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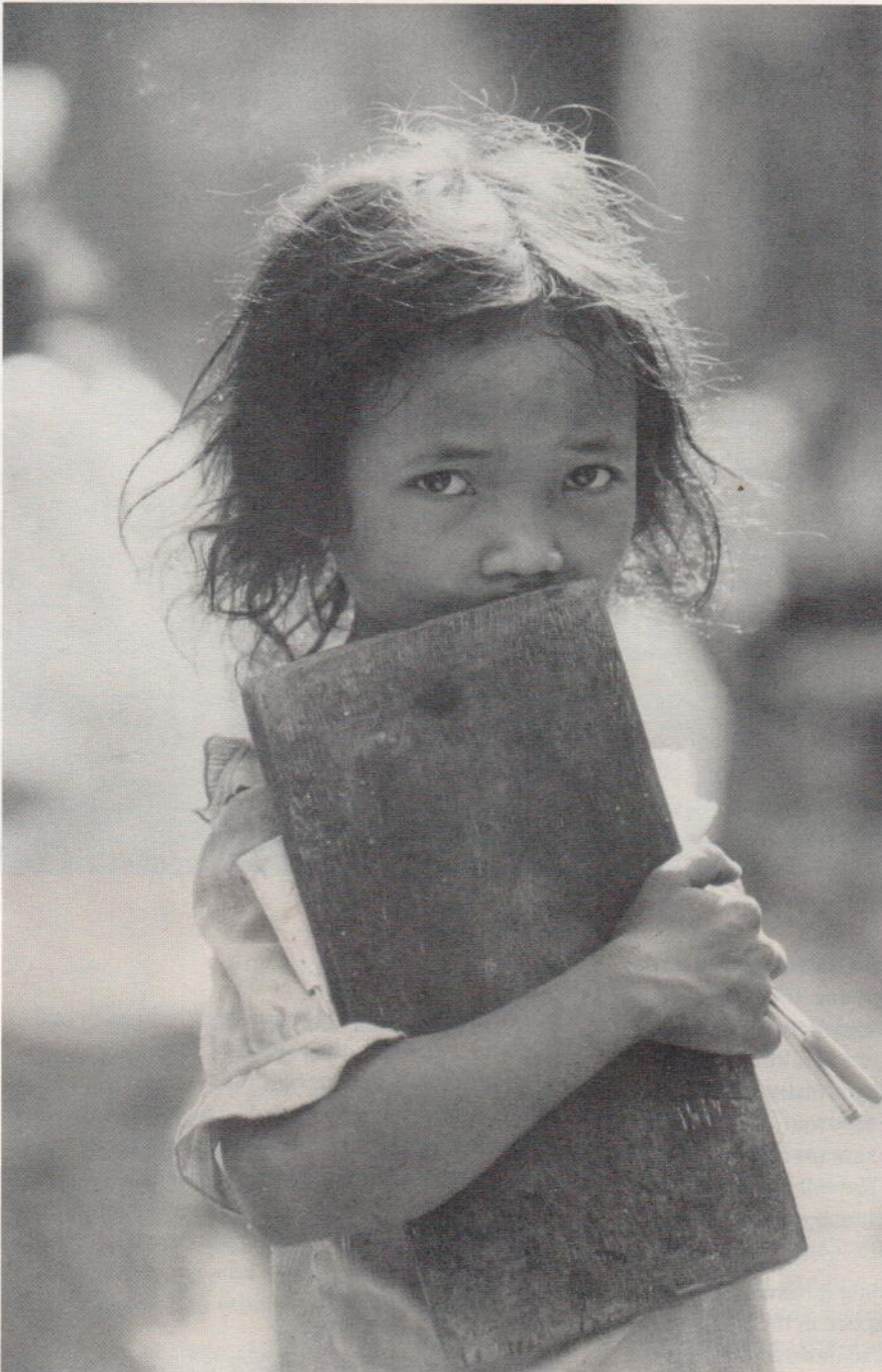
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Removing Roadblocks to Success

Transitions and Linkages between Home, Preschool, and Primary School

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UNICEF/5699 Z/91 / Mainichi/Shinichi Asabe

As we move toward the year 2000 and the goal of Education for All, some questions emerge about how to make that education **successful for all.**

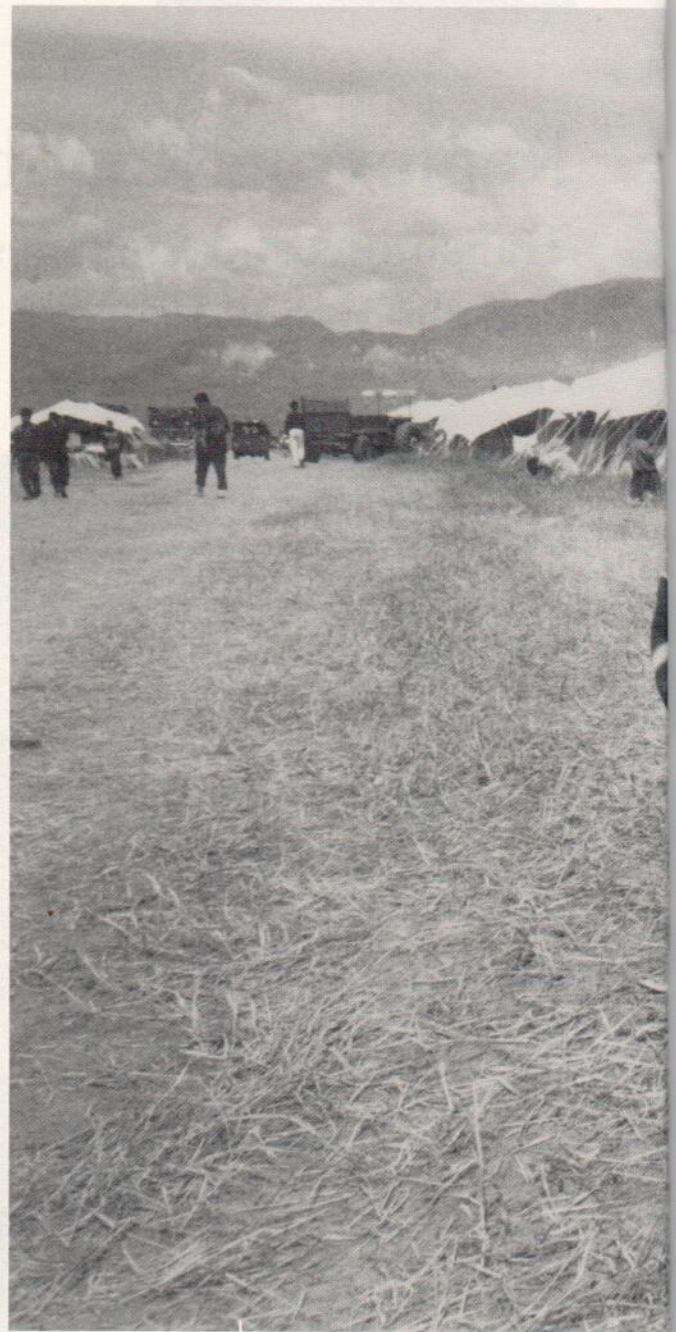
In countries all over the world we hear the same concerns: too many children are repeating grades; too many children are doing poorly in school; too many children are dropping out of school in the first few years. For example, a study in the Philippines brought to light some disheartening statistics regarding the effectiveness of primary education.¹ A high dropout rate was found to be prevalent in primary 1 and 2, accounting for 60% of total primary school dropouts. In addition, national achievement tests indicated performance below 50% of the norm. These findings raised a wide range of questions that are of concern in many countries of the world: What is the quality of the education being provided for children at the primary level? What percentage of dropouts are children from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds or minority cultures? How can we help children to get ready for school? And, taking a slightly broader perspective: Once children arrive in school, how can we make sure that schooling sets them on the road to ongoing, lifelong learning and success?

Within the early childhood care community, most would argue that the first steps on that road are accomplished by providing children with a healthy, supportive early childhood experience. But if a child is to benefit fully from a good early start, something strong and sturdy must be built upon that foundation. In this article we take a look at the transitions children make between their early childhood experiences and their schooling, and we examine ways that those transitions can be supported and linkages built between home, care settings, and schools in order to strengthen children's ability to survive and thrive as they move out into the world.

Why should we be concerned about constructing links between home, preschool, and primary school? The first days and months of schooling are traumatic for many young children, and are stressful for most. Upon entering primary school, six- or seven-year-old children are thrown into situations quite different from what they are used to, and they are expected to adapt quickly. The following are some of the transitions children must make upon entering school:

- They make a shift from learning informally through observation and practice in the home or through play in a preschool, to more formal modes of learning.

