based management

For all that has been said about EDUCO's history, what still needs to be clarified is the model and thinking behind the program. The EDUCO program was theorized to function in the following way and to have the following impact. First, the education system would be more efficient if the central MINED transferred to the community level the responsibility for hiring and firing teachers, the latter of whom would work on one-year contracts that were renewable at the discretion of the school council that hired them. These school councils, which were known as Community Education Associations (or ACEs, for their name in Spanish), were made up of five elected, volunteer parents from the community. (Note that the schools managed by ACEs tended to be small schools without principals, though one of the teachers would by default assume some of the administrative duties typically associated with the principalship.) Not only was this community arrangement seen as inherently more efficient on a system-wide basis (since parents worked on a volunteer basis and since ACEs would mobilize parents to build and maintain the school without compensation), but, in addition, this arrangement was seen as more efficient because the ACEs would manage the school's budget and would, as such, be responsible for purchasing only the educational materials that the school needed, thereby eliminating waste in purchasing. Moreover, it was thought that this arrangement would promote effectiveness because it would lead to more consistent teacher attendance and improved student test scores, a consequence of the fact that teachers were under the scrutiny of community actors to perform well or else lose their job. The potential of EDUCO to reflect efficiency, effectivneness, and accountability in the ways discussed above is what gave EDUCO its NL character. The MINED, on the other hand, was responsible for the following: facilitating the creation of the ACEs, training the members of the ACEs in administrative and accounting procedures, setting the minimum criteria for teacher selection by the ACEs, designing and providing curricula, and overall coordination, supervision, and monitoring of the program as it was scaled up (Reimers, 1997; World Bank, 1994a).

Clearly, then, and with relevance for this paper, the idea of teacher accountability was central. By turning the local community into an accountability lever, the MINED could effect improved outcomes. The community model of FMLN—imbued as it was with notions of solidarity and critical consciousness—had thus been transformed into a neoliberal experiment inscribed with mechanistic notions of teacher monitoring and punishment. To that end, it bears mentioning that FMLN communities were particularly affected by EDUCO, since this program helped the government, in the post-war context, to incorporate and undermine these communities. (Recall that the war ended in January 1992, shortly after EDUCO began, in early 1991.) This incorporation and undermining was a result of the fact, first, that FMLN communities were desperate for resources and, second, that the government would only agree to support to education in FMLN areas (as in all rural areas) through the EDUCO program. Crucially, not only were they required to join the EDUCO program if they wanted access to government resources, but, by and large, they also had to hire teachers from outside their communities, since their popular education teachers had low levels of education and thus did not have the required credentials. This requirement was a blow to popular education as well as to the broader community vision and project in which it was often embedded.

Finally, before proceeding, it should be noted that the implementation of this policy was not in doubt. All the dominant organizational and political actors agreed on this policy choice, and so it was only a matter of time and effort. Going forward from 1991, when the first education loan was approved, the World Bank provided close monitoring of the program as well as guidance at each step in the process. By 1994, thousands of communities had been integrated into the EDUCO program. Concretely, while the program began in 1991 with six communities, 3 years later it had 2316 teachers and served 74,112 students (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003a). Ten years later, in 2004, these figures had risen to 7381 and 378,208, respectively.[2] Approximately 55% of rural public schools, which make up two-thirds of all schools in El Salvador, would operate under the EDUCO program (Gillies et al., 2010).

## 6. EDUCO's results: macro and micro assessments

### 6.1. General outcomes and system-wide considerations

Before diving into a discussion of the studies that examine the community-level operation of EDUCO, two aspects of the evidence on EDUCO should be highlighted. First, it needs to be pointed out that no fewer than nine quantitative studies exist on EDUCO, with seven being carried out by the World Bank. While the World Bank's studies have played a key role in the global promotion of EDUCO—in that they claimed positive benefits, e.g., in terms of student achievement and student retention—critical reviews of their methods and interpretations have shown that their conclusions are unwarranted (Edwards, 2018b; Edwards and Loucel, 2016). Perhaps more damning is the fact that, in those studies where the shortcomings of the World Bank's models have been addressed, EDUCO has actually been found to have a negative

