



*The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development*

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# A MULTIPURPOSE MODEL OF NONFORMAL EDUCATION: THE MOTHER-CHILD EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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*The following article by Kagıtcıbası, Bekman and Göksele illustrates how an applied research project carried out with scientific rigor by academic researchers can, over time, have an important effect on policy. It can provide the basis for a new and large-scale initiative, and for cooperation between governmental and non-governmental and international organizations. Although the research results presented here are of interest in and of themselves, our main purpose in including the article in this issue of the Notebook is to show how these results have been translated into action. The first section of the article describes the original research project and its extremely encouraging results; the second section indicates how the design of the original project was modified and fashioned into an action programme.*

In Turkey, the Mother-Child Education Programme<sup>1</sup> (MCEP) has introduced a new approach to early childhood education, which targets and has many positive benefits for both the mother and the child. Born from a research project conducted over a ten-year period, it has advanced to form the basis of a major government educational policy. It has also led to the establishment of the

Mother-Child Education Foundation and has served as the incentive for a new collaboration between UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and the Mother-Child Education Foundation.

The Mother-Child Education Programme originated in a desire to provide early enrichment to children from disadvantaged environments and to strengthen their immediate environment. It thus targeted the enhancement of the overall development of preschool-aged children within their immediate social context. The Mother-Child Education Programme, as a model of nonformal education, is based on a two-tiered approach which aims to provide early enrichment to the young child and training and support to the adult (mother). The dual focus of intervention is both the positive development of the child and the empowerment of the mother. Thus it involves both preschool and adult education.

In the literature it is well documented that intervention programmes, especially for women in development, should be multipurpose, directed at the intersecting needs of women and children. (Engle 1980; Evans 1985) Multipurpose programmes are found to create greater motivation for participation. Programmes that integrate different components such as family planning, mother-child health, nutrition and school preparation, are found to be more effective than programmes with a singular purpose. (Myers 1992) The Mother-Child Education Programme is an example of a successful multipurpose programme.

The state of early childhood development and education programmes in Turkey calls for cost-effective programmes which will reach large numbers of children from socioeconomically disadvantaged environments who are in need of early education. Early education in this instance can help to bridge the gap between these children and their more advantaged peers when they start their schooling. Similarly, women with a low level of education, low status in the family and with low contribution to economic life deserve priority. Community-based and culturally-sensitive multipurpose programmes have a higher chance of being accepted and successfully applied on a large scale when they are designed to offer solutions to social problems in the country.

As mentioned above, an *empowerment* model underlies the Mother-Child Education Programme. The goal is to offer children and mothers enrichment, by providing support for their already existing strengths and building on them at both the individual and family level. This contrasts with *deficiency* models that focus on parents' shortcomings. The mother is the key figure in this context since she is empowered to provide sustained improvement in her child's as well as her own well-being.

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The programme is a community-based intervention, capitalizing upon women's networks through the use of group discussion sessions. Especially in sociocultural contexts where close-knit family and community ties exist, as in Turkey and many parts of the developing world, it makes sense for an enrichment programme to build on these ties as support mechanisms. (Kagitcibasi 1988) These mechanisms would be expected to continue to provide support to the women after the completion of the programme.

### *The Turkish Early Enrichment Project*

The origins of the Mother-Child Education Programme lie in the Turkish Early Enrichment Project, a research project conducted between 1982 and 1986 by Cigdem Kagitcibasi, Diane Sunar and Sevda Bekman of Bogazici University. (Kagitcibasi, Sunar & Bekman 1988) The project, involving early childhood enrichment and mother training in low income areas of Istanbul, set out to assess the impact of an optimal combination of educational preschool care and home intervention on the overall development of socioeconomically disadvantaged urban children. Both centre-based and home-based enrichment were studied, separately and in combination.

The study was conducted in five low-income shantytown areas of Istanbul where the majority of the population were blue-collar workers or involved in the marginal economy. The population was mostly of rural origins, having migrated to the city in search of employment. The main reason for the choice of these areas was the existence of factories employing over 300 women and thus required by law to provide a child care unit. Six daycare centres catering to low-income children were chosen. The children were three and five years of age. Of the sample, one third of the children were enrolled in educational nursery schools, one third in custodial care centres and the other third in home care with no preschool education. Some of the children in each group were randomly selected and given a home intervention in the form of a Mother Training Programme.

