

**Transition from Preschool to Primary School in Mexico
and Its Relation to Educational Outcomes:
An Exploratory Study**

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Robert G. Myers
Co-researchers: Brenda Flores and Marlene Peters

Hacia una Cultura Democrática. A. C. (Acude)
Insurgentes sur 4411/7-302
Tlalcoligia, D. F. 14430, Mexico

Introduction

The research reported here focuses on the transition from preschool to primary school during which children are exposed to many changes -- physical locations and the organization of space, styles of interaction with adults and peers, rules, expectations, content, and sometimes cultural shifts, including language. Previous research suggests that the way in which these challenging discontinuities are met, particularly during the first weeks and months in primary school, can provide children with a solid base for learning or can create difficulties with potentially negative effects on esteem, attitudes and the ability to learn, perhaps even leading to repetition or drop out.

Among the many factors that can influence the ease or difficulty of the preschool-primary school transition are: a child's temperament and level of development, conditions in the home, the economic and cultural contexts in which development and learning is occurring, experiences with formal child care or preschooling, and activities by the community and school directed specifically toward facilitating the transition. In the process both children and their families are affected.

In this study we examine the transition to primary school for a group of children from a range of environments within Mexico who have had one or two years of preschool education of varying quality. We explore perceptions by children and parents of the transition experience into, and during, the first years of primary school. We would like to know:

- What are the conditions associated with a relatively easy or difficult transition?
- Whether the quality of the preschool attended seems to make a difference.
- What the primary school and community do to ease the transition for children.
- The relationship between the ease of the initial transition to primary school and repetition in subsequent years of primary school.

The Theoretical Framework

Following Kagan and Neuman (1998), we distinguish between "vertical transitions" which involve moving "upward" in a system, leaving behind the previous level (e.g. from preschool to primary), and "horizontal transitions" -- or "border crossings" (Campbell Clark 2000; Vogler et. Ca. 2008) -- in which movement is back and forth between settings (e.g., from home to school). Our emphasis is on vertical transitions within the school system where the transition is determined primarily by law and linked to age (despite the fact that the age of entry into primary, within limits, has been shown to have little relationship to academic performance at the end of primary or beyond). (Stipek 2003).

With entrance into school a child not only enters into an institution with certain characteristics and rules that often differ from those that predominate in the family, but also acquires a new social status as a “student”. Previously in Mexico, school entrance was associated with enrolment in primary and with learning to read and write. Now, with the expansion of preschooling, as in most parts of the Minority World, transition to “school” in Mexico is associated increasingly with entrance into preschool (taking the “pre” out of preschool). Although most discussions of “school readiness” still refer to readiness to enter primary school, a preschool child has already acquired the status of “student”, increasing expectations and, often, changing the nature of preschool.

Over the past 25 years or more, changes have occurred in the way the study of the transition to primary school has been approached. In early treatments of this topic, most studies were carried out from a disciplinary base in psychology, with emphasis on whether or not children were sufficiently “mature” to make the transition, this linked closely with theories of stages of development and to whether or not age serves as an adequate indicator of maturity. More recently and complementary to the psychologically-based studies, has been the progressive incorporation of sociological, anthropological and ecological theories and approaches to transition (e.g., Rogoff 2003); Rimm-Kaufman and Pinta 2000). These studies examine such variables as home and community conditions, child rearing practices and expectations which vary considerable from place to place and over time.

There has also been a shift from the study of children as objects (with information about the transition coming from parents and teachers) to including children as a source of information and as subjects with an active role in defining and affecting their own transition (Woods and Pollard 1988). This shift includes recognizing the importance of a child’s peers as facilitators (or barriers) in the transition process.

Yet another shift in the literature involves broadening the idea of transition well beyond examination of the point of entry into school to include the period before entering primary and continuation throughout the primary school years (Moss 2008). For instance, and linking this point to the previous one, good relationships established with peers in a preschool who then accompany each other to primary may have a positive effect on entry but the “transition” really begins prior to entering primary school. In addition, Corsaro (2003) and colleagues have studied the importance of “priming events” which are interactive or symbolic activities prior to entry in primary school that permit the child, family and community not only to understand the importance of, but also to contribute actively to, a successful entry to primary.

Briefly, this study:

1. Focuses on the transition from preschool to primary;

2. Takes a continuous view of transition, looking at conditions and “readiness” prior to entrance as well as what the school has done to be ready for and assist children at entrance and during the first several years of primary.
3. Takes a multi-disciplinary view.
4. Includes children as subjects, asking them as well as parents about their perceptions of the process.

Samples and Methodology

During the 2002-2003 school year a study of preschool quality was carried out in 40 centers in Mexico. The 40 centers varied with respect to geographic location (4 states; urban and rural), socio-economic (lower vs. middle and upper class) and cultural (indigenous and non-indigenous) contexts and administrative responsibility for the preschools (private and public and, within government schools those run by several sub divisions of the Educational Secretariat as well as centers operated by Family Welfare). (See Table 1) In each center, directors and teachers were interviewed and a Preschool quality scale was applied, with information collected near the beginning of the school year and again near the end.

Table 1.-- Distribution of the sample of 40 preschool centers

Oaxaca	Puebla	Distrito Federal	Estado de México
4 Urban Marginal	3 Rural Indigenous	6 Urban Marginal (1 private)	2 Rural Community-based (CONAFE)
4 Urban Middle or Upper Class	5 Rural General	4 Urbano Middle or Upper Class (1 private)	
4 Rural Indigenous	2 Rural Community-based (operated by the State of Puebla)	2 Urban Community-based (Family Welfare)	
4 Rural General			
Total = 16	Total = 10	Total = 12	Total = 2

In addition, in 2002-3 in each center, four children were selected¹ to whom a standardized developmental test was administered. Information was actually obtained for 155 children (see Table 2). The mothers of these children were interviewed providing information about their home context.