[2] While the EDUCO program was initially only intended as a strategy to provide education at the preschool level and in grades 1–3, it was subsequently expanded in 1994 to cover through grade 6 and then again in 1997 to cover through grade 9 (Meza et al., 2004). After 2005, even some high schools became EDUCO schools (Gillies et al., 2010).

effect on student achievement (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003b).[3]

Second, a study by Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003a) has addressed EDUCO from a system-wide perspective that examined the dimensions of access, equity, productive efficiency, and social cohesion. Beyond the effects of EDUCO, this study raises serious doubts about the benefits of EDUCO more broadly. To summarize, though EDUCO is attributed with great gains in access, particularly in rural areas where the program was targeted (since these were the areas with highest need, following the destruction of the civil war), there is no way to know if another approach could not have generated the same improvements. On equity, EDUCO is concerning because of the burden that it can impose, considering that the labor contributed by parents was equivalent to work of 805 full-time staff (an amount that equals 28 percent of the work done by the administrative staff of the Ministry of Education). Of course, parental labor is in addition to other equity concerns. The fact that EDUCO operated in communities that were more marginalized and disadvantaged is evident, for example, in that 61 percent were without electricity and 74 percent were without piped water (compared with 15 and 48 percent for traditional public schools, respectively). Productive efficiency has to do with EDUCO's effects in relation to its costs. Although there is no definitive answer in this area, since evaluations have not taken costs into account, it has been shown that, in terms of costs alone, EDUCO was more expensive for the government (contrary to the rhetoric around the program), because it spent more on non-personnel recurrent costs, meaning instructional materials and administrative expenses (e.g., office supplies and transportation costs to carry out administrative tasks with various banks and government agencies) (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003b).[4] On the final dimension, Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003a) not only notes that community participation varies across communities but also concludes that, "while EDUCO purports greater social cohesion, its success depends greatly on existing social cohesion capacity" (p. 162). This is an important point, as will become more clear in the discussion that follows.

### 6.2. A focus on the community level

The preceding commentary helps to situate findings of the handful of studies that have examined EDUCO more closely. All of these studies were produced in the 2000s and early 2010s. However, as with the literature review, the focus is not on the time when the research was conducted but rather on the experience and dynamics of implementation.

In reporting on these studies, the purpose is to shed light on aspects EDUCO that have received less attention, aspects relating to the mechanisms and processes that gave life to EDUCO in practice (for, as the conclusion will further clarify, EDUCO was undone starting in 2009). In order to do this, I rely on six qualitative studies, the majority of which have arguably gone unnoticed by scholars and policymakers, both within El Salvador and in the international literature on EDUCO and CBM. I focus primarily on what is a particularly broad study of EDUCO and its mechanisms at the community level. This study was conducted by Ayala (2005) and investigated EDUCO's operation in 23 communities across 10 of the 14 departments of the country. This study is complemented by five other case studies that either looked very narrowly at EDUCO, for example, in one or a few communities (Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero, 2007; Desmond, 2009; Srygley, 2013) or looked very broadly and drew on case study methods that included focus groups, interviews, and consultations with those who worked with EDUCO at various levels, including the community (Gillies et al., 2010; World Bank, 2009).[5] It is argued that, taken together, these studies provide a window in to the functioning of EDUCO in "average" communities. Following Ayala (2005), the findings presented here are grouped according to (a) EDUCO's institutional structure, (b) community participation, (c) ACE management, and (d) pedagogical aspects.[6]

#### 6.2.1. EDUCO's institutional structure

Generally, EDUCO has been characterized as an administrative reform that—ironically, over time—increased the MINED's bureaucracy. This is particularly so when it came to the payment of teachers, since they were employed by the ACE but the government took care of the payroll, leading to the development of "convoluted" systems for issuing checks to teachers (Gillies et al., 2010). Moreover, the EDUCO office was found to be small, with limited capacity, and with access to few resources to cover the program. This was apparent in the fact that support personnel were responsible for up to 100 ACEs, many of which were geographically difficult to access, with the result being that some ACEs did not see their support personnel even once per year. In those cases where support staff came to the school, they did so without warning the ACEs ahead of time, with the implication being that the ACEs did not meet with the officials, who would simply review and sign the documents kept at the school by the ACEs; moreover, there was no

[3] See Edwards (2018d) for a discussion of Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003b) in contrast with the World Bank's studies.

