



The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

DIAGNOSIS AND SOLUTIONS: EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TRANSITIONS AND LINKAGES IN DIVERSE COUNTRIES

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Little research exists on the effectiveness of transition support programs, and the dearth of programs that have been systematically implemented and evaluated points to this as a significant lack. Nonetheless, a number of professionals and practitioners from around the world have recognized the problems all children face as they encounter the social and intellectual challenges of primary school. Within their own systems they have attempted to create programmes that facilitate the transitions children are faced with as they

move from home to an early childhood programme and/or into primary school. In the following pages we will present several examples of solutions that have been proposed or tried.

Some Experts Give Their Opinions on the Problems and Offer Possible Solutions

Kenya

In Kenya, discussions on the quality of both preschool and primary school education have led to an awareness of the importance of providing for the transition between the two. Discrepancies between preschool and primary school methodologies have been identified as possible impediments to children's success in school. In line with this, suggestions are made about ways to improve existing structures which provide support to children entering primary school and, perhaps more importantly, to create new structures which can bridge the gaps between preschool and primary school.

■ A DISCUSSION OF THE LINK BETWEEN THE PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM AND THE 8-4-4 STANDARD ONE CURRICULUM IN KENYA

By Swafiya Said, Madrasa Resource Centre, Mombasa, Kenya

Hanifa: How do you like your new school?

Ghaniya: I don't like the new school at all.

Hanifa: Why don't you like it?

Ghaniya: It's so big and noisy.

Hanifa: Keep on smiling and you will get used to it.

Ghaniya: But I don't like the teacher, she shouts and bangs on the table. Do you know that the teacher does not know how to welcome guests? She beat me on my first day, and I was not the one making noise.

The above exchange took place after the first day of primary school for a six-year-old in Kenya. Ghaniya, an intelligent little girl who had progressed very well in preschool, is quick to respond to the difficulties she encountered on her first day of primary school, difficulties that can make the entrance into primary school a negative experience. Ghaniya's first exposure to primary school is, unfortunately, typical, and, studies indicate, might well influence the rest of her school years. Encountering such a negative learning environment during the primary years can create obstacles which block future success in school.

The new and vastly different environments children encounter upon entering primary school often become handicaps to their performance and negatively influence their desire to stay in school. Among the drastic changes children encounter in moving from one environment to the

next are: changes in attitudes—on the part of both teachers and parents; changes in expectations; changes in classroom arrangement (there may be rows of desks instead of small tables); an increase in the number of subjects; and changes in the learning processes. All of these can create a large, unintended gap which can hinder the success, or at least the expected progress, of many children.

Ghaniya's responses serve as an illustration of the gap that exists between the different expectations teachers have of children in the pre-primary school and of those in the primary school. Parents also tend to expect more from their primary-school-age children than they do from their preschool age children. One example of this is that parents will carry or walk preschool children to preschool, but once the children are in primary school the attitude changes to, "now you are a big boy—you can walk to school on your own."

Education is a continuous, lifelong process, which starts as soon as one is born. Since preschool education is the basis of formal learning, special attention must be given to its implementation and in determining how it can help children to develop. The following is an overview of preschool provision in Kenya, including its history, its curriculum, and its objectives. This is followed by a discussion of primary school objectives. Finally, the methods and learning processes of both the preschool and primary level curriculum will be compared, leading to a discussion of the perceived gaps in classroom conditions. The attitudes and commitment of teachers at both levels of schooling are also mentioned. And finally, linkages to bridge gaps between preschool and primary education are suggested.

Preschools in Kenya. The existing system of providing for early childhood education is community based, in the sense that it is managed and run by the communities through their committees. Seventy-five percent of the preschools in Kenya are community owned. Kenyan communities are diversified, and therefore, so are the preschools. There are many different types of preschools in Kenya established by different groups or organizations, such as religious organizations, employers, estates or parastatal bodies, women's groups, voluntary organizations (e.g., Rotary Club, Red Cross, etc.), private communities, individual foundations, and local authorities.

In Kenya, the educational philosophy behind the building of schools is based on the concept and practices of a Harambe spirit—pulling together. Through the Harambe philosophy, communities are strongly encouraged to establish more preschools to keep up with the rapidly growing demand for them. Although the majority of the community based and private preschools have no uniform curriculum, there are national guidelines which they can follow.

The "Guidelines for Preschool Education in Kenya"(1984), issued by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), is a small book of 70 pages. Within the Guidelines, KIE has done a very good job of providing the basis for the preschool course in the following ways: in defining the curriculum; in selecting what is to be learned and taught; in determining how the material should be learned and taught; in developing guidance on how to implement the curriculum in varying school contexts; and in providing for types of pupils, social situations, and physical environments.

The main goal for Kenyan preschools, as stated in the Guidelines, is "to prepare and equip the youth to be happy and useful members of Kenya society". The guidelines suggest that the school should enable children to develop physical skills, the concept of numbers, cognitive skills, knowledge of their environment, the ability to express ideas in words, and to gain awareness of temporal and spatial relationships.

The following are objectives for preschool education in Kenya:

- to provide an informal education geared toward developing the child's mental capabilities and his or her physical growth;
- to make it possible for the child to enjoy living and learning through play;
- to enable the child to build good habits for effective living as an individual and a member of a group;
- to enable the child to appreciate his cultural background and customs;
- to foster the spiritual and moral growth of the child;
- to develop the child's imagination, self-reliance, and thinking skills;
- to enrich the child's experience so as to enable him/her to cope better with primary school.

There are two sections in the Guidelines. Section I includes notes to teachers on important issues like: understanding children, the child at school, general teaching methods, provision of material and equipment, organizing and arranging a classroom, programme of activities, and collection of simple language skills. In Section II, pre-school activities, such as language development and pre-literacy activities, pre-number activities, environmental activities, social activities, pre-science activities, creative activities, art and craft, music, and outdoor and indoor activities are provided so that even teachers who have not gone through any training can have a good idea of what preschool learning is all about. However, while the guidelines serve as a curriculum in those schools with teachers trained through the national training programme, the majority of preschool teachers have not seen them, and therefore do not rely on the guidelines for assistance. (Currently there are over 26,625 preschools teachers—2/3rds of whom have not been trained—serving over 800,000 children.)

The Ideal Preschool. The ideal preschool provides for the all around development of children, namely stimulation—intellectual, physical, social, emotional and spiritual. The ideal school is a place where:

- Teachers believe that children come to them with a wealth of knowledge from home, knowledge upon which teachers need to build. This helps teachers to establish a warm relationship between school and home.
- Teachers are friendly, approachable, supportive, and ready to facilitate children's learning, while bearing in mind that learning takes place through interaction with an interested adult. This will only happen when teachers provide an informal and secure atmosphere.

- The school provides enough learning experiences and materials so that the children may explore their environment. Since the children are ready to find out about the world, they ask questions and relate experiences, they do things, they discover, they try out things and make their own decisions. They are supported by their teachers in all of these experiences.
- There are opportunities for children to mix and socialize freely with peers.
- Children are treated as individuals and thus their individual needs are taken care of. Their questions are always answered satisfactorily. They are not at any stage ridiculed.
- Children also learn to work in groups, and therefore teachers have prepared varied group activities so that children can learn to contribute to a joint outcome. Also, working in groups encourages peers to help others who may be having difficulty. The groups help teachers to identify group dynamics and leaders.

To sum up—when one enters an ideal preschool, one should find happy children fully involved in their activities [with murmurs] and have difficulty in spotting the teacher as she too should be fully engrossed working with a group in one corner of the classroom. This is an imaginative kind of a preschool!

Preschools in reality. Very few preschools fit this description, despite the KIE guidelines. This kind of preschool is the expectation, not the rule. The reality of the fact is that current preschool practice does not match this ideology. Instead of encouraging children to ask and answer questions, or attempting to interact with the children as much as possible, teachers spend a lot of time keeping children quiet and ridiculing them. This behaviour on the part of the teacher instills fear in the children and destroys their confidence. Most preschools in Kenya are run by teachers with firm ideas on discipline and behaviour. They have large enrollments, often with one class of up to 40 children to a single teacher, and little or no equipment or learning materials. Children have no opportunities to discover and explore or even move around the room.