Mother training had two elements: a programme to foster social and personality development of the child and a programme to foster the cognitive development of the child. The former was addressed through group discussions on topics designed to increase the mother's sensitivity to the child's social and emotional needs and to help her to foster the child's social and personality growth. The programme to foster cognitive development was a Turkish translation and adaptation of HIPPI (Home Intervention Programme for Preschool Youngsters) developed by the Research Institute of Innovation in Education at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. (Lombard 1981) As a home-based enrichment approach, the programme focused on three main areas of cognitive development (language, sensory and perceptual discrimination skills and problem-solving) with materials provided for educational activities in each of these areas.

In the second and third years of the project, the Mother Training Programme consisted of biweekly home visits and group meetings that were held on alternate weeks. The programme to foster social and personality development of the child took place in the fortnightly group meetings through guided group discussions. The topics in the first year were based on children's

health, nutrition and creative-play activities. In the second year, the stress was on mother-child interaction.

The original project lasted four years (1982–1986). In the first year of the project, baseline assessments were carried out with mothers and children using developmental tests, observations and interviews. In the second and third years of the project, the intervention was introduced to a randomly selected group of the mothers, and in the fourth year reassessments were conducted. These fourth-year assessments were used to determine the short-term effects of the programme. Six years after the end of the original study (and ten years after the start of the project) a follow-up study was conducted in 1991–1992 to assess the long-term effects of the project. As detailed below, the findings have been positive and impressive.

## *Effects of the Applied Research Project*

### *Short-term effects*

The project set out to study the overall development of the child, rather than only his/her cognitive development, as is commonly done. For this reason a variety of assessment measures were employed. Determination of the results of the four-year study was based on the cognitive, personality and social development of the child, the mother's orientation to the child and direct effects on the mother.

#### ■ EFFECTS ON THE CHILD

The results were striking: significant differences were found in cognitive development between children whose mothers had undergone mother training and those who had not. Those who had benefited most were the children in custodial or home care, rather than the children who were already attending an educational care centre, suggesting a "ceiling effect" of educational enrichment. Significant differences were found between children whose mothers had been trained and those who hadn't on various cognitive measures: IQ scores, school grades, standardized tests of academic achievement and subtests of Weschler intelligence tests. Children whose mothers were trained also exhibited positive effects on their social and personality development, displaying less dependency, less aggressiveness, better self-concept and better school adjustment.

#### ■ EFFECTS ON THE MOTHER

The benefits of the programme were also reflected in the mother. Trained mothers were more verbal, less punitive, and more responsive to their children and had greater interaction with their children. Mothers who had been trained valued autonomous behaviour of the child more than the nontrained mothers and were more cognitively stimulating. A great deal of research and theory in developmental psychology has stressed the importance of the above orientations in childrearing and discipline for the cognitive, moral and personality development of the child.

Not only did the Mother Training Programme have effects on the mother's style of interaction with her child, thus leading to changes in the child's environment and behaviour, it also had

direct effects on the mother herself. Trained mothers reported a different pattern of interaction with their husbands than nontrained mothers. Trained mothers were more likely to share decision-making with their spouses on subjects such as birth control and child discipline than nontrained mothers. They also enjoyed a greater degree of communication and role-sharing with their spouses, the latter being evident, for example, in husbands helping with household chores.

### *Long-term effects*

A study of the literature on intervention programmes has shown that while short-term gains in cognitive ability have been observed, these gains were found to dissipate in the longer-term. Mother training introduced in this project attempted to overcome this problem by initiating changes in the mothers' behaviour, expectations and values in order to constitute changes in the child's environment. The dissipation of early gains found in intervention studies in the literature has been due at least partly to exclusive concentration on cognitive skills and focusing only on the child, abstracting him/her from his environment. (Kagitcibasi 1983; Bronfenbrenner 1974) In this way the child is left to rely on his/her limited resources when the intervention ends. When the child's environment is supported and changed, however, it can in turn help sustain the gains.

Although the short-term results of the project were very encouraging, only long-term investigations could indicate whether mother empowerment can ensure that, with continued support from the mother, the maintenance and extension of the positive development of the child brought about by the intervention programme can be sustained.