[4] Discussing the costs of EDUCO is very tricky. In part, this is because the cost of teachers' salaries changed over the years, and because authors have at times made claims about EDUCO teacher salaries without specifying the time period. For example, Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003a) writes—without qualification—that "EDUCO teachers' salaries are 5% higher than those of teachers in the official sector" (p. 161). However, Gillies et al. (2010) note that it was only in 1995, four years after the program started, that EDUCO teachers began to receive a monthly bonus of $40, which resulted in their making "7% above that of the rest of the teachers in the system" (p. 64). Yet it should be noted that EDUCO teachers had limitations in terms of their earning potential since they were not eligible for salary increases associated with years of service, unlike traditional public school teachers. This was a significant disadvantage because traditional public school teachers could earn 50% more beyond the entry-level salary due to automatic increases every five years (Rodriguez, 2003). Moreover, there were additional benefits which EDUCO teachers were not able to access, such as the official retirement plan, a life insurance policy, and access to the health system for teachers (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003b, p. 67), although EDUCO teachers could obtain health care via the Salvadoran Institute for Social Security (Gillies et al., 2010, p. 27). All this is to say that the cost differences to the MINED between EDUCO and traditional public school teachers are not at all clear.More generally, Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003b) finds that there were no differences in total costs across the two types of schools, when taking into account both institutional (meaning recurrent and capital) costs and private (meaning household) costs. However, when looking only at costs borne by the government, Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003b) finds that recurrent costs per student were 22% higher in EDUCO schools, after controlling for school size, average teacher salary, student-teacher ratio, resources available, and region. More specifically, this finding is largely attributable to the fact that non-personnel recurrent costs in EDUCO schools consumed 21% of all recurrent costs, while the same figure for traditional public schools was only 7%. Within the category of non-recurrent costs, the differences are greatest for instructional materials, administrative expenses (including office supplies, photocopies, and other expenses related to office work), and other non-personnel costs (since ACEs are provided with additional funds to pay for transportation costs to carry out the administrative tasks) (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003b). Interestingly, based on the costs insights of her study, Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003b) observes that "unlike traditional schools, EDUCO schools use more than half of non-personnel expenditures to cover

(*footnote continued*)
managerial costs instead of activities directly related to learning" (p. 161).

[5] Not discussed here is Lindo (1998), who studied 36 EDUCO communities. The reason for this is that this study was produced for the World Bank and is seen to suffer from a conflict of interest, since the World Bank was also funding the EDUCO program. The difference between Lindo (1998) and World Bank (2009) is that the latter was produced for an internal audience, that is, it was not meant for public dissemination, and thus the content is judged to be less encumbered by a preoccupation with how the commentary contained therein would affect perceptions of the EDUCO program.

[6] The important issue of teacher treatment is not addressed here due to the focus of this paper. For more on teacher treatment, see Edwards (2018a).

communication with the ACEs about the results of the visit and the findings of the official with regard to the performance of the ACE. Lack of support was compounded by lack of training for program personnel at all levels, which only served to worsen the disconnect between the administrative and pedagogical aspects of the program (Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero, 2007; Ayala, 2005). On this point, it has also been noted that many EDUCO schools were without principals, that many had teachers acting as principals but were not appointed as such; and that those with principals had weak incentives for the principals to support teachers, due to the conflict of authority with the ACE (Gilles et al., 2010, p. 25-26).

#### 6.2.2. Community participation

Community participation tended to be restricted to those parents who were on the ACEs, except for when grade-level meetings were called by teachers, though this trend depended on the history of the community and the pre-existing social capital (Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero, 2007, p. 93–94). Surprisingly, Ayala (2005), like Srygley (2013), also found that most community members did not know what EDUCO was (Ayala, 2005). For their part, ACE members knew that they were expected to stimulate community participation, but they were not sure how to do that, did not received training to that end, and were not entirely sure what participation was supposed to mean in practice. As a result, they focused instead on school construction, raising donations, and involving parents in food preparation, cleaning, repairs, fundraising, as well as accompanying the school principal to visit government agencies related to school business (Ayala, 2005, p. 11; Gilles et al., 2010 p. 24). Though the government also hoped that teachers would offer literacy classes for parents, this happened inconsistently, was judged to be of low quality, and only occurred when convenient for teachers (i.e., during the day, during the week, such that mothers and not fathers could participate) (Ayala, 2005, p. 11).