Children from different communities undergo different types of preparation to enter state primary schools. The highly commercialized, private preschools use traditional teaching methods of repetition, recitation, and memorization, and lots of emphasis is placed on written tasks. Other private pre-schools with trained teachers are more flexible, with some effort toward play and activity-based methods. Other preschools are just providing a safe environment and nutritious food. In other words, they are just baby-sitting services. Most of the community based preschools with trained teachers using KIE guidelines are quite progressive in the sense that they provide a conducive learning atmosphere with a substantial amount of guided and free choice activities. Teachers are approachable and teach for the purpose. Sometimes they use traditional methods and sometimes child-centred methods; overall, they are flexible teachers.

The Primary School. Primary schools in Kenya have gone through many changes since independence. There was a significant change from the 7-4-2-3 structure (7 years of primary education, 4 years of secondary education, 2 years of higher secondary, 3 years of university education), to the 8-4-4 system (8 years of primary school, 4 years of secondary education and 4 years of university education). The 8-4-4 curriculum, established in 1985, brought about great changes in the methods used in the teaching/learning process and in the assessment of children.

More subjects were included in the curriculum content to cater to children who would continue on to secondary schools, as well as to those who would end their education at the primary level.

The 8-4-4 philosophy is to build self-reliant, patriotic, responsible individuals with critical thinking skills to serve the nation. Thus the subjects offered are both vocational and academic. The curriculum emphasizes active child participation in which children become partners in their learning and build upon their knowledge. The 8-4-4 curriculum encourages children to be independent. Teachers are expected to give children ways to find out things for themselves, to experiment, and to discover so that they act intelligently.

Teachers are the key to implementation of the curriculum. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes are very important and determine what they do in the classroom. The 8-4-4 system came into existence "overnight" and most teachers were not prepared for it. Many are not convinced of the value of participation and active learning. Teachers consider themselves to be knowledge transmitters through lectures and the use of chalkboards. They see children as passive receivers. In addition to inadequately prepared teachers, there are many other factors which have contributed to the ineffective implementation of the curriculum, for instance, the large class enrollments and the acute shortage of instructional materials and teaching aids.

Gaps between Preschool and Primary School. There are significant gaps between what happens in the preschool and what happens at the primary level on a number of dimensions. For example, in terms of curriculum, as set out by the Ministry of Education, the Standard 1 class has a total of 13 subjects, as compared to 6 subjects in preschool. The preschool subjects are mathematics, language, environmental studies, physical education, music, and creative art, while in Standard 1 the subjects are English language, Kiswahili, science, GHC (geography, history and civics), physical education, religious education, mathematics, music, mother tongue, and arts and crafts.

Another difference is in teacher attitudes and practices. It is difficult to find any degree of commitment or job satisfaction among primary school teachers, but there appears to be a substantial proportion of preschool teachers who are relatively committed to their job and derive some satisfaction in teaching and therefore continue, in spite of the constraints. Primary teachers are not practicing child-centred approaches. There have been very few changes in the classroom methodologies and learning processes despite what the 8-4-4 curriculum advocates. Schools in Kenya are what John Holt (1994) described as "a place where children learn to be stupid". Children are afraid to make mistakes and they lack confidence to trust their own perceptions. In contrast to this are the progressive preschool graduates who are not afraid of making mistakes. They are responsive, spontaneous, and quite confident in their answers.

Another dimension on which preschools and primary schools differ is in terms of level of formality. Regardless of the particular type of preschool, all preschools have some element of informality in their approach. Most preschoolers spend some time in free play, engage in lots of storytelling and songs, and in activities like sand and water play. But in Standard 1, children are introduced to a lot of written work. They are expected to sit still in their seats and be very quiet. The authoritative attitude of the teacher puts children off balance and creates a gap between

what children have gone through and what is expected of them. The two levels of learning are not only dissimilar, but they are also drastically inadequate, so that the gap created makes children coil into a shell or become unmanageable. This gap may be better illustrated by looking at the condition of the process, methods, and the curriculum used in preschools and in primary schools.

The major features in the preschool are free movement, a friendly teacher approach, and a positive attitude. There is also some flexibility from subject to subject. In some cases, one would find thematic learning. Individual needs are met because the teacher-student ratio is low. On the opposite end of the spectrum, in the primary schools, the teacher possesses an authoritative attitude, follows a subject-oriented teaching approach, and practices the rote learning methods already described. These methods may not only impair learning capabilities, but may also close the door of learning abilities in many children altogether.

The discrepancies between what children are expected to learn and know in preschool and in primary school result in either of the following scenarios: 1) inappropriate preschools and inappropriate primary schools, or 2) appropriate preschools and inappropriate primary schools. The fact is that strictly formal preschools prepare children to fit into the primary schools, which themselves are termed as inappropriate (because of the unpleasant classroom conditions, gloomy bare walls, and teacher-centred approaches, where teachers are spending much of the time rushing to cover the syllabus and complaining of the overloaded curriculum rather than finding ways of making learning interesting and providing meaningful learning!). On the other hand, the good, appropriate preschools with bright classrooms and lots of learning materials where child-centred approaches are practised do not necessarily prepare children for entrance into the primary school system.

What needs to be done. There is an urgent need to bridge the gap so that the good intentions of both the preschool and the primary school curriculum can produce the happy, reliant, and intelligent citizens to build the Kenyan Nation. There must be a conscious effort by the schools at both levels to recognize the gaps, and to be aware of some of the discrepancies between preschool and primary school that create undue stress on children. Some of the suggestions include:

- Orientation visits of the pre-primary (transit) class to the Standard 1 class and a tour of the whole school.
- Child-to-Child programmes in which senior children can come to the preschools and help preschool children in their activities, and then introduce them to the primary school.
- Efforts can be made to educate the masses on current education attitudes, e.g. participatory methods. The prevailing belief in Kenya is that learning only takes place in a classroom when learners are seated in rows facing a blackboard and instructed by teachers. The few teachers who practice child-centred methods are pressured by parents to change.
- Teacher training institutions should keep up to current thinking in education and instill new beliefs so that they become integrated into the fields. This means the teacher trainers themselves should have faith in emerging methodologies and keep up to date not only with methodologies, but with learning processes, material development, team working spirit, etc.

- Improving the attitudes of teachers so that teachers will stop groaning and complaining about overloaded curriculum, and other things. Instead teachers should be encouraged to find ways and means of improving practice and obtaining good results. Teacher training institutions should also encourage the use of the English language. A good example of the use of the English language in schools is exhibited by our close neighbour Uganda. Children there are fluent and confident in speaking English from preschool on. A study showed that in Uganda the English language fluency helped students' achievement in both language and mathematics. Another good example in Uganda is the Minds Across Project (1988) where children were able to produce their own literature from their creative writing. In addition, training institutions should train teachers in the thematic or project learning system.
- The KIE should revise the primary school curriculum, with an aim toward integrating topics in several subject areas, for example 'water', which is repeated in practically all subjects—science, GHC (geography, history and civics), language, mathematics, etc. When a topic is introduced, it should be linked to all the other subjects. This will reduce time and thus ease the burden on the teacher.
- A preschool curriculum should be developed with specific objectives, activities, and methods to help teachers interpret the curriculum better. The caliber of teachers is such that their understanding level is quite low. Most of them are primary school dropouts or Form IV failures. More preschool teacher training facilities should be established.
- The government needs to introduce a policy that presents a reasonable salary scheme for preschool teachers.
- Primary schools should establish a system where the Standard 1 school teachers work with the transit teachers of the preschool. At present the transit teachers are preparing children for Standard 1 interviews by drilling them to prepare for the test for entrance to primary school.

From Ethiopia to Indonesia

Through attendance at a meeting (The International Technical Consultation on the Early Learning Experiences of Children 0-6) sponsored by UNESCO in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in November of 1994, a researcher was given the tools to examine the issues surrounding transition present in her home country (Indonesia), to identify areas of need, and, finally, to offer specific practices which could be implemented in Indonesia in order to provide bridging supports to children moving from preschool into primary school.