#### ■ LONG-TERM EFFECTS ON THE CHILD

In 1991, six years after the completion of the intervention programme a follow-up study was conducted to investigate the long-term effects of the project. Of the original sample of 255, 225 mothers were found; 217 mothers and their children participated in the follow-up study. Home intervention in the form of mother training was found to have sustained effects. A most important finding had to do with school attainment. At the time of the follow-up study compulsory schooling was five years in Turkey. Therefore in low-income areas especially, those children who are not successful in school drop out after they finish primary school (five years). Continuing with schooling is an important factor for future success and social mobility. Of the young adolescents (13–15 years of age), 86% of the mother-trained group were still in school, compared with 67% of the nontrained group, the difference being highly significant ( $p = .002$ ).

The children in the mother-trained group surpassed the nontrained group on a vocabulary test, showing higher cognitive capacity.<sup>2</sup> Also, the children in the mother-trained group showed better school performance than the nontrained group over the five years of primary school. They also manifested more positive attitudes related to schooling and better self-concept. For example they felt that they could be the best in class if they studied hard, that the teachers and they, themselves, were pleased with their school performance; and they gave fewer nonacademic reasons for continuing in school, such as "having nothing better to do" or "parents wanted them to attend school", than the nontrained group.

The adolescents whose mothers had been trained reported more positive retrospective memories of their mothers (from childhood). They remembered their mothers as talking to them, being more appreciative of them, more consoling and less likely to use physical punishment. These adolescents also showed better social integration and autonomy, in terms of their ideas being accepted by their friends and making their own decisions.

More children of the trained mothers than the nontrained mothers believed that they were prepared for school at the beginning. Since two-thirds of both groups had been in preschool, this difference between the trained and nontrained group is likely to be due to mother training. This suggests that the early family experiences of the mother-trained and nontrained groups had been quite different, leading to more positive long-term outcomes for the mother-trained children.

#### ■ LONG-TERM EFFECTS ON THE MOTHER

Mother training resulted in a positive change in the mother, both in empowering the mother to provide a more supportive and stimulating environment for the overall development of the child and also in long-term benefits to the mothers themselves. In terms of mother-child interaction, mothers who had been trained reported having better relations with their children, such as understanding the child, talking problems over with the child, and not beating the child as much as the nontrained group. They also had better family relations and had higher educational expectations for their children. These results from the mother interviews confirmed the adolescents' self-reports.

#### ■ DIRECT EFFECTS ON MOTHERS

Trained mothers were more likely to have the last word in making decisions (48%) than untrained mothers (38%). A significant difference was found between the two groups indicating the higher status of trained mothers in the home, as measured by an index combining shared decision-making, communication and role-sharing with their spouses (also used in the fourth year of the original study). Trained mothers were found to read newspapers and magazines more than untrained mothers, employed contraceptive methods more than untrained mothers and were more knowledgeable on issues of family planning. These mothers seemed to utilize available services more and had a better evaluation of their economic situation than untrained mothers.

Thus the programme seemed to enable women to communicate more effectively with their children, to prepare more positive environments for their overall development and success, as well as to achieve better relations with their family and to increase their status in their family.

### ***Discussion of the Effects of the Project***

The long-term effects of the project seem tied to its holistic and contextual focus. Given the key role of the mother in the utilization of resources for the production of family health and well-being, especially regarding the development of children, it makes good sense to target the mother for intervention. The programme results indicate how nonformal early childhood education and parent education can be integrated and how the mother can be empowered to promote her child's as well as her own well-being.

The project built and strengthened women's networks through the group discussion sessions. These networks were expected to continue, providing support to the women after completion of the programme. Another reason for the sustained effects is the nature of the changes in women and in their interactive styles with their children and spouses. The Mother Training Programme provided the participating mothers with better interpersonal skills; these newly acquired skills helped them to solve problems more effectively, which can be expected to take root and be self-sustaining. (Kagitcibasi 1992)

The follow-up study of the project, especially, has far-reaching policy implications. Most important, it has constituted a crucial test of the value of the original research project as a model for further replication. In countries like Turkey, where there is a need for large-scale early support and training programmes, it has not often been clear which approach is most effective, due partly to the lack of long-term evaluation studies. (Evidence is often based on Western experience which may or may not be generalizable to different cultural contexts.) The programme offered an example of the great potential of a culturally sensitive, contextual approach, rather than an individualistic approach, in supporting child (and mother) development. Specifically, the child was reached *in context*, through the mother, and the mother was reached *in context*, through the community-based mothers discussion groups. Such parent-family-oriented, interactive learning experiences promote both the child's overall development and the empowerment of the woman since the context is mobilized to support the target persons.