- They are expected to move quickly from an oral culture, in which they are only beginning to gain comfort and competency, to a written culture.
- Most children are expected to sit still and follow a whole range of new rules when they are used to more activity and freedom of movement.
- Many children have to make an adjustment from the practices and behaviour patterns of a minority or popular culture in their home, to the practices and expectations of a majority or dominant culture adhered to by the school.
- They are sometimes required to learn and use a





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new language, with little or no adjustment time or direct language instruction.

- For some, the shift involves a change from being an only child or part of a small group of children in the family, to being part of a larger group. This requires them to quickly develop new social skills and to take on new roles, including the role of "student," which require greater independence of children who may or may not be developmentally ready for it.²

Even one of these challenges can block a child's healthy growth and success in the new setting. When

several of these changes are encountered by a child at the same time, the stress of moving into the new learning environment of the school can be overwhelming. The result is often that the child fails to perform well, ends up repeating grades, becomes disaffected with learning, develops a sense of failure and low self-esteem, and ultimately drops out. Thus, the way in which the transition from home or preschool to school is handled can have important effects on children's future success and happiness, as well as on their ability to enjoy and take advantage of schooling in the present.

But concern with transitions goes well beyond concern for individual children and their futures; it encompasses the entire school system and its ability to successfully educate students for the greater good of society. Because the disjunction among diverse "worlds" or "learning environments" is usually greater for children from poor and disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, the failure to anticipate potential difficulties related to differences between home and school can perpetuate and even create inequities among the "haves" and the "have nots" and among different cultural groups in school and beyond. A society that aspires to equity cannot afford to ignore problems that arise in the transition from home to school.

The difficulties associated with the passage from home to school have been present to some degree as long as we have had schools. But interest and concern about children's transitions has grown of late. At least four factors have contributed to this increased attention:

School planners are more concerned with efficiency and quality. Interest in the transition to school has increased because many primary school systems have begun to put more emphasis on efficiency and quality, now that access and enrolment numbers have grown appreciably. For some school planners, children are viewed as productive resources to be transformed by school systems, whose goals are to achieve a good ratio of benefits to costs. One indicator of inefficiency in a school system is a high rate of repetition. Repetition often leads to dropout. Studies in many countries suggest that the highest rate of repetition is found during the first year or two of school. (Torres 1995) Accordingly, questions have arisen about how the transition to school might be eased so as to help children perform better during the first years, thereby avoiding repetition and, in the process, help to increase the efficiency of primary education.

The expansion of early childhood programmes has changed the nature of the transition. Another source of increased interest in transitions derives from the growth spurt of early childhood programmes over the last few years. Previously, the transition-to-school "problem" was defined for the most part in terms of the movement from home to school. Early childhood development and education programmes are (in some people's minds) supposed to help solve that problem. They are supposed to bridge gaps between home and school, leading to better adjustment to and performance in primary school. We have considerable evidence to show that is often the case.³ But some early childhood programmes seem to do a better job of facilitating the transition than others. And, perhaps more importantly, the general atmosphere of most early childhood programmes is still very different from that of the school. Early childhood education, in many cases, is more closely aligned with principles of holistic care and develop-

ment, or with making sure children have an enjoyable learning experience, than it is with preparation for formal learning and school settings. Indeed, many early childhood educators bristle at the thought that their purpose is to prepare children for school.

Ironically, the differences between early education and school may create new difficulties for children as they enter school, even as preschool preparation may resolve others. Although children who have attended preschools are generally more ready to learn, and stronger in their basic social, cognitive, and emotional development, they still must overcome the uncertainty and stress associated with moving into a new and different setting. Proponents of ECCD are more frequently raising questions about why it is difficult for *schools to adjust themselves to children* who come from stimulating early education environments. In some cases, under-trained teachers, who are confronted with a mixed group of children with preschool experience and children without, actually push the children with preschool experience aside, ignoring them until the others have "caught up". This has led educational planners to ask: What is the point of offering early childhood programming if the primary schools are unprepared for such children? This, of course, is the wrong question. A better question would be: How can we incorporate children's transitions to school and the schools' readiness to receive all children into our early childhood programming and planning?

Urbanization means that schools are increasingly "foreign". The apparent increased failure of children to make successful transitions into school may be a product of urbanization. When schools are located in small towns, children usually know all or most of the other children who will attend the school. Often the school is multi-grade so that children find themselves in classes with siblings who can help them adjust. It is usually possible to walk to school rather than to go in a bus, even if long distances are involved. In addition, many times teachers are already known to the children because they come from the local community. All of these factors make the school part of the child's natural "territory" and community; it is not a forbidding place. Yet, even in these conditions, the passage can be a difficult one. With the move toward urbanization, however, children may be sent to a large, unfamiliar school setting far from home, where they are separated from familiar faces and contexts. For these children the transition becomes even harder. There has been growing awareness among social planners in recent years that urbanization may be having a negative impact on children; this issue needs to be addressed.

A new interest in children with special needs has prompted new looks at the process of transition. Yet another source of interest in linkages and the transition from home and/or preschool to primary school comes from the increased attention being

given to children with special needs.⁴ In the past, these children were often kept out of school. Recently however, international and national movements have begun to open doors for them. The drive for the inclusion of children with special needs with other children into regular classrooms has stimulated efforts to anticipate and overcome the potential for stress and the negative effects associated with the inclusion process, in which children, families, and professionals must all make adjustments.

A Framework for Addressing Transitions and Linkages

Children's Multiple Learning Environments

Although we speak of "transitions" in this article, adopting a term that is commonly used, it would be more accurate to frame the issue in terms of the relationships among the multiple learning environments which make up the world of a pre-school or school-age child. These learning environments include the home, preschool or school, community, church, etc.,⁵

all of which generally have different characteristics. Moving from one environment to another may be accompanied by vulnerability, uncertainty, exposure to new demands, and feelings of stress, and it may be beyond the developmental capabilities of some children to reconcile the cultural and behavioural expectations with which they are confronted.⁶ The question is: How can these environments be linked together in a better way so that movement among them is not so stressful? Is the answer to this question to try to make all environments look alike? Or can we maintain the virtues of each? Finally, can we effectively help the child if we change only the home environment but not the school, or vice versa?

Figure 1 indicates some of the differences between learning environments and processes in the home, in early childhood programmes, and in the school. In general, the learning environment of most early childhood development programmes and preschools is probably closer to that of the family than to that of most schools, but it is usually more structured than most homes. As suggested earlier, the differences between these environments and processes are usually greater when we speak of a family living in poverty or a family that belongs to an ethnic or racial group that does not conform to the dominant culture of a country.

Figure 1. Learning Environments: The Home, Early Childhood Programmes, and the School

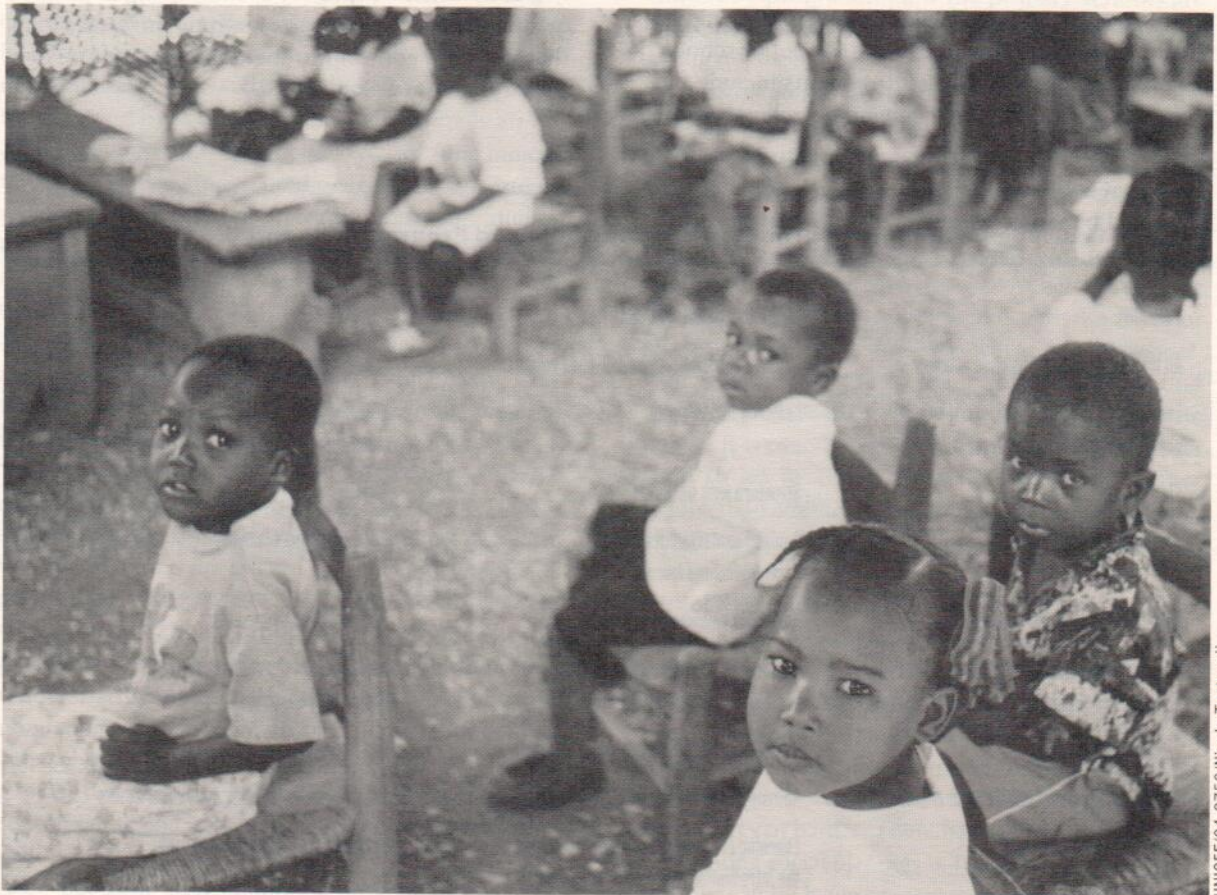
THE HOME	EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME	THE SCHOOL
An informal, loving adult-child relation	An informal, supportive adult-child relation	A formal, less personal adult-child relation
Learning through imitation, experience, and trial and error	Learning through play	Learning through didactic teaching, memorization
Flexibility	Structure with flexibility	Rigidity
Contextualized learning	A mix of contextualized and decontextualized learning	Decontextualized learning
Modelling, one-on-one teaching	Numerous children to one adult	Many children to one adult
Adjustments to the interests and needs of the child	Adjustments to interests and needs of child, in the context of the group	Adjustment of the child to the demands of the school
Emphasis on the concrete	Use of concrete/objects to teach concepts	Use of symbols
Active participation in chores and rituals	Activity-based learning	Passive role in learning and school events
Learning in mother tongue	Learning in mother tongue, perhaps with the introduction of national language	Learning in the national language
Emphasis on language comprehension	Emphasis on language comprehension and production	Emphasis on language production
Emphasis on process	Emphasis on process	Emphasis on results