■ A SOUVENIR FROM ETHIOPIA: BRIDGING PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

By Dr. Diah Harianti, Researcher, Agency for Research and Development, Ministry of Education.

Based on research findings and observations, sociologists have come to the conclusion that schools, especially formal schools, have directed children's focus away from their parents and their local environment. It has been shown that what children learn in school is quite different than what they learn in their immediate environment, especially what is learned from their

parents and friends. As a result, many parents from certain social groups consider school a negative impact on their children's education and do not allow them to attend.

On the other hand, many parents who do send their children to primary school raise such questions as: Why is subject matter so heavily emphasized? How come my children no longer like going to school after they start learning at primary education? Why could they learn by playing in preschool, and now, after they are in primary education, there are so many subjects to be learned?

These grievances indicate that there are significant discrepancies between preschool and primary education. The following are some of the noted differences in learning approaches between preschool and elementary education.

- The learning principle implemented in preschool is that of learning by playing, as well as playing by learning. Meanwhile in primary education, there is no distinct principle. However, it might be appropriate to label the primary education principle as "learning is hard", but even that would be arguable.
- "Subject matter" is a term which is not applicable for preschool. At this level children learn according to their own developmental stages. In the primary school, however, children are forced to become familiar with things like times tables when they are in their 1st year.
- The integrative approach is mostly applied in preschool, while a subject-based approach is used in primary education.

While each of these approaches has its own merits, it is necessary to provide some continuity between them. Since preschool children are likely to continue on to primary school, they should be given time to adjust to the new environment, as well as to new methods of learning. The first year of primary school is really very difficult for new students, especially those who are only 6 or 7 years old, many of whom are in different stages of development. If the representative education coordinators (especially teachers) do not tackle this issue carefully, it might result in negative consequences, such as a child being reluctant to go to school, or worse, it might cause a setback in the child's developmental progress. If children are moved abruptly from an enjoyable learning environment into a totally different environment which requires them to memorize, to calculate, and to read and write in order to fulfill a predetermined and rigid set of expectations, the effects on the children can be disastrous. For some children these fast changes are certainly a heavy burden.

These two problems (i.e., formal education which alienates children from their environment, and the enormous differences between preschool and primary education) have become an issue of great concern in years I and II of primary education. Thus, there should be some way of bridging these gaps if we really want a kind of "earthly" education, that is, an education that will be useful in solving the social, economic, and cultural problems of a nation, and not an "ivory tower" approach. Having come to this realization, we should also be aware that children's education should be adjusted to their needs, conditions, and potentialities, as well as to the needs of the respective society.

The bridge. I was lucky to have had the chance to attend the meeting conducted by UNESCO in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in November of 1994. The purpose of the meeting, the International Technical Consultation on the Early Learning Experiences of Children 0-6, was to look for alternatives in the teaching-learning process which could bridge formal education at the primary level and prior education, namely preschool education. The meeting was actually the continuation of a research and development activity which had been conducted by 5 countries: India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Ethiopia, and Egypt. The meeting's aim was to make participants aware of the importance of educational activities that bridge formal and any previous education—either that taking place through preschool or in the home.

From my experience, it seems that in order to build the bridge in Indonesia, some adjustments need to be made in the Indonesia educational system, not at the preschool level but at year I primary level and, if possible, year II. Since the existing preschools are not designed to prepare learners entering the primary school, and since preschools are not mandatory (less than 50% of children attend), if changes were made at the preschool level, only a few children would benefit.

The Addis Ababa meeting provided many suggestions on building bridges between preschool and primary school, which, in my opinion, would not be difficult to implement in Indonesia. The suggestions are:

A special training for teachers of years I and II primary education. This training would be aimed at building an awareness of the importance of taking care of children who newly enter primary education, while at the same time increasing teacher ability to apply different methods in the teaching-learning process. Obviously, the training should be very specific and in accordance with the needs of year I and II primary education teachers.

The child's mother tongue should be the language of instruction in years I and II. Using their first language will clearly facilitate children's learning comprehension, as well as provide them with a connection to their home environment. These implications certainly have a broad meaning for a country such as Indonesia. It should be understood that more than 50% of children in years I and II use the Indonesian language in the classroom, which, for them, is a foreign language. Theoretically, children should begin to read and write by using a familiar language, which in this case, is their first language. However, the national curriculum states that teachers of years I and II should provide instruction in the Indonesian language. One of the methods in early reading and writing applied by most teachers and most student textbooks asks for a higher understanding of the language than many children possess. Consequently, through research, the conclusion has been reached that there are a lot of children who have not been able to learn to read and write with the appropriate tools. Thus there is necessity of building a bridge.

Individual services need to be provided for children in years I and II. This is important because, upon entering school, each child has his or her own specific abilities, and many of these differ from one child to the next. There could be many children who are already fluent in reading and writing, and other children who are not familiar with any letters at all. These two groups of children study together in the same class, yet it does not make sense for them to use the same materials. There are more instances where this kind of discrepancy might arise in the classroom,

such as with differences in language, arithmetic, and physical ability. It would be appropriate to include a program in the teacher training which addresses these individual differences.

There is a need to lessen the teaching burden (load) of teachers in primary education, years I and II. This would allow teachers to concentrate more fully on the teaching of early reading, writing, and arithmetic. Additionally, teachers also need to acquire teaching skills in areas such as music, art, and sports.

Year I teachers should be familiar with the students' educational background and abilities prior to entering primary school. This information is absolutely necessary for teachers to better understand each student and his or her capabilities, and subsequently to provide appropriate activities according to individual ability. Examples of student reading ability would be a good way to put this important information to use. This could be organized by the school in several ways. For example, reports could be written up on the reading abilities of year I primary students who have attended preschool, allowing primary teachers to adjust the reading curriculum to individual student levels. Following this, preschool teachers would need to write reports with the needs of year I primary teachers in mind. For learners who come from an environment other than preschool, interviews could be conducted with year I teachers and parents—either in the home or in school.

Teaching/learning tools need to be provided which can accommodate individual needs and conditions. If it is discovered that children are keen on playing with leaves, stones, seeds, or bamboo, teachers should use these materials in the teaching-learning process. It would also be beneficial if teachers introduced local dances, games, musical instruments, and traditional celebrations into the process of learning. This will help children to feel closer to their home environments and will help prevent alienation from parents and society.

There is a need to build harmonious relationships between teachers and parents. There should be at least three meetings per year between teachers and parents. Parents should also be asked to participate in educating their children at home. Because of the large number of students in one classroom, it is impossible for teachers to provide appropriate attention to each child; therefore parental involvement is essential. Keeping in mind that learning to read and building vocabulary are ongoing processes needing consistent reinforcement, teachers should involve parents by asking them to read books brought home from school by their children. Moreover, parents can teach children by pointing out things from the world around them, like a cat giving birth, a hen laying an egg, a trip to the market, etc, all which provide learning experiences outside the classroom. This could certainly be done at home, without any cost to the parent.

New Zealand

For many years now, children have been entering the school system in New Zealand at age five. They do so, one at a time, as they become 5 years of age (rather than in groups at a specific time). In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach to children's transition from preschool into elementary school, Margery Renwick examines the differing perceptions and expectations of the children entering the school

system, of their parents, and of their teachers. The results indicate there are many dimensions to the issue of transition; the process of having children enter on their date of birth cannot be evaluated on its own.

■ **NEW ZEALAND: TO SCHOOL AT FIVE. THE TRANSITION FROM HOME OR PRESCHOOL TO SCHOOL.**

By Margery Renwick. Wellington: The New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1984.

To understand and document the process of starting school, a research project was begun in 1977. (At the time of the study, about 85% of all four-year-olds and about 50% of all three-year-olds attended some kind of preschool in New Zealand.) First, parents, preschool teachers, and new-entrant teachers were interviewed, and a small group of parents was asked to keep diaries of their children's experiences on entering school. From the information gathered, key issues were isolated and questionnaires prepared which were administered to a national sample of 300 teachers of new entrants, to 300 preschool teachers and supervisors (from three different kinds of preschool experiences), and to 300 parents. An extraordinarily high return (more than 90%) was obtained in all three categories.