While the aim of the original project was to investigate whether mother training constituted a useful supplement to educational nursery schools in order to create a "comprehensive preschool education," the results of this study, based on the variables measured, suggest that centre-based intervention and home-based intervention programmes may be considered as alternatives to each other rather than viewing them only as complementary elements.

In countries like Turkey where state resources are directed toward formal education, concentrating on primary schooling, preschool education is bound to have low priority. In Turkey, only 7% of the children attend any type of preschool before entering primary school. Therefore there is a need to develop cost-effective alternative models to formal preschool education. Adult education programmes can be utilized for this purpose. They can help to overcome problems encountered due to educational and economic disadvantage. This is important, considering Turkey is a country which does not have a widespread system of early childhood education, although it has a very large number of children who are at risk of developmental deficits because of socioeconomic disadvantage. Since most preschool programmes are located in the larger cities and are mainly private tuition-charging centres, rural children and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged sectors have limited access to preschool education, although they need early enrichment the most. (Bekman 1990) Centre-based educational programmes, while producing desired effects in terms of the child's cognitive and social benefits, are expensive to implement on a large scale.

Beside the positive effects of the Mother-Child Education Programme, the cost effectiveness of the model also makes it attractive for wide-scale use. Home intervention is a highly effective and relatively low-cost strategy for early enrichment. Expensive institutional investment is not

required, as the most important resource used is the human resource. Furthermore, being community-based, the Mother-Child Education Programme has the inherent flexibility to benefit from the indigenous culture and to be culturally relevant.

Through enriching the child's environment, this approach has the potential to promote self-sustaining changes and growth.

## *From Project to Programme*

In order for the research project to move beyond its limited status to application on a broader scale, a number of things had to happen. First, the content needed to be adjusted so it could be more easily administered and could be applied in various contexts and with groups with differing needs. To this end, a new Cognitive Training Programme was developed to replace HIPPY. (Lombard 1981) The new training programme (Kagitcibasi and Bekman 1991) was condensed into a span of 25 weeks and was directed specifically at children in the year before they begin formal schooling. This revised model was tried out separately in both Ministry of Education and nonministry settings even before the research project ended, and was further adjusted based on these experiences.

The revised organization and content involve 25 weekly group meetings of around two hours duration. Each group is made up of approximately twenty mothers. The Mother Enrichment part of the programme is realized in the form of group discussions guided by a trained group leader during the first part of every week's meeting. The mothers are expected to attend every week and they do make an effort to do so, which is a constructive action on behalf of the mother. The mother's participation in the discussions teaches her to develop effective communication with the child, increasing her sensitivity to the child's needs, aimed to equip her to promote the child's healthy physical and psychosocial development. The mothers ask questions, generate answers and express opinions related to their own experiences in the discussions, guided by the group leader. Group dynamics techniques are used. There is not a unidirectional flow of information, rather learning takes place through an exchange of real-life experiences and self-expression is encouraged. In the first half of the 25 weeks, the topics for the group discussions focus on children's development, health, nutrition and creative play activities. In the second half, the emphasis is on discipline, mother-child interaction, communication, expressing feelings and the needs of the mother.

A further component has been added in the past year. During the group meetings and following the weekly Mother Enrichment topics, the group leaders direct the discussion to a specific topic in family planning and health. The topics range from birth control methods to problems that can be encountered in pregnancy and childbirth.

Following the group discussions, mothers are taught how to use that week's Cognitive Training Programme. Thus in the second part of the group meeting, the group breaks up into smaller groups of four or five, headed by a mother's aide (who is a part of the group but has completed the worksheet with her child the previous week). Each small group role-plays through the worksheets and storybooks in order to be able to use the Cognitive Training Programme

effectively with their children at home during the week. Each week's materials contain various exercises to be used by the mother with the child each day. The group leader (Ministry of Education adult-education teacher) conducts home visits now and then to ensure the Cognitive Training Programme is being implemented correctly and to assist with problems that may be encountered with the child.