#### 6.2.3. ACE management

Studies describe ACE members as inexperienced and illiterate (Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero, 2007; Desmond, 2009). The decisions that were taken frequently fell to the two or three ACE members who were active, though these decisions were also influenced by teachers, often at the request of ACE members, who asked for guidance or assistance (Ayala, 2005). While ACE communication was infrequent, casual, and often directed by teachers, ACEs did carry out valuable tasks related to the use of school funds, in addition to school works (e.g., construction, maintenance, reparation), and the acquisition of resources (e.g., computers, TVs, photocopiers, refrigerators, etc.). They also signed teacher checks, made purchases and payments, and sometimes monitored the attendance and the work of teachers (Ayala, 2005).

Yet it was found that the majority of ACE members were not familiar with basic documents such as agreements and contracts; moreover, in many cases they seemed only to sign required documents in order to keep the school running (Ayala, 2005). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given parents' ignorance, ACEs frequently allowed teachers, principals, and technicians from the Ministry of Education to take decisions into their own hands (Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero, 2007; Ayala, 2005; Gillies et al., 2010). Crucially, even the hiring of teachers was driven by the director of the school, by a teacher, or by someone from the departmental office of the Ministry of Education, the latter of whom would send pre-selected teachers to the ACEs for contracting (Ayala, 2005). In the 2000s, out of recognition of the administrative challenges that parents faced, the Ministry of Education created the position of operations agent, who was to help with payroll procedures and the completion of the required reports and forms—related, for example, to income tax payment to the Ministry of Treasury, social security contributions, pension contributions, etc. (Gillies et al., 2010).

Ultimately, ACEs were seen as necessary not because of their ability to hold teachers to account but rather because, "if there is no ACE, there is no school" (Ayala, 2005, p. 14). That is, the ACE became a perfunctory entity that neither contributed to accountability nor functioned in the other ways imagined. Indeed, contrary to the theory and rhetoric around EDUCO, Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero (2007) concluded the following: "The weight of 'management' leaves little space for curricular and pedagogical aspects. There exists the need to return to a comprehensive approach, one that puts administrative and financial aspects in the service of teaching and learning, not the other way around" (p. 120). What stands out here is that this is the same critique so often leveled against public schools. As opposed to operating as independent mechanisms, the ACEs failed to function as envisioned, in part because the Ministry of Education did not provide training or technical assistance, and, in the case of the latter, where it did, technical assistants tended to complete tasks on behalf of the ACEs, as opposed to working to increase their capacity (Ayala, 2005).

#### 6.2.4. Pedagogical aspects

Despite the assumptions about EDUCO's ability to produce relations of accountability that would make teachers work harder and teach better, no studies have been found that examined the actual teaching practices of EDUCO teachers. Rather, multiple studies mentioned the lack of resources in EDUCO schools, including books, the official curriculum, didactic materials, and recreational material (Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero, 2007; Ayala, 2005; Desmond, 2009)—an issue that is also present in traditional public schools (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003b).[7] Teaching quality was further undermined by the fact that there were infrequent visits by pedagogical experts from the Ministry of Education (ranging from 1 to 5 visits per year) (Ávila de Parada and Landaverde de Romero, 2007; Ayala, 2005, p. 30), in addition to the reality of classroom overcrowding (Desmond, 2009). On this point, Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003b), found student-teacher ratios of 60 and 50 for EDUCO and traditional public schools, respectively (as of 1998) (p. 133). A final challenge to mention here is that 39 percent of EDUCO schools had multiple grades (up to three) in the same classroom, and without adequate resources/technology to respond to the associated challenges (SIMEDUCO, 2011). In light of the obstacles detailed in this and the previous sections of this paper, it is unsurprising—and, indeed, should be expected—that the EDUCO model would not lead to better education results. If anything, a close examination of the EDUCO program indicates that what is needed is more attention to the context in which the model is implemented.