The study was comprised of the following areas:

- children's expectations of school, school readiness for children, including the profile of a school beginner and a description of the school experience for the child;
- school entry from the standpoint of parents, covering such issues as whether or not parents should stay in the school during the first day, the relevance of sharing information about children with the teacher, parental attitudes, and participation by parents in the school through parent-helper schemes;
- an examination of the links between preschool and primary school, looking at the liaison between the two, at pre-entry visits, at how new-entrant teachers look at preschools, and at the advantages and disadvantages of children attending preschool;
- administrative issues are discussed and include: the administrative division between preschools and schools, the age of entry into school, and whether entry should be individual or in groups.

The study included some of the following observations:

Children's expectations. Children expect to learn to read (among other things). They expect to have a loving teacher, but they also recognize that they need to work hard and be good all the time or they will be disciplined.

School readiness. There is a wide variation in opinions on the subject of school readiness among teachers and among parents. Some of them believe no such thing as school readiness exists. Others, who believe it is possible to isolate characteristics indicating a child is ready to enter school, refer to the following:

- *Social maturity:* The child makes friends easily and is able to cooperate with others; he or she is secure, confident, and independent with respect to activities rather than thought (e.g., is able to go to the toilet alone).
- *Language development:* The child speaks confidently, possesses a good vocabulary, has had exposure to books, and exhibits pre-reading skills and a desire to read.
- *Behaviour and discipline:* The child accepts and respects authority, is obedient, and can sit still and listen.
- *Health:* The child is in good health and has also acquired certain physical skills. He or she also has the ability to cope with personal hygiene.
- *Desire to learn:* The child is curious.
- *Specific skills:* The child can use equipment (such as scissors or a pencil); count, recognize letters, know his or her address, and can write own name.

Pervading many of the comments made about school readiness is the need for a child to have a positive attitude towards school. This was linked with having at least one teacher with a sense of humour.

The school experience. "In the opinion of the parents, the single most important factor in making a child feel enthusiastic about school is the personality of the teacher, particularly her ability to make the new child feel he or she is welcome.... It is equally clear that if a child has problems, they are likely to be caused either by difficulties in coping with other children, in settling in, in a social sense, or by difficulties in adjusting to the demands and restraints of school organization, routine, and discipline." (Renwick 1984, 19)

The presentation of the classroom and classroom activities can also affect a child's adjustment. Children sometimes have difficulties in accepting and conforming to the demands of classroom routine and organization. This may reflect anxiety about not knowing what is expected of them. Many teachers place great stress on children being disciplined, obedient, and accepting of the teacher's authority.

The relationship between teachers and parents. "The question of whether or not a mother should stay in the classroom on a child's first day illustrates the tension that can occur between mother and teacher when it comes to what many see as the 'handing over' of the child to the school." (Renwick 1984, 29) Most teachers say the adjustment is better if the mother does not stay. Teachers feel that parental presence simply represents a mother's exaggerated concern and unwillingness to let go; few recognize that parents may want to share this experience with their child, much as they have shared other experiences.

The impact of parents staying on the first day is probably less important than such things as: how well the child already knows the teacher; whether or not the parents have given the child the impression that they like and trust the teacher; whether or not there are plenty of interesting and absorbing things for the new child to do; whether or not the child knows other children in the classroom; and whether the class is small or large. (Renwick 1984, 33)

The sharing of information about children when they start school is important, but it should be done in a way that does not lead to labelling of the children and with the realization that information at this age is quickly out of date because children change so fast. Information about a child's health, including disabilities, is particularly important.

Parental involvement in the school has also proven to be successful. "Parents who are happy with their relationship with the school usually give as their main reason that the school is always welcoming." (Renwick 1984, 42)

Preschool/School partnership. "Although many teachers in all sections of early childhood education are conscious of the need for preschool/school liaison, such liaisons frequently depend on the personal qualities and enthusiasm of individual teachers" (Renwick 1984, 55). Preschool teachers often feel that primary school teachers do not really take preschool education seriously. It was found that regular meetings, or even occasional meetings, were by no means common. However, meetings may be less important than other forms of liaison, such as visits of preschool staff and children to the school as part of a policy to introduce preschool children to school.

Age and process of admission to primary school. Most parents (80%), preschool teachers, and new-entry teachers felt that age 5 was the most appropriate age for entrance into school, although various individuals thought that there should be some flexibility in the age of entrance. Individual admission on a child's fifth birthday is generally taken for granted and accepted as a system which is both reasonable and workable; however, approximately half of all new-entry teachers favoured group admission as compared with about 30% of parents and preschool teachers. Those arguing for continuous and individual admission stressed that this system helped assure individual attention for new children and improved the chances of getting to know individual parents. Those favouring group admission argued mainly that classroom organization and management were easier to maintain. An alternative to individual admission that might have similar advantages would be admission of small groups of 4 to 6 children whose birthdays are close together, perhaps once a month.

The current system of entry into school grew historically because many schools were in small rural towns and had only one or two teachers, and children entering school individually made it less disruptive for the other children. In small towns, the transition is more natural because the teachers tend to know the children before they arrive, the communication with parents is more informal and the schools are less threatening. With the growth of large urban schools, the situation changes. A question was raised about whether transition is really mainly an urban problem.

Remedial Bridging Programs: Addressing Deficits in Children

Among countries which have already instituted bridging programs, a range of approaches have been taken. The following examples illustrate the ways these programs have been designed, adopted, and implemented to facilitate the transition process while taking a basically remedial approach.

Philippines

In the Philippines they have been experimenting with ways to prepare children for primary school through the integration of early childhood education (ECD) into the existing school system. The ECD program that has evolved illustrates the potential for moving early childhood teaching methods into the first grade of schooling, and for helping children adjust to and perform better upon entry into primary school. It also demonstrates some of the difficulties in trying to introduce ECD into elementary education, particularly when first grade classes are large, when teachers have not been properly oriented, and when there is an overwhelming tradition of formalized instruction.

■ PREPARING CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL IN THE PHILIPPINES

By Dr. L. Luis-Santos, Director III of the Bureau of Elementary Education of the DECS, titled, "ADECS ECCD Program," based on two documents provided by the Department of Education and Sports (DECS), titled, "The Summer School Program" and "Integration of Early childhood Experiences in Grade I"; and profiting from conversations with Feny de los Angeles Bautista.

Recognizing the need for and importance of preschool education, the Philippine Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) in 1971 issued a policy document encouraging the school division to establish public preschool classes whenever possible. Since that time, public preschools have been provided, adding to the many private preschools already in existence.

In January 1995, a survey was conducted to assess the preschools implemented by DECS. One of the conclusions of the survey was that Government cannot afford to provide preschools in all parts of the country. Thus, in March 1995, DECS issued the following statement on early childhood education which affirms the importance of preschool but states that preschools should be developed by the community to provide early childhood development experiences for 5-year old-children before they enter Grade 1.

To provide children...the benefits of preschool education, the concept of preschool as a structured system must give way to a system which is community based. A community-based preschool will be an alternative technology that will be set up in the disadvantaged areas to give early childhood development experiences to 5-year old children before they go to grade I. It is a community-based nonprofit school which will be established through a collaborative partnership of DECS, NGOs, Local Government Units (LGUs) and agents.

In addition to this movement toward locally-sponsored preschools, DECS has put considerable emphasis on the issue of school readiness, exploring different methods of better preparing children for school, and then keeping them in school. A study reported in 1995 (Heaver and Hunt) brought to light some disheartening statistics regarding the effectiveness of primary education in the Philippines. A high dropout rate was found to be prevalent in the first and second grades, accounting for 60% of total primary school dropouts. In addition, national achievement tests indicated performance in the earlier grades at below 50% of the norm. These findings resulted in concerns about such issues as quality of education, dropout rates, and school readiness. A World Bank study, which showed that children from poor areas who do not attend preschool have an 18% drop-out rate, while the rate for those who do attend preschool is 12%,

prompted the Bureau of Elementary Education (within DECS) to explore and implement programs that would provide preschool education to all children, and assist them in making the transition from home to school.

