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# SITE VISIT: Peru—A Nonformal Programme of "Initial Education" (PRONOEI)

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Robert G. Myers. *Toward a Fair Start for Children: Programming for Early Childhood Care and Development in the Developing World*. 1993. Pages 83-84.

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In 1967, a nutrition education project for mothers was begun in several villages in highland Peru in the Department of Puno where the infant mortality rate was then greater than 150 and malnutrition was widespread. The project, initiated by volunteers from a regional university, evolved into a community programme that included daily cooking of mid-morning snacks for children, ages 3 to 5, gathered together for several hours each weekday morning. From this cooking programme, a non-formal preschool also emerged that was intended to help the children who were brought along to develop mentally and socially, and to prepare them for schools (Myers et al. 1985).

Five years later, as part of a major educational reform, the government extended this small-scale community-based model, launching a major child care and development initiative in the Department of Puno. Since then, the community-based non-formal model has spread widely throughout Peru, offering an alternative to the formal preschool centres.

Community participation takes several forms: provision of a site (and often construction of a building) for the "Children's House"; selection of an "animator" who is paid a gratuity but is essentially serving the community as a volunteer, and management of the centres through a parent committee. In some cases, income generating projects have been created as part of the programme, and in most, the food supplied from government programmes is supplemented by local contributions.

An in-depth evaluation of the PRONOEI in 1985 showed that PRONOEI children were socially and intellectually more prepared for primary school than a comparison group of similar children who had not participated in the PRONOEI. The difference appeared despite the minimum quality of many of the PRONOEI. In addition, this difference did not seem to be retained as children moved through the primary school, presumably because of the low quality of the primary schools.

The per student cost of programmes (using enrollment figures and not counting the contributions of the local community in terms of labour and materials), amounted to about \$US 28.00 per year, or less than one-half the cost of the alternative formal preschool programmes. The experience suggests that effectiveness at low cost can be achieved over time in a relatively large scale non-

formal preschool programme but that there is a need to consider the preschool and primary school programmes together in order to maximise the effectiveness of both.

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*Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.*  
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1999.