## 7. The insights of systems theory

As was shown, EDUCO was found to exhibit serious deficiencies in practice, and for many reasons for which systems theory can account. For example, in terms of the institutional dimension, one can highlight organizational capacity. Here, the studies reviewed found (a) that the EDUCO office within the Ministry of Education was small and with limited capacity, (b) that there were too few staff to support all the ACEs in practice at the departmental level (given high school-to-staff ratios and long travel distances), and, (c) that, frequently, there was no-one to serve as a school director or principal, since leadership responsibilities fell—problematically, as shown—to teachers and to the parents on the school council. On this last point, studies revealed that parental capacity varied widely, with parents at times being characterized as inexperienced and illiterate. As a result, parents often asked teachers, principals, and technicians from the Ministry of Education for

[7] For more on the education system in El Salvador, see Edwards et al. (2017, 2018). For a few points of comparison, consider that 81 percent of traditional public schools had desks compared with 78 percent of EDUCO schools; 41 percent versus 42 percent had math textbooks, and 38 percent versus 32 percent had language texts (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003b).

guidance. This guidance extended to the hiring of teachers, which was the core responsibility of ACEs. In recognition of the struggles of parents, the Ministry of Education created a new support position in the 2000s—the position of operations agent—to help with the paperwork and reports that were required of the ACEs.

Although additional resources were dedicated to EDUCO through the operations agent position, EDUCO always suffered—as most schools in El Salvador—from a lack of organizational resources. Not only did EDUCO schools lack school materials, as discussed in the section on pedagogical aspects, but the core feature of EDUCO, that is, the school councils, were a form of unpaid labor that contributed work equivalent to the labor of 805 full-time staff each year (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003a). Moreover, parents participated in school construction, contributed donations, paid school fees, and helped with food/snack preparation, cleaning, repairs, fundraising, in addition to accompanying the school director on visits to government agencies related to school business. Thus, beyond insufficient material resources, EDUCO hinged on an extractive design that required significant time and energy from parents—and all without contributing anything to the parents in return, an issue to which this paper will return below.

After organizational capacity and resources, the third aspect of the institutional dimension is the institutional framework. Although the technical design of EDUCO provided a simple institutional framework, there were a few issues that arose in practice. While many EDUCO schools were without principals, where there were principals (who also doubled as teachers) they had weak incentives to work with the ACEs because of the conflict of authority (e.g., regarding teacher hiring and firing and spending of the budget) and because of the adversarial dynamic that this conflict could produce. This is a case where the technical design did not mesh well with the practical, institutional incentives. The same is true of the promotion of community participation. Although teachers knew that they were expected to stimulate community participation, they were not sure how to do that, did not receive training to that end, and did not have any incentive to stimulate community participation that would be aimed at the oversight of teachers themselves. Relatedly, in a technical sense, the program documents did not clarify how community participation should have been stimulated; they only state that, in implementing the EDUCO model in a given community, "community disposition to support educational management" would be taken into account (MINED, 1992, p. 7).

Lastly, in terms of institutional framework, it is certainly the case that parents had some incentive to follow the procedures prescribed by the Ministry of Education when it came to paperwork and reporting. This incentive derived from the fact that, if they didn't, they would not receive funding for the school and teacher in their community. However, an issue at the heart of this paper is the fact that EDUCO did not provide much incentive for more than a couple community members to go through the motions. To be sure, the EDUCO program entailed the nominal participation of at least three parents[8] in order to hire teachers and to fill out paperwork (though both of these activities often happened through guidance from teachers or other government staff).[9] But EDUCO did not provide opportunities for more general engagement that could be seen as broadly meaningful to the community. Though the Ministry of Education encouraged teachers to offer literacy classes for parents, this practice, as noted previously, was sporadic, low quality, and inconveniently scheduled for parents. Thus, the point remains that EDUCO was a very narrow and neoliberal form of community participation that was focused on teacher accountability, economic efficiency, and educational effectiveness. Although the thinking behind EDUCO is very seductive, in practice, it represented a shallow and extractive form of community participation.