Prior to 1995, Philippine children entered the primary school at age 7. A majority of these children entered school without having had the opportunity to go to preschools. Recognizing that many children enter school at a definite disadvantage, the Government of the Philippines, with assistance from UNICEF, experimented in 1991 with a 6-week summer preschool program designed to improve socialization and "readiness" skills for children 6.5 to 7 years of age. Although the results of the Summer Preschool Program were moderately positive, budget constraints prevented continuation and expansion of the program. As a result, it was decided to incorporate early childhood experiences into the curriculum of Grade I. The experiences and outcomes of these two programs follow.

The Summer Preschool Program. This experimental program, carried out in seven schools in each of three regions of the country, was explicitly intended to help bridge the gap between home and school by providing children with interesting and motivating activities in an enriching environment. In all, 583 children from low income municipalities participated in the six-week, full-day program. Teachers were oriented to a special early childhood program (Learning Competencies for Preschoolers) and were provided with instructional materials (manipulative toys, blocks, activity sheets, poems, jingles, rhymes, and songs).

To evaluate the results of the program, readiness tests in Filipino, Mathematics and Mental Ability were administered to children who had participated in the summer school program and to a comparative group of children who had not participated in the program and who had no preschool background. When mean scores for the two groups were compared using t-tests, a significant difference was found for all three tests, favouring the preschoolers. The significance level was highest for mathematics. When the results were disaggregated by region, significant results were found for two regions, but not a third.

Overall, however, this six-week program met with mixed success. On the positive side, teachers who received the children after this experience were enthusiastic about the children's readiness for school. And in a follow-up study, the dropout rate for children who had been in the summer preschool was 1%, compared to the 15% for those children without the summer class. The drawbacks included the fact that teachers were not compensated for this apart from their regular salaries, so they were dissatisfied; parents had vacation plans that were interrupted by this schedule; and it was too hot.

Because of the positive benefits, DECS wanted to continue to provide the readiness activity, but not during the summer. They then experimented with the integration of ECD into grade one.

Early Childhood Experiences for Grade I. Beginning in the 1992-93 school year, an experiment was carried out in which the curriculum of the summer preschool program was moved into the first four weeks of the school year. The experiment was implemented in 66 classes in six regions of the country. Feedback from the teachers suggested that the curriculum

was useful and the activities challenging, interesting, and enjoyable for the children. These encouraging results led to extension of the program to eight weeks in 1993-94, and to implementation in a larger number of classes and areas. DECS Central Office initiated training for teachers of public school kindergartens (referred to as "school-based ECD") in preparation for the opening of 1,428 classes in October, 1993.

An evaluation of the expanded program indicated that parents were supportive, that the materials were helpful, and that the curriculum helped to prepare children better for their grade I work.

During the 1994-95 school year, the program was expanded further to include 30,375 pupils in 15 regions, with a total of 675 Grade I classes participating. In addition, a 2-week trainers' training course was conducted in November 1994 with the regional and division supervisors as participants. There are now 48 supervisors who have conducted one-week or weekend training programs for the teachers in their divisions.

In 1995, Early Childhood Experiences for Grade I was institutionalized at the same time as the official age for entry into primary school was dropped to six years of age. All Grade I teachers were requested to implement the eight-week curriculum and gradually move to the regular Grade I curriculum. Monitoring of the institutionalization of the Early Childhood Experiences conducted in 176 classes in 22 divisions during June and July of 1995 indicated the following:

- Most teachers had undergone a training program of 1 to 3 days, but the length of the training was thought by many to be too short.
- The curriculum guide was generally thought to be helpful and age-appropriate but brought with it extra work, and the teaching aids were sometimes inadequate.
- Most teachers followed the suggested schedule of activities.
- Some teachers were apprehensive that the 8-week curriculum would infringe on their budget of time to work on Grade One curriculum.
- Some teachers did not implement the 8-week curriculum because they thought their students were ready for Grade I work, they had not been given an orientation, they were worried about covering the Grade I materials, or the classes were too large.

One of the concerns which has surfaced in regard to the curriculum is that it is too close to formal elementary school approaches.

Comment. The model has evolved. There is now an eight-week curriculum (6 weeks of preschools plus 2 weeks of transition) that is introduced during the initial months of Grade 1. The program has been implemented in 15 regions covering 52 divisions. With the lowering of the entrance age to six years beginning 1995-1996, the program is relevant and necessary, especially since preschool education is not yet available to all children at age four and five. The eight week preschool curriculum helps to ease the transition into the formal and structured Grade 1 classroom.

South Africa

In South Africa they have experimented with a number of bridging programmes in order to make the transition from home to school less abrupt and to help prepare children for primary school. The majority of the programmes, while claiming that within the programmes the schools "bend to the needs of the children rather than requiring the child to meet the needs of the system," in practice, place emphasis on providing young children with skills that will help them survive in the primary school.

■ DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING (DET) BRIDGING PERIOD PROGRAMME (BPP)

By Judith L. Evans

The Department of Education and Training's Bridging Period Programme has been chosen for review because it is one of the most extensive programmes, and it represents a unique approach to addressing the problem of repetition and dropout.

The BPP is structured so that it effectively provides a year (or two years) of pre-primary education for those children who require it. When children enter school they receive a three-week orientation programme. Those who are ready (group 1) are moved to the first year of primary school (known as SSA) after the initial three-week period. The other children continue in the orientation class. These children are then tested 12 weeks later, at the completion of the Bridging Module. Again those who are ready (group 2) are moved to SSA and the others (group 3) continue in an extended school readiness programme for the remainder of the year. During the second year group 3 begins the process over again. These children are moved into SSA when they are ready.

By 1990, the BPP had been successfully introduced into primary schools which have three or more SSA classes, and since then it has been phased in at smaller public schools. In 1992, BPP was introduced into state-aided or farm schools as well. This resulted in a total of 1,808 bridging classes being provided in 1,230 schools. In 1992, in greater Cape Town itself, there were some 40 bridging classes and in Johannesburg there were 136. (Taylor 1992, 14)

According to Department of Education and Training reports (as summarized in Taylor 1989, 33), the programme reduced the failure rate from 21% to 3% in SSA. Taylor reports that this finding was corroborated by an independent research study undertaken in Soweto, where it was found that children with no preschool training were almost twice as likely to repeat a grade at least once during the first three years of school compared to those who had attended a pre-basic course. From this Taylor concludes that "in the South African context, preschool programmes carried out within the strongly authoritarian instrumental framework of the Department of Education and Training do mediate the school experiences of African children" (1989, 33).

Following the example of DET, the self-governing states also began to be involved in pre-primary education (e.g., Ciskei). Some established pre-primary schools at a very high cost, others added a pre-primary class to primary schools, and others subsidized private initiatives. "By 1987 over 31,000 children in six African education departments were enrolled in state-subsidized or state-initiated pre-primary programmes" (1989, 34).

There are two ways to look at the BPP programme. It can be seen as a way for the Department of Education and Training to offer a pre-primary class, even though this is not within their mandate. For some children it can be a two-year programme, for others it can be one year, and for those who are ready, it can be a very temporary step before movement almost directly into primary school. Another way to look at BPP is that it allows for the reality that children are likely to repeat first grade. It provides a mechanism whereby children can be seen to be making progress and not simply repeating the first year of primary school. In either case, what is evident from the BPP programme is that the Department of Education and Training recognised the importance of a pre-primary experience, and that they tried to find ways to accommodate a preschool experience into the reality of their structural constraints.

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Creating a Variety of Approaches to Support Linkages

Guyana

This case study provides an interesting example of how the research process and results can be used to make a difference in the way transitions are handled for children. The strategy used was to bring together the teachers from the pre-primary and primary classes and have them work together to come to some common understanding of what is required of children in the different settings and how the teachers in both settings can make the transition smoother for children.

■ TRANSITION FROM NURSERY SCHOOL TO GRADE ONE IN GUYANA

based on studies by Janis Blakey, University of Alberta, and Norma Agnes Baichoo, Assistant Chief Education Officer, Guyana

Since 1976, children in Guyana have had a constitutional right to free education beginning at the nursery-school level. Nursery education, which is divided into two levels, covers children from 3 years, 9 months to 5 years, 9 months. A very high percentage of children in Guyana attend nursery school. The transition from nursery school to primary school has been a concern in Guyana since at least the mid-1980s, prompting research on this transition period.