The characteristics in Figure 1 are obviously stereotypes of reality. Some teachers achieve a good personal relationship with the children in their class, respond to their personal needs and interests, and emphasize process, etc. Some parents do not have an informal and loving relationship with their children, are rigid with respect to what they expect from their children, show little flexibility in their actions, and do not adjust to individual needs, etc. Nevertheless, the chart offers a baseline description of common differences between three typical settings for children.

What are the needs of children in transition from home to school? The period of the developmental transition being discussed encompasses roughly ages three, or four, to eight. The actual age of entrance into formal primary school varies from country to country as does the age of entrance into an early childhood programme. To orient the reader to the child's changing needs from birth through the early primary years, an inset is provided on page 7.

Although every child is a unique person with an individual temperament, learning style, family background, and pattern and timing of growth, there are predictable sequences of growth and change during childhood. Proponents of early childhood programming argue that children need developmentally appropriate experiences which allow the child to have a healthy body, a capable mind, and appropriate social skills. One of the major challenges of each learning environment is to provide the child with conditions and experiences that are in line with these sequences of development.

The spurt of development that occurs between the ages of three and five, in which certain baseline cognitive abilities must be supported if the child is to thrive and become a capable adult, does not stop at age five or six, but continues through the age of eight. Thus the transition from the pre-school years into primary school is in fact an important stage of development and experience in its own right.



In many settings children's needs are not being met.

UNICEF/94-0759/Nicole Toutourji

THE NEEDS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Very young children (birth–3 years) need:

- Protection from physical danger
- Adequate nutrition and health care
- Appropriate immunizations
- An adult with whom to form an attachment
- An adult who can understand and respond to their signals
- Things to look at, touch, hear, smell, taste
- Opportunities to explore their world
- Appropriate language stimulation
- Support in acquiring new motor, language, and thinking skills
- A chance to develop some independence
- Help in learning how to control their own behaviour
- Opportunities to begin to learn to care for themselves
- Daily opportunities to play with a variety of objects

Preschool-aged children need all of the above, plus:

- Opportunities to develop fine motor skills
- Encouragement of language through talking, being read to, singing
- Activities which will develop a positive sense of mastery
- Opportunities to learn cooperation, helping, sharing
- Experimentation with pre-writing and pre-reading skills
- Hands-on exploration for learning through action
- Opportunities for taking responsibility and making choices
- Encouragement to develop self-control, cooperation, persistence in completing projects
- Support for their sense of self-worth
- Opportunities for self-expression
- Encouragement of creativity

Children in the early primary grades need all of the above, plus:

- Support in acquiring additional motor, language, and thinking skills
- Additional opportunities to develop independence
- Opportunities to become self-reliant in their personal care
- Opportunities to develop a wide variety of skills
- Support for the further development of language through talking, reading, singing
- Activities which will further develop a positive sense of mastery of a variety of skills and concepts
- Opportunities to learn cooperation and to help others
- Hands-on manipulation of objects which support learning
- Opportunities for taking responsibility and making choices
- Support in the development of self-control and persistence in completing projects
- Support for their sense of self-worth and pride in their accomplishments
- Motivation for and reinforcement of academic achievement

Some school systems and governments test children for "school readiness" but often these tests do not focus on children's developmental status or on the experiences children bring with them to the school setting. Tests are most often designed to determine children's knowledge (e.g., their ability to recite the alphabet and perhaps read, knowledge of numbers and perhaps the ability to do simple calculations).⁷ This means that the school is not really given the information it needs to teach effectively, particularly for children who are not adequately prepared or who are developmentally behind the expected norm, or are otherwise at risk. Thus, programmes in the early years of primary school are most often planned around subject matter to be imparted to children, rather than around the *children as learners*.

Addressing children's transitions. Depending on how you frame the problem of transitions, and depending on the nature of what particular children (or groups of children) experience in their home, and what they experience in early childhood and school environments, there are very different approaches to transition that can be taken. To help frame the subsequent discussion, a rough three-part typology is used, representing different approaches to understanding both the problems and the solutions for connecting a child's home and early childhood experiences to the child's primary school experiences. (See Figure 2) Each strategy is based on a different perception of where the main problem lies. The perception represented by the first of the scenarios described, that there are identified deficiencies in the child, home, or early care environments, has led many communities to institute ECCD programmes and child remediation programmes to address the deficiencies of children's readiness for school. In some cases, this approach is successful and enables more children to enter, stay,

and succeed in school. However, in many cases, these well-prepared students arrive at schools that are not prepared for them, and they fail to thrive despite good remedial or preventive early attention. In these cases, it is important to consider number two, that the learning environments of schools are not adequate to meet children's needs, and three, that the disjunction between a child's diverse environments needs to be addressed programmatically. Efforts to ease children's transitions and adjustments to school and to improve school performance may, and probably should, combine all three kinds of solutions. An elaboration on each of the approaches follows.

Approach 1: Changing the Child and the Home

Changing the child (and/or the child's home environment) so that the child will be more adjusted to the school is undoubtedly the most common approach taken in the attempt to ease transition and improve the achievement of children in primary school. A wide variety of early childhood interventions have appeared, focused on child or family. At least one objective of these approaches is to help prepare the child for entry into school. Although these programmes have often been effective, this strategy, if taken as the exclusive approach to easing transition, must be viewed with caution as well as with promise.

- First, focusing on the child explicitly or implicitly places the blame for failure in school on the child and/or the family, thereby promoting an aura of failure.
- Second, the strategy of changing the child often carries with it, intended or unintended, a devaluing of popular or minority cultures. This occurs

Figure 2. Typology of Approaches to Problems Related to Transitions

PROBLEM	SOLUTIONS
1. There are deficiencies in the child, the home, and/or in the learning environments in which a child participates prior to entering school that leave the child poorly prepared for school.	Change the child before she/he gets to school (or once she/he arrives). Change the home and community learning environments.
2. The learning environments provided by primary schools do not respond properly to the needs and conditions of the children they receive.	Change the nature of the first years of primary schooling.
3. The disjunction between the preschool environment and the primary school environment causes stress and is disorienting.	Smooth the transition: build linkages; strengthen coping skills and communication; develop a transition plan

because the process of setting the standards for entrance into school is usually controlled by a dominant culture and/or a central bureaucracy. The creation of curriculum may not, and often does not, adequately take into account cultural differences in goals and values, styles of learning, or languages used at home. A low value is placed on culturally-rooted standards and practices which are not represented in the dominant culture, implying that minority cultural practices are not desirable or useful. Making the child fit the school promotes an homogenization of culture rather than a recognition and celebration of cultural differences.