To wrap up this section, a brief comment on the political dimension is necessary. In terms of leadership, the local level was found wanting, for the reasons discussed above related to ACE capacity and community member deference to teachers and government staff. At the national level, while commitment to EDUCO waxed and waned somewhat over the life of the program, there was no doubt that it was a core feature of the educational preferences of the right-wing party that held power from 1989 to 2009, meaning that the program was never in jeopardy of being cancelled during that time. However, in 2009 the first left-wing president to be elected in the post-war period began the process of undoing EDUCO and converting the schools and teachers to the traditional public school system (see Edwards, 2018d; Edwards et al., 2017 for more). Though EDUCO would be effectively undone by 2011, the program had a significant period of stability (1991–2011) and, indeed, not only continues to live on in the literature on CBM but also continues to be cited and to be revered as a strong form of community participation (Edwards, forthcoming, 2018, 2018c, 2018d; Edwards and Higa, 2018).

## 8. Towards broader notions of social capital and community empowerment

Just as El Salvador has reassessed the desirability of this program, so too should the international community. Moreover, scholars and policymakers should extend this reassessment to how we think about CBM more generally, and particularly in relation to how CBM works in marginalized contexts, which ist he focus of this paper. While both EDUCO and the studies discussed in the literature review section speak to the ability of parents to participate in ways that support the school (e.g., school works, food preparation, resource acquisition, etc.), there are many different issues that come into play which prevent the management of schools by parents. These issues include low levels of education, the higher social position of teachers vis-à-vis parents, gender norms, insufficient training and professional development, and lack of specialized support personnel from the government. Of course, these issues are all in addition to the infrequently addressed assumption that communities are unitary and unfragmented and that they have the ability and desire to be involved in teacher and school management.

This is not to suggest that EDUCO offers no lessons for how to improve the functioning of CBM in practice. That is, if one is concerned with the operation of the technical aspects of CBM initiatives, many lessons can be drawn from the case of EDUCO. These include the following:

- support offices within the MINED should be well-staffed and well-resourced and the support staff should have in their case load a number of schools that can reasonably be visited and supported regularly;
- support at the school level should entail more than a check of the paperwork kept by school committees, and school visits should occur at time that is convenient for the members of the school

[8] The administrative processes required by the Ministry of Education specified the participation of the ACE president, treasurer, and secretary. Though technically the ACEs should have had as well as vice-president and a "vocal," or an additional community representative (MINED, 1995).

[9] This is a key issue of which to be aware, because the ability of parents to hire and fire teachers has been *the* aspect of EDUCO most lauded by international development professionals and education reformers. Thus, although the idea of parents hiring and firing teachers is one that easily attracts attention, especially when it is paired with the neoliberal logic that undergirded the international promotion of the program (see the section herein on EDUCO's design), in practice, we see that the idea breaks down. Considering, on one hand, that teacher turnover was reported to be low, and, on the other, that parents' hiring decisions were often guided by teachers, principals, and governmental staff, one

(*footnote continued*)
is led to conclude that the central mechanism of accountability embedded in the program—and for which it became, and continues to be, so renowned—fundamentally did not work in practice as envisioned.

committees, in order to discuss and address the challenges faced by these committees;
- the evaluations conducted during school visits should be communicated back to the school committees in order to foster improvement;
- administrative procedures should be clearly delineated, should be accompanied by sufficient training for parents, and should avoid duplication of responsibilities across administrative levels;
- training should be maintained over time, since membership on the school committees changes at regular intervals, in order to ensure that successive generations of parents have the skills and information necessary to carry out their duties;
- informational campaigns should be carried out and maintained over time so that community members are aware of the design and details of CBM programs, to avoid general ignorance within communities of the purposes and processes of CBM;
- where teachers are expected to stimulate community participation, the means by which this is supposed to happen should be clarified and communicated to teachers;
- limits should be placed on the duration of time for which parents can serve on school committees, in order avoid elite capture and to encourage participation by new and/or different members of the community;
- there should be clear guidelines that resolve the tension between school committees and school directors, since there can be overlap in terms of the responsibilities assigned to each; and
- in order to ensure program stability over time, consistent political support at the highest levels is necessary.

But beyond the technical aspect, what both EDUCO and previous studies indicate is that we should extend how we think about community management as well as the ways that community capacity and agency can be heightened. This is important not only in order to do CBM better but also in order to support the ability of communities to address the sources of their marginalization. This is a key point, because even where CBM is well implemented, in contexts of marginalization, it not likely to have significant implications for education quality due to the structural issues that prevent adequate resources and support from reaching the community and its schools in the first place. If these broader issues are the focus of our concern, the suggestion of this paper is that we must shift the emphasis from doing CBM better to seeing CBM as one possible element of a broader approach to community building and empowerment.