In 1985, a research project was organized to identify the different perspectives that parents, nursery school teachers, and grade one (Prep A) teachers had on the problem of transition, examining goals and expectations, as well as looking at the importance assigned to specific features of early education, such as play, open structures, and child-directed learning. (Blakely 1986) The project also sought suggestions from the teachers about how to help with the

transition. The results of the study served as a basis for reflection in future workshops which brought together both nursery and Prep A teachers in a search for common ground on which to facilitate transition.

At the time the research was undertaken, the nursery school curriculum was directed toward the integral development of young children in order to help them to develop to their full potential. It was characterized by a flexible approach which took children at their existing levels of development. By way of contrast, primary schools were not flexible, placing heavy emphasis on cognitive development, on tests, and on completing the syllabus. In the opinion of the researchers,

It is evident that teachers of Prep A classes need to understand the interaction of children coming from the nursery schools. In the primary school, many teachers prefer the children who would sit still and await instructions: any deviation is deemed undisciplined and difficult to cope with. This is clearly the teacher's preference for the kind of child he wants in the classroom, but because of the structure of the nursery programme and the school environment, these children have grown accustomed to another type of behaviour that is acceptable in that [preschool] setting. (Baichoo 1986)

Nursery and primary school teachers were found to have similar goals for children, such as the acquisition of basic skills, the promotion of cognitive development, the extension of learning to beyond the classroom, and socialization for respect and national consciousness. But when the expectations of the two groups were compared, primary teachers were found to be more oriented toward preparation in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Both groups felt that cooperation with parents and the children's readiness for school were central problems to be addressed. The research also showed, as might be expected, that nursery school teachers regarded play as very important. Prep A teachers were less enthusiastic about play but thought that it was somewhat important, while parents did not rank play as important at all, even in nursery school. All of the groups considered an open structure for learning important, however, the educators were clearly more in favour of this approach than the parents. Interestingly, parents were more supportive of an open learning structure for grade one than they were for nursery school. Apparently, this reflected a parental desire to ensure that their children had mastered the basic skills thought necessary to read and write before entering primary school. Consistent with the above, parents were more supportive of a highly structured program of teacher-directed learning than were educators. The research also included interviews with children who, not surprisingly, "...liked teachers who played with them, taught them songs, told stories and did not 'beat kids.'" (Blakey 1986, 11)

A workshop was organized which brought together nursery and primary school teachers. Working in pairs made up of one nursery teacher and one primary teacher from the same geographical area, teachers were asked to pose solutions for bridging gaps between their respective levels of education. Their solutions included: visiting homes, working with children in smaller groups, establishing interest corners, and team teaching when the number of children permits.

Reflecting on the research results and the suggestions of the paired teachers, the group reached a number of areas of agreement and generated a list of eleven beliefs that all teachers felt were important. The eleven beliefs were that:

1. Children should be allowed to express themselves freely and clearly in written and oral form.
2. Young children should develop a sense of responsibility.
3. Young children should have self-confidence and a healthy self-concept.
4. Young children should be given an opportunity to play meaningfully because, through play, children sometimes learn what adults cannot teach them.
5. Second year children in nursery should be exposed to part of the Prep A programme.
6. Pupils should be promoted according to ability and performance and not by age only.
7. Children need individual attention from teachers, as well as from parents.
8. Children have a right to ask questions and to explore things in the environment.
9. Interaction between teachers and children, parents and children, and parents and teachers will result in a satisfying learning experience.
10. Parents, as well as teachers, should provide materials to create an exciting classroom.
11. Children learn from each other.

These statements were used as a basis for reflection by the teachers on how the curriculum and methods could be adjusted to be more in line with these beliefs. The teachers suggested further that:

- Prep A must have some semblance of the nursery for the 1st term and must be more conducive to learning (by including interest corners, for instance).
- Nursery and primary teachers should meet periodically.
- There should be a continuity of training values.
- The nursery teachers should meet the Prep A teachers halfway when considering academic achievements and prepare the children for the Prep A experience. For example, children should know how to write and understand some mathematical concepts, and they should be less mobile in the classroom.
- A report from nursery schools should be available to Prep A teachers.

Against this background, a recent report by Guyana to UNESCO (1996) indicated that activities intended to facilitate transitions were taking place in Guyana. In the ten administrative regions and in the capital Georgetown, nursery and primary schools are involved in activities to facilitate the transition from nursery to primary school and to define the underlying principles of early childhood education. These exercises include:

- Regular workshops for nursery teachers;
- Visits by second-year pupils of nursery schools to primary schools during the final term of the academic year;
- The meeting of Prep A and nursery teachers at specified nursery workshops to discuss prerequisite skills and expectations for the Prep A entrants;

- Visits by Prep A teachers to observe the second-year nursery pupils "at work";
- Assistance to parents at Parent Action Committee meetings to understand the Prep A programme;
- Speakers are encouraged to address parents about their roles and responsibilities for the psychological preparation of their children for entry to primary school at graduation ceremonies, prize-giving activities, and school-closing exercises;
- Teachers of Preps A and B should be encouraged to ensure that they provide a stimulating classroom environment which closely resembles the nursery school setting through the presence of manipulative toys, interest corners, basic charts, large clear and colourful pictures, and the allied arts;
- Meetings of clusters of schools and level committees should meet to identify difficulties in classroom performance and to arrive at workable solutions, especially in the area of methodology.

Last, in order to ensure that the concept of early childhood education and the transition from nursery to primary level is more widely understood, three approaches have been planned:

- Workshops for teachers of Preps A and B, and orientation of head teachers of primary schools (workshop courses are to include: the infant school curriculum, related theories and principles, establishing the infant school environment, the creative arts and the young child, the integrated approach, the infant class time-table, transition from the nursery to the primary level, and the preparation for the new school term).
- As an outcome of the workshops for prep teachers, one hundred trained teachers will be selected to receive further coaching as Field Officers so that the implementation of the ECE at the primary level can be closely monitored.
- A public awareness programme is geared to help parents and the general public understand and appreciate their roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the Early Childhood Education programme.

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South Africa

A programme developed in Bophuthatswana has attempted to address the issue of children's transition by focussing on the readiness of the primary school for children as well as children's readiness for the primary school. The Bophuthatswana Education Department's Early Childhood Programme was designed to tackle the problem of repetition and drop-out (defined as a problem of children's transition into school), not by adding a bridging year, but by experimenting with upgrading the primary school itself and by developing a pre-primary programme for children 3-6 years of age.

■ THE BOPHUTHATSWANA PRIMARY EDUCATION UPGRADING PROGRAMME (PEUP) AND PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION.

By Judith L. Evans

The Bophuthatswana Primary Education Upgrading Programme (PEUP) began in 1980. The basic notion was that if the quality of the primary school could be upgraded, then there would be less inefficiency and waste since children would more easily make the transition from home to school. The approach taken by Bophuthatswana is supported by research. In studies undertaken to examine the 'disadvantages' of the African child's home environment, children were observed and tested before entrance into school and after a few years in school. The results of the studies indicated that "while there may be some aspects of the early home environment which are not conducive to children being school-ready at six years, these aspects are few." (Kemp 1993, 2)

The researchers argue that the issue is not the child's lack of readiness for the school. They feel their data show that "the causes of early school failure lie not in the *home life* of the children before school, but in the *actual school experience itself*." (Kemp 1993, 2) They go on to argue for a radical restructuring of the early school curriculum. Curriculum reform was one part of the Bophuthatswana PEUP; it also addressed teacher training and parent/community involvement issues.

The PEUP project was initiated to facilitate the adoption of child-centred teaching approaches in pilot primary classrooms. The objectives of the effort were to improve the learning environment by, for example, encouraging the painting of classrooms, improving the supply of adequate water and toilet facilities at schools, motivating schools to overcome shortages in classroom accommodation, and introducing appropriate learning materials, by drawing on community—and particularly parent—involvement in school matters.

In order to enter the project, schools had to demonstrate their commitment to the upgrading process. Schools were required to fulfill five conditions for entry into the programme. They had to commit themselves to the following standards: to have single sessions only; to limit their class sizes to 50; to admit pupils only if they were five and a half years old on entry; to commit themselves to carrying out certain classroom improvements, such as constructing shelves, at their own expense; and, finally, to contribute on a rand-for-rand basis to the purchase of the project furniture. This cost was absorbed by parents.