- Third, and related to the foregoing, approaches that seek to change the child tend to be negative. They begin with the identification of *deficits* in children or families (as defined by those in charge), the approaches then focus on how to "compensate" for these "deficits". This contrasts with a process which identifies strengths in children, families, and cultures, and uses those strengths as a basis for the "social construction" of alternatives.
- Fourth, changing the child to be better prepared for school may not mean that the child is better prepared for life because, in the process, skills and abilities crucial to everyday living may be discarded or weakened.
- Finally, placing emphasis on the preparation for

school emphasizes the future and can, if exaggerated, have the effect of robbing the child of enjoyment and essential experiences in the present. A child, like any other person, should be able to enjoy what she or he is living in the present, even while looking toward the future.

With these cautions in mind, we ask: What does it mean for a child to be "prepared" for school, as typically defined? What are the so-called deficiencies that cause problems upon entry into school and sometimes lead to failure? Figure 3 sets out a list of possible "deficiencies" often cited as reasons why children do poorly in school, and for which some kind of early childhood programme is devised to help compensate or overcome.

The list is set in a negative framework, as is often done in programming, but it could be turned around to reflect a more positive approach. If this were done, the child, in order to be considered prepared to enter school, should be:

- *physically healthy and well nourished*
- *able to handle basic cognitive concepts*
- *able to communicate in everyday transactions and in the language of school*
- *able to relate well to others*
- *psychologically self-assured, with a good self concept*
- *able to work independently*
- *motivated to learn*

Figure 3. Deficiencies to be Overcome to Prepare the Child for School

DEFICIENCY	TYPICAL PROGRAMME SOLUTIONS
Poor health/nutrition that reduces activity levels and increases absences.	Provide health care, food and vitamin supplements, growth monitoring, health and nutrition education for parents, etc.
Physical or learning disability.	Provide special programmes, particularly those that help a child cope in the real world; provide parental orientation/education.
Delayed cognitive development.	Offer ECCD programmes which stress cognitive development, in centres or at home.
Language problems: Delay in learning languages. Need to learn other language.	Offer early education activities that stress language development, in centres or in the home; offer bilingual preschool classrooms.
Lack of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills.	Teach such skills as part of a general development programme or explicitly teach alphabets, writing, ciphering.
Social/ psychological insecurity and dependence.	Create programmes that offer counselling services, or that focus on general development in a way that helps children build social "survival skills".
Low expectations of the child by both the child and parents.	Help to show child and parents through ECCD programmes that children are capable of achieving.

It is common and appropriate for early childhood programmes to take an integrated view of what abilities children need to develop in order to enter into school, and incorporate these and all activities that will help to strengthen the various abilities listed above. In some cases, however, emphasis is placed on only one or two of the above, to the detriment of the others.

In sum, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of early childhood projects and programmes representing diverse goals, curricula, forms of organization, responsibilities for the adults involved, training methods, degrees of parental involvement, etc., all intended, at least in part, to change children so that they will be better prepared for school. As was said earlier, this approach of changing the child can be valid and effective as a method of increasing children's chances of success in school. However, ECCD professionals, who define early childhood as continuing through age eight, will argue that changing the child is only a part of the solution to the "transition problem". In fact, they argue, it is also necessary to restructure primary schools to better fit children's developmental patterns and needs. We will turn now to programmes that seek to ease children's transition to primary school by making changes within the school itself.

Approach 2: Changing the School

What is it about schools that makes entry difficult for many children? What can schools change in order to bridge the gap between home or an early education programme and the primary school? What can be done to help schools adjust to the many kinds of children they receive? What makes schools "friendly?"

Teachers in Primary 1 and 2 have an extremely difficult job to do. While in terms of the child's developmental needs it would be more appropriate for teachers in the early primary grades to function as early educators, administratively the primary school is located within the formal school system, which generally begins for children at age six or seven. This has many implications. Teachers in the early grades have to deal with a large number of students whom the law says must attend school. Furthermore, teachers are subject to many organizational conventions often used in primary school settings that are designed to make managing children easier: self-contained classrooms, age and ability groupings, and the division of curricula into discrete subject areas. Rules of the classroom have also been developed to help control children, such as asking permission, raising hands, remaining seated, etc. These practices are different from those within early childhood education settings where, for instance, there is less division in the curriculum, and where children are usually more free to move about.

Against this background, there are a number of ini-

tiatives and possible changes that might be instituted to make primary schools more child-friendly, to help bridge the gap between the home and/or early education settings and primary school, and to help teachers in the early primary grades address children's needs more appropriately.

■ Add programmes within the school that address children's needs.

Let us begin by looking at initiatives taken within schools that are intended to help the transition to school, but which, in fact, are really designed to change the child rather than the school.

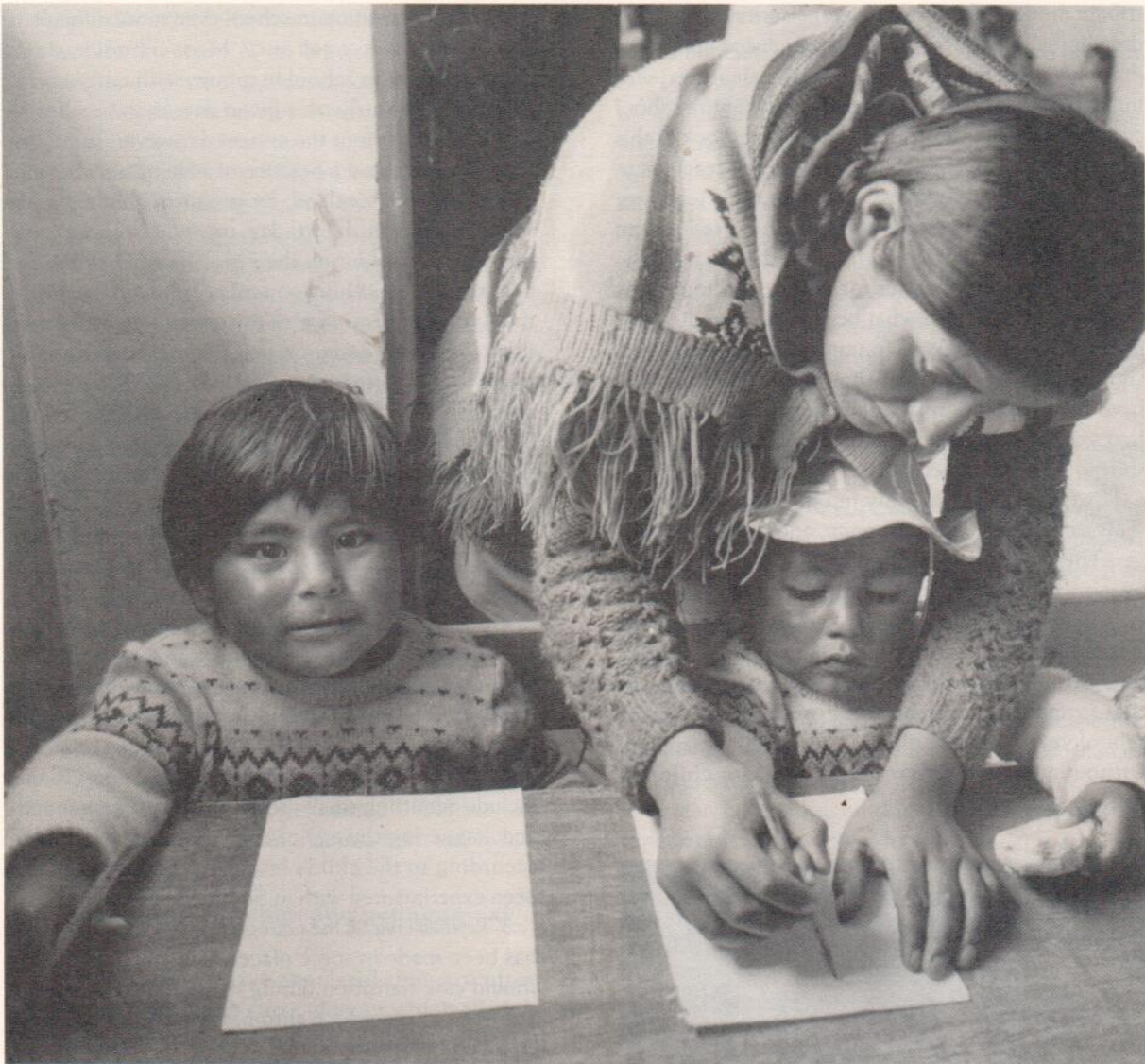
1. Some primary school systems offer *readiness programmes*. On page 30 we describe a bridging (transition) programme put into effect in the Philippines that originated as a six-week readiness programme run by the schools during the summer immediately preceding entry into primary school. This is a model that exemplifies programmes which focus on intensive preparation of the child for school.