While some recent work has highlighted the position of school directors in marginalized communities and the roles that they can play in mobilizing community members to contribute to educational quality (DeMatthews et al., 2016), it is argued here that we also need to think about community social capital more broadly. Indeed, not only has previous literature raised the issue of social capital in relation to CBM (e.g., Pryor, 2005; Gershberg et al., 2009), but, in the case of EDUCO, its hidden dimensions (i.e., its unknown foundations in popular education and the struggle of the FMLN) likewise draw our attention to this matter and is a prime area for future research. Put differently, it is argued here that scholars should think beyond the school itself to also examine the processes, policies, conditions, and strategies that can reinforce community capacity building, community empowerment, community well-being, and community social capital more generally. To this end, within (though also beyond) El Salvador, the legacy of liberation theology, popular education, and experimentation with alternative forms of community self-governance become prime issues for further exploration that can expand the conversation around CBM.[10]

Beyond tokenistic and mechanistic notions of community participation in school governance, it is essential that scholars seriously entertain more democratic ways of organizing not only schools but also the communities in which they are embedded. One step in this direction is to consider a different concept of accountability, as authors writing in the area of community building have done. As opposed to focusing on the kinds of accountability emphasized in CBM, where program designers envision (often unrealistically) that parent councils can monitoring school teachers and principals, Wallis (1998), for example, suggests that we consider whether outside actors are accountable to the community. The point is to think of accountability to the community, not using the community to enact a narrow and technical accountability in a school-based intervention, particularly since "an unintended consequence of meeting narrowly defined demands for accountability may be weakening social capital" because of its extractive nature (Wallis, 1998, p. 324).

However, in sociological terms, it is also necessary to go beyond a general conception of social capital as community technical capacity. A change in terminology goes along with the shift in focus advocated above by Wallis (1998). If communities are to have the ability to hold outside actors accountable, multiple transformations in how we think about communities and how communities engage within and beyond their borders are essential. These transformations can be discussed in terms of bonding, bridging, and linking capital—where bonding capital refers to "trusting and cooperative relations between members," bridging capital refers to "relations of respect and mutuality between people who know they are not alike in some socio-demographic sense," and linking capital refers to "norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal, or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society" (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004, p. 654–655). More simply, when it comes to the empowerment of individual communities, networks of communities, and their ability to engage with outside actors from an empowered position, these three dimensions of social capital respectively underscore the need to focus, first, on community cohesion and identity (bonding), second, on the connections and working relationships that exist across communities (bridging) and, third, on the knowledge, capacity, and dispositions necessary to interact with outside actors (whether from governmental or non-governmental organizations) in ways that will help the community work towards its goals, as opposed to responding only to the interventions and programs proposed by others.

Of course, thinking in this way about community participation—both within and beyond education—goes hand-in-hand with changes in how governmental offices, development professionals, and international agencies work with communities. While significant work has been done that expands the focus from community participation to community empowerment, particularly by scholars working in the area of community organizing (Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Warren and Mapp, 2011), significant changes remain to be made on multiple fronts, from the concepts employed in making policy to the strategies deployed in working with communities. The present paper has represented an effort to make progress on both fronts by looking closely at a well-documented and well-known example of CBM in practice and by suggesting that we revise how we approach community participation in ways discussed in this section. Learning from EDUCO and shifting the focus from CBM to community empowerment is imperative because CBM initiatives in development contexts tend to be implemented in marginalized contexts where participation of community members in CBM will not be meaningful and where CBM will not have meaningful implications for the community more generally. That is, even when CBM is implemented faithfully and even when it reflects the intentions of development professionals, it is not clear that such programs—grounded as they are in technical logic and limited as they are in their focus on specific managerial functions—hold any promise for meaningful community empowerment or significant social transformation that address the structural relationships within and beyond the community (e.g.,

[10] For a few pieces that attempt to contribute in this area, see ADES (2003), Alvear (2002), Cruz (2004), and Hammond (1998).

sexism, racism, classism, neglect of marginalized communities, underfunding and under-resourcing of education, etc.) that contribute to their marginalization. At best, CBM can be thought of as one element of broader efforts to work towards community organizing, community building, and community empowerment.

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