Upgrading of the classrooms began with Grade 1 in seven schools. The following year Grade 2 was upgraded in the seven schools, and the upgrading continued year by year. In addition to the physical upgrading, in-service teacher training courses were provided at the seven schools. (By 1988, all 840 primary schools in Bophuthatswana were included.)

An important aspect of the programme was the elimination of end-of-the-year examinations up to and including Standard 3. Throughout these grade levels there is automatic promotion of students. Released from the constraints of formal testing and the consequent cramming, teachers are free to institute child-centred methods at the lower end of the primary school. Not surprisingly, as students entered Standard 4 (at the end of which there is an exam), there was a return to more didactic teaching.

In 1982, at much the same time as PEUP was being introduced, there was a departmental commitment to supporting an early intervention programme for 3-6 year olds, making early childhood education part of the education system. In many schools the pre-primary programme was implemented in conjunction with the PEUP.

The Bophuthatswana pre-primary programme is unusual in that it did not have school readiness as its major aim. Its goal is to ensure that 3-6 year olds acquire adequate life and school skills so that they will become responsible adults and community leaders. The focus is on all-round development: social, emotional, spiritual, physical and mental. Life-skills include confidence, creativity, independence, logical thinking, curiosity, etc. School readiness skills involve gross and fine motor co-ordination, concentration, listening and language skills. The programme also has the stated aim of encouraging parental participation and involvement in the child's development and education. By 1994 the department had 532 preschool classes catering to some 32,000 children, predominantly in rural areas.

In terms of financing the programme, PEUP involves individuals and private institutions as well as government. The private/government partnership seems to have been an important element of this effort. While the government infrastructure provides the space for the programme, non-governmental agencies provide the curriculum and training expertise. The partnerships seem to have been effective.

Overall PEUP is considered a success story. There are a number of positive elements to the preschool model. First, it spreads the provision load and promotes parent involvement. Second, state support has led to good teacher/pupil ratios and a higher quality programme. Third, the focus on life skills preparation has been a positive feature. Taylor summarizes the experience by stating, "it has infused primary education in Bophuthatswana with a new spirit and orientation." (Taylor 1989, 38) The value of such an infusion cannot be overlooked.

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Colombia

While not including an early childhood component, the Nueva Escuela from Colombia is illustrative of the way in which the structure, curriculum, and pedagogy of a primary school can be linked appropriately with community needs to make the school a more welcoming and supportive place for children, while at the same time stimulating their learning and achievement.

■ THE NEW SCHOOL PROGRAMME (ESCUELA NUEVA): MORE AND BETTER PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN RURAL AREAS.

By Vicky Colbert, Clemencia Chiappe and Jairo Arboleda, UNICEF Colombia, 1990. Summary by Judith Evans.

The Escuela Nueva was organized in 1975 in response to persistent problems in rural education. The basic assumption behind the effort was that things had to be done differently if children were going to be educated in rural areas. The programme started with two fundamental assumptions. The first was that innovation at the level of the child requires creative changes in the training of teachers, in administrative structures, and in relations with the community. Accordingly, the programme was designed to offer an integral response to these assumptions through the development of four components: curricular, training, administrative, and community. Thus, it features concrete strategies for children, teachers, administrative agents, and the community.

Second, from the outset, it was essential to develop mechanisms that are replicable, decentralized, and viable in a technical, political, and financial sense. In other words, the design of the system had to include how to go to scale. In 1985 the programme was adopted as the national strategy to universalize primary education in rural education in Colombia.

Curriculum content. The curriculum promotes active and reflective learning, the ability to think, analyse, investigate, create, apply knowledge, and improve children's self-esteem. It incorporates a flexible promotion mechanism and seeks the development of cooperation, comradeship, solidarity, civic participation, and democratic attitudes.

The curriculum is socially relevant and inductive, and concrete. It also provides active learning experiences for children. The package includes study guides for children, a school library with basic reference material, activity or learning centres, and the organization of a school government. The study guides follow a methodology that promotes active learning, cognitive abilities, discussion, group decision making and the development of skills that can be applied within the environment, thus making the link between the school and the community.

The study guides also contain a sequence of objectives and activities to be developed at the pace of the student, thereby allowing for flexible promotion. The guides are adapted to the lifestyle of the rural child. Within the flexible promotion system, children may advance from one grade or level to another at their own pace. The system allows children to leave school temporarily to

help their parents in agricultural activities, in case of illness, or any other valid reason, without jeopardizing their chance of returning to school and continuing their education. The concept of adapting to the child by incorporating flexible time is a highly important learning variable in this model.

Another important characteristic is that the study guides combine a core national curriculum with possibilities for regional and local adaptations made by the teachers during the training workshops.

The adoption of self-instructional guides comes in recognition of the need to facilitate the workload of those teachers who have to handle more than one grade at a time. The study guides are used by groups of two or three children to encourage group work processes.

Teacher training and follow-up. This component promotes in teachers a guiding and orienting role, as opposed to one involving the mere transmission of knowledge. It also encourages a positive attitude toward new ways of working in rural education, the acceptance of the teacher's role as a leader and dynamic force in the community, and it fosters a positive attitude toward the administrative agents and technical assistance.

Training and follow-up for teachers and administrative agents involves in-service training workshops. A series of four basic workshops, one for administrative agents and three for teachers, in one year's time, are essential to correctly implement the methodology. After each of the workshops there is an opportunity for teachers to meet once a month to exchange ideas, analyse problems, and discuss results.

Group discussion (sometimes in the teacher's own classroom) is used to promote positive attitudes toward the programme, and to provide teachers with information and strategies. This approach to teacher training maintains that if the learning model proposed for children is active, discovery-oriented, tied to the community, and with an emphasis on creativity and cooperation in group projects, the process of training teachers must have similar characteristics. This is why the training materials follow a similar methodological pattern and process as the children's study guides.

Administration. This component promotes a supportive rather than controlling role for administration. Administrative agents are required to integrate pedagogical practices into their administrative functions. As noted, one of the four workshops offered each year is for administrators. The workshop for administrative agents/supervisors has as its objectives: to develop the abilities of the staff to guide the application of the Escuela Nueva methodology; to develop the abilities of staff to follow-up the implementation of the programme while working with teachers in the classroom; and to modify their traditional role in such a way that they become an immediate resource person for teachers in the learning process.

The community. This component encourages the mobilization of parents and community to increase their involvement in school activities. Some of these activities include becoming familiar with the new educational approaches, helping to gather simple information on the

community, improving the physical space and furnishing the classrooms, and helping to organize the library and/or the activity centres.

Specifically, the programme gives teachers the guidelines for the preparation of a community map, a family information register, a calendar of agricultural events, and various social and cultural monographs to increase the knowledge of the community. This is the first step toward a process of community development, and it is essential regardless of whether or not the teacher lives in the community.

In addition, the written materials used by the students include community content, thereby encouraging students to apply what they learn in their real life to their school life, and to promote activities that contribute to improvement of the overall community.

Evaluation. The impact of the programme is now becoming evident, particularly when children from Nueva Escuela are compared with children from the traditional system. Formative evaluations have been conducted at both the student and teacher level at different periods of time. For example, in tests given on socio-civic behaviour, mathematics for third grade, and Spanish for third and fourth grades, children of the Escuela Nueva scored considerably higher than those in traditional rural schools. An analysis of self-esteem showed that children enrolled in the Nueva Escuela programme have a higher level of self-esteem than children in other rural schools. The fact that self-esteem of girls equalled that of boys is particularly important and demonstrates the equalizing effect of the participatory methodology.

However, the growing demand for implementation of the programme and the positive reaction of teachers, administrative agents, and the community are the best indicators of success.

India

■ INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

By Mala Kullar and Shyam Menon, 1996 (reprinted, with editing, from the Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter, Number 86, July 1997)

In the mid-eighties, Bodh Shiksha Samiti began as an initiative for providing primary school education to children of the urban poor in the slums of Jaipur, Rajasthan. What began with a school in a single slum, has, over the years, expanded to seven slums.