2. Another approach is to provide *tutorials*. Frequently tutorials are provided for children who are identified as needing extra help during the first year of school. This extra help is given to children in addition to the regular primary school curriculum. Although this practice may be beneficial, it can also become a kind of punishment for children and teachers alike because they are expected to use their free time for the tutoring, while others get to play or relax.

Readiness programmes and tutorials do not really change the school or adjust it to the child; rather, they seek to make changes in the child so the child will fit better into the school. They do not attempt to change teaching styles or curricula or other features of the school that might help children adjust better socially or learn better in the school.

The problem with the readiness programmes offered to children just before they enter school is that these programmes do not generally provide the long-term support which children with true differences in background and culture need to succeed. This highlights an important point: *transition programmes need to address not only the point of actual entry into school, a moment that looms very large in the minds of most children, but also what happens to children during at least the first two years of school.* The bridges between where a child is coming from, experientially and developmentally, and where we are asking him/her to go, cognitively and socially, generally require more time and individualized attention to construct than is available in short-term remedial programmes.

3. Some primary schools have sought to make school a more friendly place by providing *health and nutrition services* for the children—school breakfasts or health and dental checkups, etc. These efforts are necessary and good. They may help children to adjust to and perform better in schools by improving energy



UNICEF/1562/Ray Whittin

Children often need individual help in making the transition to school.

levels and attention spans or by reducing absences. But, again, such programmes are primarily directed toward changing the child rather than addressing deficiencies in the school.

■ Change the administration, organization, and rules in schools.

One strategy for addressing children's transitions is to make structural changes in the school or school system. For example the following approaches might be instituted:

1. *Lowering age of entry.* One factor that needs to be taken into account in the shift from home or preschool to school is the age of entry. The adjustment to school will not be the same for a child aged seven as for a child aged five. Lowering the age of entry into school, as is occurring in a number of countries in Latin America and Asia, does not necessarily

make transition easier or harder. It does, however, change the level of what can be expected of a child prior to school entry and during Primary 1 and 2; it also requires significant changes in how the school functions, including adapting the curriculum for these younger children and preparing teachers to teach them.

The Philippine programme that began as a remedial programme before school entry has now been moved into the school system and has officially incorporated a segment into its curriculum labelled "Early Childhood Experiences" (ECE), which is followed during the first eight weeks of primary school. This transition occurred when the official age of entry was moved downward from seven to six years of age. (See p.32) A small-scale evaluation of the ECE experience suggested that the eight-week curriculum does con-

tribute moderately to improved performance of children in the first year and leads to a reduced number of dropouts, thereby providing the rationale for extending Early Childhood Experiences to the entire school system. Some educators in the Philippines look at this experiment as a means to push first grade teachers in the system to become less formal in their teaching methods and to become more oriented toward an active learning approach, a shift that should make the transition to school easier for children. Should this occur on a large scale, what began as a remedial programme will have served to transform the school in a significant way. On the other hand, teachers who have been used to formal teaching methods during the first year may find it difficult to make the necessary shift to nonformal methods.

Lowering the age of entry into primary school presents a challenge, an opportunity, and a potential danger. The challenge is to adjust methods and content to be more developmentally appropriate. The opportunity is to expose primary school teachers to more active learning approaches appropriate to younger children (and often to older children as well). The danger is that formal teaching methods used in the primary school years with the older children will be applied without adjustment to teaching younger children,



Curricula should include opportunities for self-expression.

making the transition to school even more difficult.

2. *Individual vs. group entry.* Most school systems admit children to school in groups with entry occurring simultaneously on a given date each year for all children throughout the system. However, some systems have adopted a practice of individual entry into school. In New Zealand, for instance, children enter school on their fifth birthday, regardless of when that birthday occurs during the year. (Renwick 1984; see case studies, p.28) Proponents of this system argue that individual entry helps to assure individual attention to children, and promotes the planning of appropriate learning experiences for their continuous development. Individual admission breaks with the "whole class" approach and undercuts set expectations in relation to standardized courses of instruction that both teachers and parents are likely to carry. It is argued that this system also encourages and facilitates initial contact between home and school and allows greater parental communication.

Opponents of this system point to the complications created by individual admission with respect to classroom organization and management. They argue that because it is difficult to establish set classroom routines, it is harder for children to settle into any regular pattern. Variations on the individual entry theme include admitting small groups to school each month and staggering the age of entry into primary school according to the child's level of preparation, as has been experimented with in South Africa (see p. 32).

3. *Repetition rules.* One change in school routines that has been made in some places, with the idea that it should ease transition during the first year of school, has been to introduce automatic promotion. There seems to be little agreement about the results of this strategy on the performance of children in cases where promotion is automatic at the end of each primary school grade. However, automatic passage need not be the procedure for all grades. Mexico and Peru, for instance, have recently introduced automatic promotion at the end of the first year only. This allows for the fact that some children are quicker than others, and that some arrive at school with skills and a disposition to learn, while others do not. Automatic promotion after the first grade is seen as a way of countering the sense of failure experienced by children who do not learn to read and write at the required level by the end of their first year and who are therefore made to repeat the year. The hope is that, with automatic promotion, children will be permitted to learn to read and write at their own pace over two years rather than one, and presumably will catch up by the end of second grade. The results of these experiments in automatic promotion remain to be evaluated.

4. *Class size.* Reducing class size could be a helpful way to ease the transition of children into primary school, especially in those cases where teachers have

to handle classes of forty or more children, a situation that is all too common. With large classes, the need to "manage" and "control" students becomes a first priority; educating them takes a back seat. Large classes not only make individual attention to students difficult, but they also produce a different kind of interaction among students who must learn how to operate within the context of the larger group setting.

5. *Physical proximity of preschools and primary schools.* It has been argued that locating preschools within or next to primary schools could help transitions for several reasons. First, preschool children would already be accustomed to coming to the primary school, and they would be used to sharing a larger space with older children. By placing the two together, older siblings (or even neighbours' children) could be charged with bringing the younger child to school, and help to provide security in the new environment while the child becomes acclimated to it. Also, physical proximity may encourage joint administration and supervision of preschool and primary schools.

Although this practice has advantages and may appear to be logical, the net effect may simply be to move the problems associated with transition down a year, or to the time that children first come to preschool. It may also result in a higher probability that early educators will be expected to behave like first grade teachers and that the preschool will follow a more formal curriculum.

■ Change the curriculum and pedagogical practices.

When children arrive at school they are often exposed to a lock-step curriculum in which all children are expected to learn the same material at the same rate and move together from one grade to the next, again at the same rate. In these situations, the prevailing attitude is that one curriculum serves all. Most primary schools today still practice "frontal" teaching (where the teacher stands in front of the students and dominates the discussion), and promote passive learning and memorization. In many primary schools, teachers come from outside the community; they may or may not be fluent in the local language. Class sizes may be very large, making it difficult to provide any kind of individual attention to children. As suggested in Figure 1, these characteristics are usually very different from those of the learning which takes place in the home or in preschool programmes.

There have been many efforts to drastically modify primary school curricula, methods, and organization. In the mid-1970s, for instance, innovative programmes were introduced into Indonesia and the Philippines that were intended to help children advance in primary school at their own pace, using self-instruction modules, and with a significant degree of peer teaching.

■ Change the teacher.

It is difficult to expect changes in curricula or methods to have an effect on providing linkages for children if major changes do not occur in the selection and/or training of teachers. It is common for teachers to have some sort of re-tooling in order to be able to handle a new curriculum, but it is also common for these training experiences to be short and superficial, with little follow-up or supervision. Thus, they fail to produce the needed changes. The New School in Colombia described on page 37, a transition project in Peru, and other programmes have made ongoing training a requirement for teachers wishing to participate in demonstration schools.

In some programmes, changing the teacher means changing the selection of teachers, rather than retraining existing teachers. For example, in rural Egypt, villagers without much formal pedagogical training are selected to become teachers, in part because they make a more direct link to the community, and in part because they have not been trained in the more rigid teaching methods characteristic of many teacher training programmes. In other cases, individual teachers are selected based on their attitudes, cultural expertise, and willingness to learn new methods, rather than on their current credentials.

Research literature on this topic suggests that the expectations that teachers have for students in general, as well as their expectations for particular students, is one of the most important factors affecting the performance of children in primary school. Teachers trained for a particular setting are more likely to have appropriate expectations.

Another aspect of teaching that can contribute to a difficult adjustment on the part of children is the practice of corporal punishment. Where this is a part of a tradition of discipline at home, corporal punishment may not contribute greatly to problems of transition to the school, but in some settings, this is the single most direct reason for children leaving school.⁸

In *Bridging the Gap Between Home and School*, Sylva and Blatchford (1996) suggest that the following strategies should be employed to improve teaching in the early grades and to provide continuity between home and school:

- Train primary teachers differently for lower and upper primary grade specializations.
- Recognize that the greatest educational gains are to be achieved by placing the most able and highly qualified teachers in the lower grades.
- Devise teacher training curricula to include guidance on young children's learning needs, language and bi-lingual development, and appropriate active-based pedagogy.
- Develop career structures for teachers to increase motivation and commitment, and provide ongoing training.