In addition to adjusting the actual organization and content of the Mother-Child Education Programme, it was necessary, in order for the project to become a larger programme, to disseminate and publicize results of the Mother Enrichment component of the project. Accordingly, in collaboration with the mothers participating in the Mother Training Programme, an eleven-session television series was prepared. The participating mothers volunteered to take part in the small group discussions which were televised on the state television channel. These television programmes were well received.

In order to extend the programme, additional funding and a continuing institutional base were required. Based on the research results and television series, it was possible to obtain limited funding from various groups, including parent-teacher associations, women's groups and private businesses. With these funds additional applications of the mother training programme were carried out as a public service, mainly in Istanbul.

In 1991, additional advances were made with the collaboration of UNICEF and the Ministry of Education. A major breakthrough occurred when the Mother Enrichment component of the project was adopted into the Adult Education Programme of the Ministry of Education, targeted at training childminders. The project team trained Adult Education teachers and the revised training manual was published by UNICEF.

Also in 1991, a foundation belonging to a private bank, the Finance Foundation, began providing financial support for the programme in Istanbul in Adult Education Centres attached to the Nonformal Education Division of the Ministry of Education. In two years, over 700 mothers in Istanbul participated in the programme. During 1992 and 1993, with the collaboration of UNICEF and the Finance Foundation, the programme was applied in Sanliurfa in the less-developed southeastern region of Turkey to over 700 women and young girls. Another replication of the project was begun in 1992, when group leaders were trained in the Netherlands to work with Turkish workers there. In addition, the Mother Enrichment component of the project is currently being applied on a pilot basis in two early enrichment programmes carried out by Averroes Foundation.

These successes and adaptations have helped to promote formation of a privately funded nonprofit organization called the Mother-Child Education Foundation (MCEF), founded in August 1993 with the initiative and support of the finance Foundation. The aim of the MCEF is to "contribute by means of educational, social economic and financial activities to the development of modern Turkey." The Foundation not only finances the programme but also trains teachers, prepares material and collaborates with the Ministry of Education and other organizations for the expansion of the programme across Turkey.

Continuing collaboration between the Nonformal Education Division of the Ministry of Education and the MCEF has allowed the programme to expand. The Nonformal Education Division is responsible for Adult Education centres in each district in the country. Adult Education teachers are trained by the MCEF to apply the Mother-Child Education Programme in their own districts, mainly in low-income shanty town and working class areas. The aim is for the Nonformal Division Ministry staff to be responsible for the implementation of the programme at various levels of the organizational structure. This will allow the number of beneficiaries to increase as the training of staff currently being undertaken by the Foundation can be assumed by Ministry staff. This will also quicken the process of training, reduce costs and set in place a decentralized system.

In the past three years this collaboration has led to participation of over 3,000 mother-child pairs, and in 1993–1994, the programme was applied in ten provinces across Turkey. In 1994–1995, expansion to 20 provinces and 4,000 mother-child pairs was planned with the Ministry of Education. In addition, a collaboration with the General Directory of Social Services and the Child Protection Agency (SSCPA) attached to the Office of the Prime Minister has led to pilot projects in Izmir and Ankara. The intention is to implement the programme in twelve districts in 1994–1995.<sup>3</sup>

The process that has been described above, still in progress, is an example of a research project leading to a national programme. It is also an example of scientific research affecting public policy. With the help of the Mother-Child Education Programme, the rather narrow definition of preschool education in Turkey in terms of formal centre-based preschools has expanded to include nonformal community and home-based early enrichment. In terms of the goals and targets of nonformal education, also, there has been an expansion in scope to combine early childhood education and care with parent (adult) education and to combine child development goals with women's empowerment, health and family planning. Finally, we also have here an example of effective cooperation among a university, a Ministry (government) and international (UNICEF) and local agencies (Mother-Child Education Foundation). It is clear that programmes have much to gain and are more likely to go to scale with such cooperation. The Mother-Child Education Programme promises to contribute to human development and wellbeing in Turkey.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The original four-year project was funded by the International Development Research Centre of Canada; the follow-up study was funded by the Population Council (ME Awards Program).

<sup>2</sup> The vocabulary test was the standardized WISC-R, based on Turkish word counts; mean score for trained group: 45.62 and nontrained group: 41.92.

<sup>3</sup> The Expansion of the Mother-Child Education Programme is financed by the World Bank through the Ministry of Education in a three-year funding plan.

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