Initially, Bodh created what they envisioned to be an ideal primary school. The school was designed, on the one hand, to reflect the aspirations of the slum dwellers and respect the dignity of children, and, on the other hand, to eschew certain existing practices, such as corporal punishment, which were prevalent both in the community and in other schools in the neighbourhood, as well as within the wider context of the city. This ideal school was visualized to implement a curriculum which would respond to the whole life-space of the students, their material deprivation, emotional stress, and intellectual suppression. Thus, Bodh sought to evolve a model of primary education based on democratic principles and to provide children with a

nurturing learning environment based on trust rather than on fear of teachers. This model also viewed parents and community members as active stakeholders, not only in the setting up of the school, but also in its day to day operations and curricular issues.

In time, younger siblings of the slum schoolchildren tagged along with their older brothers and sisters, and the need for catering to the preschool age group was recognized. This led to the inception of Bodh's preschool centres in 1993, first with a pilot grant funded by Aga Khan Foundation (AKF India), followed by full project funding from AKF, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and British DfID (ex-ODA).

Bodh's concern is as much social as it is educational. The organisation tacitly endorses a vision of social change which is community centred, community determined, and based on the principles of equality, human dignity and democratic functioning. Bodh solicits the collaboration of residents. The first priority for Bodh, therefore, is always to generate a sense of ownership for the programmes on the part of the community. Bodh schools are intended to provide for the communities to discover for themselves the value of the collective and to eventually work toward this vision.

Approaches, curriculum and practice. The curricular and pedagogical approaches of Bodh essentially emerge out of the broad vision of social intervention mentioned above. Schools are set up to function in a democratic framework, and the spirit of democracy characterizes the interactions among teachers, between teachers and functionaries, teachers and children, teachers and para-teachers (mother teachers and child teachers), teachers and community, and among the children themselves.

The approaches developed by Bodh over the years place great significance on community and parental involvement in the education of their children.

The curriculum and practice evolved and operationalized in the Bodh approach seek to make education interesting and activity-oriented, and thus reject rote learning. There are not rigidly defined classes, but only loosely constituted samooths (groups) based roughly on age and ability. The system also allows for periodic regrouping on the basis of assessment of capabilities.

The pedagogy adopted in the preschool and early primary classes is largely play-centred and activity-oriented, and teaching is done in an integrated manner.

In the development of curriculum and material for the preschool programme, the teachers gain familiarity with the children's dialects, traditional stories, games, songs and customs, and they use these as part of their pedagogical tools and activities. For example, traditional stories are recited and dramatized with puppets and pictures; traditional songs are sung by teachers and children. In all of these the children's active participation is solicited. For example, children chorus the teachers in songs; teachers ask questions while telling stories or during puppet shows to which children respond; children take turns in reciting stories or singing songs; and games are played with much zest, noise, and the teacher's participation.

This, however, brings us to a pertinent and related question: how does the Bodh philosophy translate into its curricular practice? Bodh's approach to curriculum and pedagogy seems to stem from a set of convictions underlying assumptions. These are:

- a child is qualitatively different from an adult in the manner in which she/he knows, understands, and relates to the world;
- what the child learns at school is only part of the broader socialization and learning he/she imbibes from home, neighbourhood, and the larger society;
- a child learns best through meaningful activities;
- learning takes place best when it goes through a process similar to the one that knowledge has evolved through; and
- there is considerable individual difference between children in style and pace of learning, even within similar age and ability clusters.

The pedagogy. We received the impression that the pedagogy adopted in the preschool and early primary classes was largely play-centred and activity-oriented. The teacher initiated an activity which normally lasted for half an hour or so. Learning of mathematics was not separated from that of language or drawing. Children were encouraged to learn independently through their own activities, play situations, and stories. In subsequent classes, however, subjects were demarcated to some extent

Operations. Every Bodh teacher, in the slum schools as well as in other schools, visits the household of one child in her group on average every day. She shares her impressions of the child's progress, and gets to understand the parent's perceptions, which she records in the cumulative assessment record book of the child, which is prepared monthly. This home visiting process truly seems to work to build a real partnership between home and school through the child's progress.

The teachers, the mother, and (mostly adolescent) children who have been trained to be teachers, wherever present, provide structure to the typical preschool morning, which proceeds in a planned, sequential, though not rigidly fixed manner. All activities are planned for systematically at the centre-level under the leadership of teacher and mother teachers who maintain daily diaries, for which an hour is reserved every day. They record all that happened in the course of their work and make an assessment of what they were able or unable to achieve, giving reasons. The diaries then serve as the basis for teacher (peer) discussion groups. The depth of reflective thinking about what has happened and the planning for what will come next is impressive. Some mother teachers have become literate enough to write diaries on their own.

Coordinated environments. The preschool now provides the children with an environment which is somewhat different from the children's homes. An attempt is made to connect the programme setting to children's familiar settings through the informal (samoo) structure of the programme. There are also opportunities to connect the community and the school through local

women's groups which meet every day to, among other things, discuss their children's education, cleanliness, health and nutrition.

It is from these women's groups that the cadre of mother teachers has been successfully trained and employed in the preschools. Similarly, some children, especially adolescent girls, through association and training have also been involved in the preschool programme as child teachers. Like mother teachers, they work as assistants to the preschool teachers, and now a salary is being considered for them.

Having involved the mothers in the child's preschool education has also created a channel of entry into the school for the children's family members, especially their mothers and older sisters. Through the preschool programme, interest and concern is aroused within families about the young child's process of development. This carries over as the children enter primary school.

At the present time, Bodh both operates its own schools and works with government schools. The link with government schools began when Bodh and AKF wanted to experiment with whether and to what degree their approach to teaching and learning could be transferred to government schools, where the circumstances are quite different.

Initially Bodh started with an "adoption" programme (now called the extension programme) that began with dialogues with the government schools to introduce the Bodh philosophy and pedagogy to teachers in the schools. Bodh had support from the local Ministry of Education personnel to undertake training of teachers in 10 government schools. They began with 1-2 classes per school, with a Bodh-trained teacher working alongside the government teachers. While there have been constant challenges, the approach is beginning to take hold.

Training. The effectiveness of Bodh's operations is the result of its training, which develops in the teachers the required competence, motivation and attitudes. To develop the desired skills requires an intense induction or training programme which aims not merely at developing in the participants a repertoire of knowledge and skills, but also in sowing in them the seeds of healthy scepticism about what has long been taken for granted about education, school, and children. They are trained for two months to assist the teacher. The training provides the women with an opportunity for debating and dialoguing on the various issues related to children, community, schooling, curriculum, pedagogy and so on.

The value of the initial training programme seems to be the emphasis on developing a worldview, basic awareness, and a positive disposition regarding children, community, and schooling, and not so much on skills development. The orientation of the training programme is not didactic; the participants are encouraged to bring forth their own experiences and skills into the programme.

Most mothers who were trained as mother teachers were initially illiterate; many have since acquired literacy and numeracy skills at the samooths. But their other talents and skills, such as singing and the ability to relate to children, make them valuable resources in the preschools.

The responses of children. Children in the Bodh classes were definitely confident and fearless in the manner in which they related to each other and the adults. In the primary schools, the difference in classroom climate between the Bodh classrooms and the non-Bodh classes was clear. In one of the schools we visited, the children of a non-Bodh class were more interested in what was happening in the neighbouring Bodh class than in their own; they were peeping into the Bodh class all the time. Presumably, they found the Bodh class much greater fun than theirs.

Bodh pedagogy involves, at times, a lot of noise too, and this was not always taken to very kindly by the non-Bodh teachers in the adoption schools. Obviously there was a certain difference in perception between Bodh and non-Bodh teachers as to what should be considered "good" classroom behaviour. The problem was less visible in schools where the Bodh approach has been more widely accepted by the school head and teachers.

The future. Currently Bodh has three programmes: its work with primary school children in slums; the preschool programmes in slum schools; and the extension programme with government schools. AKF is hoping to work with Bodh in the coming years to expand and strengthen Bodh as an institution, and to modify the slum schools to serve as local resource centres for further outreach.

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