A critical element in the adjustment to school is the language of instruction. UNICEF/4220/Sprague

■ **Incorporate local culture into the schools.**

Too often the idea of incorporating local or indigenous cultures into primary schools is restricted to providing stories and games taken from the local culture and/or to adjusting textbooks by including topics and illustrations that are culturally pertinent. These initiatives represent a good start toward incorporating local culture into the schools, but other changes may be more important. One of these has to do with creating culturally-linked modes of learning that bring the community into the school; another involves using the local language initially as the language of instruction.

Language learning and the language of instruction. A critical element in adjustment to school is the language of instruction. Many children grow up in bi-lingual or multi-lingual cultures. They may have a large vocabulary and may have learned to manage the grammar and rules of their mother tongue by the time they enter school, but they may have little or no facility in the language used for instruction in the school. They are not well prepared, therefore, to learn to read and write in the language of the school. One solution to this has been to help children learn the language of the school prior to entry; another has been to change the language of instruction used during the first years of the primary school.

The following quotation is taken from "Language Planning in Preschool Education," (*Coordinators' Notebook 9*) but the points are equally valid for the first years of primary school, and especially for situations in which languages and cultural differences are present:

In group care settings for preschool-aged children,

a number of factors can be identified as constituting likely obstacles to an optimal language environment. Very large groups of children and high child/adult ratios reduce the likelihood of one-on-one interactions between children and adults. Repeated failure on the part of the adult to respond to the child's communicative attempts (either because of disinterest, because of commitment to more adult-centred activities, or because the adult and child do not share a language) constitutes another environmental obstacle. Failure on the part of the adult to recognize the need to attend to all children, including those who may seem shy, less interested in the group activities, less responsible, or less competent can further diminish the quality of the environment for children. A strong programmatic emphasis on teaching academic skills (letters, numbers, colours, rote memorization of materials) may absorb energies that could better be devoted to real communicative activities and language-enriching conversations. The absence of appropriate books and materials that provide the context for conversations that build oral vocabulary and readiness for literacy may likewise reduce the value of the language environment to the child. (12)

An extensive literature exists dealing with strategies for introducing a second language to children, including bi-lingual programmes that utilize the native and the second language, immersion programmes in which an entire group of children from the same language background interact with specially trained group leaders using another language, and submersion programmes (entailing the greatest risk) in which a few

children whose first language is foreign to the staff are literally submerged in a second language setting without any provisions for language learning support. Experiments in such diverse settings as Nigeria and Peru suggest that using the mother tongue (for class work as well as in teaching children to read and write) during the first years of primary school, and treating the second language as a subject to be learned during this period not only helps school adjustment, but can also prepare children adequately for a shift to the dominant language during the latter years of primary school. Such mother tongue programmes are not always easy to carry out successfully, however.⁹

Culture and learning. The question of language, central as it is, is only part of a larger issue of how to relate the surrounding culture to the learning that takes place within the primary schools. As indicated, this means more than simply introducing local topics and illustrations into textbooks. It means moving the school into the community and the community into the school, a feature that has been emphasised in many of the innovative primary school experiments.

In most of the preceding examples of changing the school to ease transition, the primary school is treated as a totally separate learning environment from that of the preschool or the home. No real notion of linkages is incorporated. Education and learning is not looked upon as an experience to be shared by all. There is little communication and contact among the people who are responsible for learning in the various environments. Indeed, there may be frictions and even jealousies among diverse stakeholders in the child's life. At the same time, we have seen that many of the programmes also make a special effort to bring the community into the schools. We now turn to looking at approaches that focus more specifically on building linkages between home, community, preschool, and school.

Approach 3: Supporting Smooth Transitions through Building Linkages— Education as a Shared Experience

A third approach to reducing the tensions that affect a child entering school is to build linkages between a child's home, care settings, other learning environments (such as religious or community institutions), and primary school. This can be accomplished by strengthening communication among diverse people with influence in a child's life. It requires that parents, preschool and primary teachers, and administrators work together to construct a locally-relevant (and when possible, an individually-tailored) educational process that facilitates children's transitions.

This approach of building linkages may or may not

mean attempting to smooth the transition by making the child's various environments look more alike. To some extent, adjusting environments so that they will mesh more comfortably is both a positive and logical step. Most educators, for instance, would say that learning in the first grades of primary school would be facilitated by adopting more active teaching methods, by being more flexible, by attempting to create contexts for learning, by allowing children to learn in the mother tongue (with the dominant language taught as a second language), etc. Making such changes would move the school closer to both early education programmes and to the home.

At the same time, trying to make the school look too much like the home, or vice versa, should not be carried to extremes. Children learn different things from different environments. They can learn from contrasts as well as similarities, and it is valuable for them to learn how to manage themselves in diverse settings. Therefore, even while making some essential adjustments in the home or the school that may "smooth the transition," it is also valuable to:

- find ways to respect the unique and positive points of each environment;
- anticipate and provide orientation for changes that will be faced by children and parents;
- develop broad coping skills in children (rather than remould them to one environment or another);
- foster continuing communication among the adults in the child's life; and
- find means of supporting each child in his or her particular passages.

These strategies do not depend on changing the nature of the child or the nature of the school. They require planners to anticipate changes children will face, to address the expectations and attitudes of both adults and children, to build cooperation among the diverse influential people in a child's life, and to improve communication and linkages between home, early childhood programmes, and school. All of these activities should be directed toward making learning a shared experience between children and the adults in their lives. An interesting example of this approach comes from Chile's Transitions from Home to School Project (PTHS), which is composed of three separate programmes that provide support to the adults in children's lives, from birth to age eight. The project has the following components:

- The Parents and Children component (Proyecto Padres e Hijos). This intervention works with groups of mothers of small children (0–5 years). The aim is to empower parents so that they can create more favourable conditions in the home and in the community for the development of the full potential of their children.
- The Educating Together component (Proyecto

Educando Juntos). This project involves the creation of collaborative relationships between parents, kindergarten teachers, and primary 1 and 2 teachers to bridge the gap between home, kindergarten, and primary school. It is expected that this will result in improved conditions for the cognitive and emotional development of children from kindergarten until the end of primary 2, as well as in facilitating children's school learning.

- The Teacher Development component (Proyecto Capacitacion del Magisterio). This intervention is directed toward kindergarten and primary 1 and 2 teachers. The objective is to promote team work between kindergarten and primary school teachers and to prepare them in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The emphasis is on the production of written material and on curriculum content that is culturally relevant to the life experiences of children from poor communities. (Benito and Filp 1996)

How can the administrative and organizational, as well as the social and psychological, barriers between learning environments be overcome? There are several ways that barriers can be reduced or even removed entirely. Providing continuity—of curriculum, teachers, and methodology—is one way this can be achieved. Increasing communication and cooperation between all those who work for the benefit of the child is yet another.

■ Seeking continuity in teaching methods and teachers

1. *Continuity of curriculum.* Improving the continuity of what and how children are expected to learn as they move from home or preschool to school means at least two things. First, it means reducing the discontinuities that often occur as a child moves from a personal, open, active curriculum in the home or preschool to an impersonal, passive, and didactic approach in primary school. To do that well, parents, preschool teachers, and primary school teachers should sit together to see where, in each particular setting, adjustments can be made (see section below on working together). In some cases, this may mean that parents or preschool teachers pay a bit more attention to pre-reading, writing, and ciphering skills than they have in the past. It may include such simple things as helping a child learn the letters of his or her name or how to hold a pencil. In other cases, it may mean that primary school teachers can be helped to see ways to introduce more active learning methods into their teaching.

But continuity also means assuring that the curriculum, whether in preschool or school, evolves in a way that is developmentally appropriate. This is important for children in general, but it is particularly crucial for children who may be developing at rates that are different from the norm or from some imported defini-

tion of the norm. To seek this continuity, the curricula of preschools and primary schools can be re-examined in light of what research literature identifies as age-appropriate for the country and cultural groups involved. Countries or states may need to do some assessments of children to understand more clearly what developmental characteristics their children are expressing at various ages in their particular context. But perhaps more important, flexibility needs to be built into all curricular plans, in order to make them responsive to the needs of particular children as they cross the line from home or preschool to school. That is very hard to do when one adult is faced with forty or more children, or even twenty-five children, and a fixed syllabus in the first grade. It is very hard to do without extensive, ongoing communication between parents, preschool teachers, and primary school teachers.

2. *Continuity of Teachers.* In some places, a bridge is made between preschool and primary school when teachers move with a particular group of children as they cross the boundaries between preschool and primary 1 and 2. In this case, children do not have to adjust to a new teacher as they move because their teacher moves with them. These children will have a better notion of what to expect since they are already familiar with the teacher's style and approach. This arrangement also has the potential advantage of providing continuity for the children as they move through the period of learning the basics of reading and writing because they do not have to adhere to a fixed schedule or adjust to a different person or style of teaching. Obviously, like any other, this system has its drawbacks. If a teacher is not adequately prepared, is not flexible, or if a particular teacher and child clash, this system may not work well, and a child may be condemned to three years, instead of one year, of reading and "writhing".

Another arrangement is for children to be grouped in multi-age, multi-grade classrooms, involving children at the kindergarten, first, and second grade levels, breaking the traditional age-grade-teacher mode of organization.¹⁰ Multi-grade teaching is difficult. It involves particular skills and support, not only from the school, but also from parents. By necessity, it often occurs within the primary schools in rural areas, where teachers with few children combine several years, or sometimes all six years, of primary school in a one-room schoolhouse. But instances of combining classes that cross the preschool/primary school line are less common. In such cases, peers can be drawn upon to help with the teaching and learning, but caution must be taken not to hamper the learning process of faster students, in favour of having them help slower ones.

■ Orientation and communication

Both children and parents need orientation to what

will be expected of them as their children enter school, and to how school works. This can be accomplished by arranging orientations well in advance of entrance into the school.

In some locations, orientation of preschoolers to school occurs naturally or informally. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, for instance, it is common for older children to bring their younger siblings to school with them when they cannot be attended to at home. School and its routines become familiar to children long before their official entry into school. In rural Mexico, it is not uncommon for families to arrange for children to come to school as "oyentes" (listeners) for an agreed-upon time during the year prior to their formal entrance.

More formal arrangements for planned visits to schools are arranged, for instance, in Singapore and in Guyana, where one activity during the last year of preschool is to visit primary school for at least several days.

In Lesotho, a novel Child-to-Child programme has been developed to help orient preschoolers to school. Primary 1 children are paired with preschoolers and accompany them to the school so that the younger

children can learn about what happens in the first year of school.

Meetings with parents before school begins, although an obvious way to orient and communicate with parents, is not as common an occurrence as one might think. The registration process provides an opportunity that is not often used to orient parents to school. Registration is more often used as a time to take care of bureaucratic demands than it is as a time to help parents find out about how the school works, to meet teachers, or to learn what is expected once school begins. However, earlier and more frequent modes of orienting parents are advisable, conditions permitting. (See section below on transition planning.)

Communication between parents and teachers is often seen as a one-way street in which teachers notify parents about what is expected of them when their child enters school, and then about how their child is doing during the school year. Clearly, communication should be a two-way street in which parents also provide teachers with information about their child. This would imply that parents are able to assess and articulate their child's abilities. For some parents this is true. In other cases, parents need help to see the relevancy



UN Photo/153446/John Isaac

It is common for older children to bring younger siblings to school with them.

of their situational and intuitive familiarity with their child, and to learn ways to articulate clearer observations about the child's strengths and needs.

■ Working together

1. *Preschool and primary school teachers* usually work separately. They train separately. They plan separately. They seldom communicate about the history of a particular child. It is possible, however, to create processes that will help these two groups of teachers to train, plan, and work together. This has been done, for instance in Guyana (see p. 34), where joint workshops have been established for preschool and early primary school teachers. The main purpose of these workshops, beyond building personal communication and relationships, has been to see ways of adjusting curricula to the benefit of the child.

Working together has been formalized in some places in France by organizing team teaching in which preschool and primary school teachers work together in the same classrooms and are supervised by the same supervisor.

A process of transition planning for children with special needs, taking various forms, has provided another way to bring together teachers in sending and receiving institutions. (See below.)

2. *Parents and teachers.* Schools are often closed to parents, making it difficult to encourage teachers and parents to work together. In some systems, this separation is fostered because it is thought that teachers are the experts and that participation by parents in the formulation of the curriculum or directly in classrooms will undercut good teaching. If teachers carry such attitudes toward parents, although they may communicate with parents from time to time, it is highly unlikely that they will work together with parents in any significant way, despite the presence of Parent and Teacher Associations.

In cases where parents have traditionally been shut out of schools, developing cooperative transition programmes might serve to open the school to them. Focusing directly on improving children's transitions may make it easier for parents and teachers to develop a good working relationship. It is less likely in such systems that teachers will be open to the actual presence of parents in classrooms, at least in the initial stages of building relationships with parents.

Many teachers would like to be able to work more closely with parents at the point their children enter school and/or during the school year itself, but do not have the capacity to do so. Typically, teacher training involves such areas as how to teach a particular subject and how to deal with children, but it does not include how to work with adults. This requires that a teacher be able to communicate well. Unless teachers have good self-esteem and are comfortable dealing with adults, it may be difficult for them to have meaningful communications with parents. With this insight in

mind, it is possible to fashion training programmes for teachers that will help them work more effectively with parents.¹¹

3. *Involving the community.* Making the school a part of the community and vice versa can help transition. This can be accomplished in several ways: when the school building is opened for community events; when teachers and staff at the school participate in community activities, and thus are familiar to community leaders and parents; and when the community is asked to help supply the school with what it needs, including expertise in particular topics and processes. With this kind of reciprocal relationship there is more likelihood that fruitful communications can be set up to benefit children, families, and the school.

Incorporating the features discussed is a model of primary school education for rural areas called the New School (*Escuela Nueva*), which evolved in Colombia over the period from 1975 to 1990. A basic assumption of this experiment was that for children to learn better it would be necessary to change the curriculum content, strategies of teacher training, and the administrative structure and relations of the school to the community.¹² Without attempting a complete description of the system (see page 37 for a fuller description of the model), here are some of the innovative features of the New School:

- Teachers are trained to be "facilitators". Materials let children progress at their own pace.
- The system tries to maximise student involvement on several levels: whole-class discussion, cooperative groups, and individual projects, and by bringing students' cultural and personal experience to most learning situations in order to make the classroom instruction relevant.
- Students simultaneously learn to learn by themselves and progress toward self-reliance by making decisions and by bringing their own knowledge into the learning environment.
- Student learning is enhanced by actively involving parents in the support of their children's learning.
- The writing curriculum emphasises meaningful written communication as the final step of a thinking process. It tries to meld learning the mechanics of written language (spelling, punctuation or grammar) to the act of communicating in writing.
- The self-instructional textbooks draw on the experiences and knowledge of students, as well as on the realms of experience that are less familiar.

Other examples of radical changes in the primary school curriculum and methodology that involve working with the community come from such far-flung places as Mali, Egypt, India, Bangladesh, and Chile.¹³ In general, these examples are innovative because they involve village schools that promote more active learning, that are flexible in the application of their curricula, and that bring the community

into the school, all of which help promote not only successful transition, but also ongoing learning throughout the primary school years.

■ Creating transition plans

One way to bring together a number of the suggestions that have been made for easing the transition from home to school, or from preschool to school, is to establish a process for creating and implementing transition plans. A recent literature dealing with the transition of children with special needs from infant programmes to preschool and from preschool to primary school provides us with a number of lessons and experiences that may be applied more generally. A law passed in the United States in 1986 mandated provision of preschool for children with special needs. This led to concerns about how these children's passages from one experience to another would be made, and to legislation which required that transition plans be established to smooth those passages.

In the course of creating, implementing, and evaluating various transition models, additional clarity has been achieved about the most important features of a successful transition, as well as about the needs of children, parents, and professional providers in the process. Several models now exist for developing transition plans and for training individuals who need to be involved.

The following factors for success in transitions were identified:

- inter-agency cooperation
- parent involvement
- preparation of the child's environment
- planning
- communication
- shared information
- trust

Parental needs were also identified, including: an ability to assess the child's needs; an understanding of the placement process; knowledge of how to seek out related services (e.g., transportation, speech-language therapy, physical therapy); legal information; someone with whom they can meet prior to the transition and to whom the parents can relate specifically in the new setting (an assigned contact person).

Similarly, professionals' needs were identified. They included: knowledge of federal and state laws; knowledge about how to involve parents; communication skills; knowledge of how to convene a meeting and what to cover; knowledge of available resources (particularly health resources); understanding of the stress that families and children experience and conditions that add to that stress; knowledge of how to assess children; and an understanding of the timing of transition.

In a 1990 issue of *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, several experiments in building transition

plans are presented, some of which put greater stress on the child and "building survival skills," some of which stress "parental empowerment," and others of which stress training for providers to carry out a leading role in the process, all within a larger framework of working together. Issue number 22 of the *Coordinators' Notebook* will focus on inclusive education and special needs education in more depth.

Conclusions

There is ample reason to put energy into easing the transition from home or preschool to school because doing so will bring benefits to individual children, to the school system, and to society at large. Benefits include: reduced levels of personal failure, repetition, and dropout; additional interest in learning on the part of children; and an increased level of skill that children will continue to use throughout their lives.

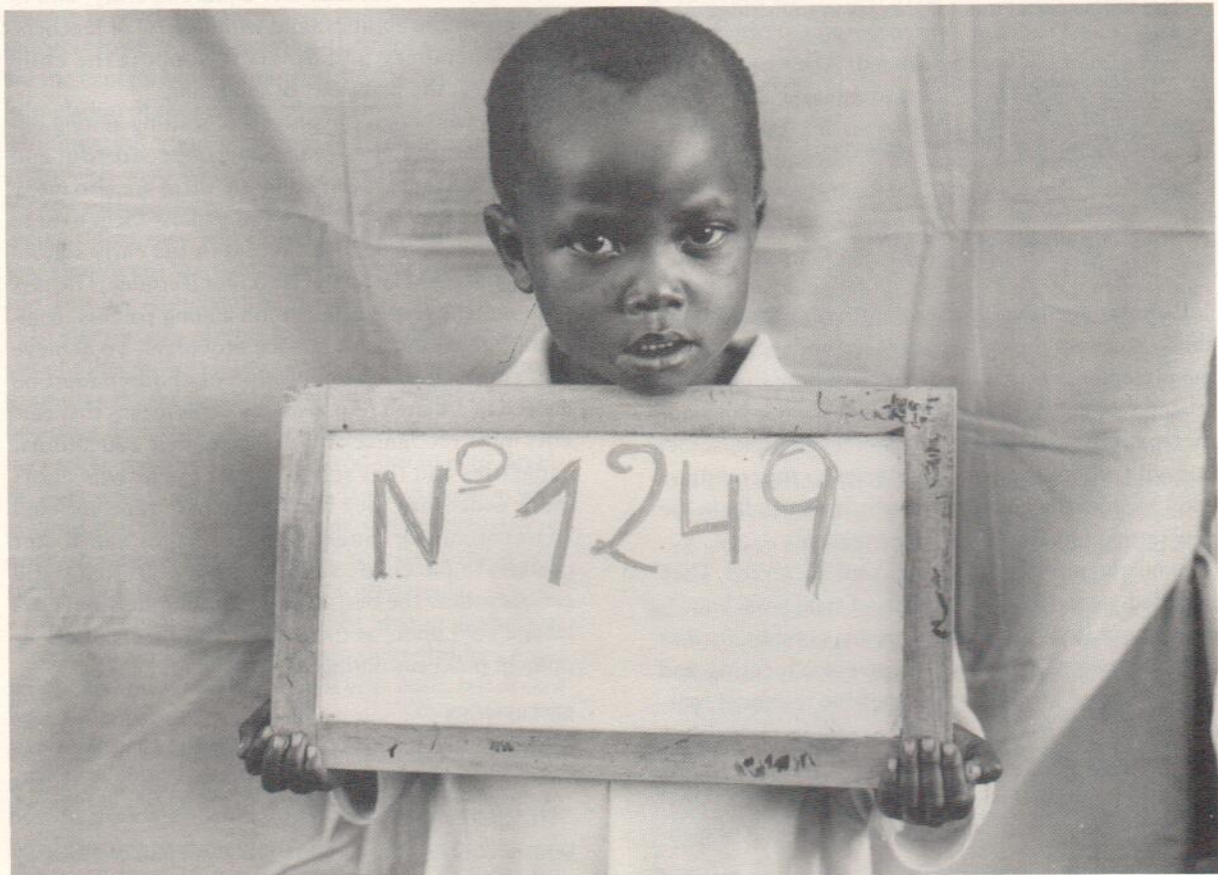
Transition is most effectively addressed when it is viewed as an ongoing process which begins before school entry, involves particular problems at the point of entry, and also requires attention during at least the first year or two of schooling. Accordingly, it is necessary to seek appropriate ways to socialize/orient parents and children well before entrance into primary school. It is also necessary to seek adjustments within the school that will facilitate children's entry, and to strengthen the abilities (and willingness) of teachers, family members, and others to support the child throughout the first years of schooling.

In sum, although the process of shifting among different learning environments can be stressful and sometimes damaging to children, there are also many ways to anticipate problems and address them so as to reduce stress, maximise success in the early school years, and build an appreciation for learning. The task requires, above all, cooperation among parents, community members, and service providers. To achieve that cooperation, the education of children must be viewed as a shared responsibility. This means that parents must recognise and exercise their educational capacities and that schools must open their doors much wider than they have in the past to parents and the community. Such direct linkages can foster changes in the child's various worlds of learning, and can also allow the best of each world to be appreciated and built upon, as the marvellous process of development proceeds during the early years.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Richard Heaver and Joseph Hunt. *Improving Early Childhood Development: An Integrated Program for the Philippines*. (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1995), p. 4.

² The three shifts from popular culture to dominant culture, from oral to written culture, and from personal identity to role identity come from work done by Johanna Filp and others at the Centro de Investigacion y Desarrollo de la Educacion (CIDE) en Chile. See, for instance, J. Filp y A.M. Cabello, eds., *Mejorando las Oportunidades Educativas de los Niños que Entran a la Escuela. Taller regional sobre la transición del niño de la familia a la escuela*. (Santiago, Chile: UNICEF y el CIDE, 1992), pp. 9-10.

³ For example, see the review of longitudinal studies provided in Myers, 1992a.

⁴ See, for instance, *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1990), the entire issue.

⁵ The first definition of "transition" that one encounters in most dictionaries is, "passing from one condition, form, stage, mode of being or place to another." Implicit in this definition is the idea of leaving behind the previous state. As a child develops, she leaves earlier stages of development behind. This kind of transition would be true whether or not a child enters into school at age 5 or 6 or 7, or never enters into school. On the other hand, entrance into school normally indicates something new for the child. The transition represents an additional setting for the child, not a replacement, because the child does not leave the family behind. With few exceptions, she continues to live with the family, spending the majority of her time there so that the most important influence on her life continues to be the family. With the entrance into school (or into a preschool programme), the child is entering an additional learning environment, but is not passing from one to the other; learning occurs in multiple environments. In the case of a change from a preschool programme to primary school, it is more legitimate to use the phrase transition because the child does leave behind the preschool in order to enter into the primary school.

⁶ One way of looking at this problem is in terms of the movement of children from one "developmental niche" to another or from one "eco-cultural niche" to another. See the theoretical work of Super and Harkness (1987) as well as that of Bronfenbrenner (1979).

⁷ In order to understand the nature of the experience and capabilities of a four-year-old, and how that relates to later learning when the child has completed a year of primary school (i.e., at age 7), a multi-country study is being conducted. (Olmsted & Weikart 1989) It is anticipated that the relationship between the kinds of experiences and abilities that children evidence at

age four can be related to their skills, knowledge, and abilities at age seven. This would provide guidance on the kinds of experiences children should have during the pre-school years to prepare them better for primary school.

⁸ See, Botswana: Acculturation and preparation for school, *Bernard van Leer Newsletter*, No. 81 (January 1996), pp. 6-7.

⁹ In Mexico a bi-lingual programme exists but is not applied with any rigour because teachers do not like to use the mother tongue and/or because parents often insist on the use of Spanish. Parental insistence is linked to the fact that, historically, many children have dropped out of school by the third grade and parents want to ensure that their children have learned Spanish prior to that point. Now that the dropout rate has been greatly reduced, the previous attitude continues even though it would be possible now for the official bi-lingual programme to work.

¹⁰ An excellent example of such teaching is vividly described and analyzed in L.S. Goldstein, "Caught in the middle: Tension and contradiction in enacting the primary grade curriculum," *Curriculum Inquiry* (in press).

¹¹ An excellent example of such training is found in the New Educational Spaces project in Mexico, funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. In this project, preschool teachers operating popular, community-based centres, have been provided, at their request, with training to help develop their self-esteem, to be able to speak well before a group, and to develop their own reading habits.

¹² This model has been described in many publications. See, for instance: V. Colbert, C. Chiappe and J. Arboleda, "The New School Programme: More and better education for children in rural areas." Bogotá, Ministry of Education-UNICEF, September, 1990; or, E. Schiefelbein, "In search of the school of the XXI century. Is the Colombian Escuela the right pathfinder?" (Santiago, Chile, UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, and UNICEF, September, 1991.)

¹³ Many of these examples and others are set out in publications from UNESCO/UNICEF issued as part of a project called, "Education for All, Making it Work." The project has presented the cases in booklets, and through films contained in the Education for All video bank. Other interesting cases are described in publications of Save the Children/USA or the Aga Khan Foundation (e.g., M. Khullar and S. Menon, "Innovative approaches in early childhood education," September 1996 which describes an initiative for providing primary school education to children of the urban slums of Jaipur, Rajasthan.).