¹ The criteria for selection were: 1) 2 niños y 2 niñas (total 4 por preescolar); Two children en el tercer año de preescolar (con edades entre 4 años 7 meses y 5 años 4 meses) and two en el Segundo año (con edades entre 3 años 10 meses y 4 años 6 meses); 3) Todos los niños y niñas seleccionados fueron de nuevo ingreso a la educación preescolar en 2002. It was not always posible to find students with the indicated characteristics. This reduced the sample to 155.

Table 2. Distribution of the simple of children, 2002/3, by age and gender

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Under 4 years	2	1.3	2	1.3	4	2.6
4 to 4 and 6 months	21	13.6	27	17.4	48	31.0
4years/7 months to 5 years	22	14.2	25	16.0	47	30.2
5 years/1 month to 5/3 months	20	12.9	21	13.6	41	26.5
5 years/4 months or more	7	4.5	8	5.2	15	9.7
Total	72	46.5	83	53.5	155	100.

The information from the 2002-2003 study provided base-line data for a follow-up of children during the 2007-2008 school year when most of the students were in fourth or fifth grade of primary school. During February, March and April of 2008, it was possible to find 109 of the 154 children (70%); these were interviewed to determine their perceptions of their transition to primary school and subsequent progress and performance in the system. Parents of 107 of these children were also asked about their perceptions of the transition and about the behavior and progress of their children in primary school. Directors (N = 62) and primary school teachers (N= 220) in the schools where children were located were also interviewed (the actual teacher of each student (N = 107) as well as teachers in the first grade of the school, N = 113). Information about the grades of children during the various primary school years were sought from official records and from report cards kept by parents. In addition, it was possible to obtain scores on a standardized test given to third graders for 88 of the 109 students.

In Table 3, a comparison is made between selected characteristics of the children first studied in 2002/3 and those found in the follow-up study in 2008. The differences in distributions within states and type of program reflect the sample described in Table 1.² Rural children and particularly rural indigenous children are over-represented in the study sample in relation to the distribution of children in the population as a whole. It is important to note that schools were not chosen randomly but rather to maximize variety. Therefore results from this study cannot be extrapolated.

Differences in the distributions between 2002/3 and 2008 are not significant.

²The fact that we looked for different types of preschools in different status and did not sep a similar distribution by type within each state makes analysis and comparison by state inappropriate.

Table 3. Distribution of 2002/3 and 2007/8 samples of children

Variables	2002-2003 children (N=155)	2007-2008 children (N= 109)
Genero: Boys Girls	53% 47%	57% 43%
Location: D.F. State of Mex. Oaxaca Puebla	30.5% 5.2% 38.3% 26%	28% 7% 35% 30%
Preschool system CONAFE Rural Community Rural General Rural Indigenous Urban Community (DIF) Urban private Urban general (SEP)	5% 5% 19% 21% 6% 3% 42%	7% 6% 20% 22% 6% 4% 35%

In this study both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis were used. From interviews analytical categories for analysis were constructed from the open questions. Once categories were determined (for example, for perceptions of the transition process) it was possible to seek relationships with other variables. For the analysis of determinants of grades and of test scores, linear regression analysis was applied.

Presentation of Results

A. Perceptions of children and their parents of entrance into primary school

To determine perceptions of the transition to primary school the following were used:

Children	Parents
1. Remember your first days in primary school. Imagine that you just entered primary school. Tell me how it was.	1. Do you remember when your child entered primary school? How were those first days?
2. How did you feel the first days of your arrival at primary school?	2. Can you tell me how your child felt when he/she entered primary school?
3. What did you like the most about those first days?	3. When he/she entered primary did he/she have any difficulties? If so, what were they and how were they resolved?

Both children and parents responded with a wide range of perceptions that included expressions such as happiness, anticipation, well-being, fear, loneliness, sadness and nervousness. Sometimes multiple feelings were contradictory, for instance a child might express a sense of sadness because she did not know anybody, accompanied however by a kind of happy anticipation that she was going to learn new things and make new friends. From the responses we created 3 categories of response: positive, difficult or “ambivalent” when both kinds of expressions were present. The distributions of these three categories, for children and parents were:

	Children	Parents
Positive	52%	57%
Difficult	19%	12%
Ambivalent	29%	31%

Examples of responses from children classified as:

1. Positive

“It was very good, easy, because the teacher paid lots of attention, helped us in everything. If we had doubts we asked her. I felt happy to leave the preschool and enter primary and, happy to make new friends.”

“The teacher treated me well and we drew, painted and went outside to play. I felt good because I was with my girl friends and I liked playing. After a few days, the teacher began to teach us the alphabet and how to make words and she let us play a lot.”

2. Difficult

“Well, at that time I left the classroom because the teacher, Sol, did not let me eat during recreation. I hid because I did not want to go to class. I felt bad. In my house I told my father that I did not want to go to school and cried because I did not want the teacher to scold me.”

“...I felt strange because there were children bigger than me. I missed my preschool a lot because I did not have hardly any friends in primary so I almost did not want to go.”

3. Ambivalent

“They were difficult moments because I did not know anybody and when a arrived here I liked one movie a lot but they made fun of me for that and for the way I talked. I liked the school because it was big and because the teachers had good vibes with the kids.”

Responses from parents classified as:

1. Positive

“He was not afraid because he had a brother in primary. He was very happy, with a lot of hope. He did not think things would go badly; he is a very independent boy.

“For him it was a good experience. He felt happy because now he was growing and he liked the school a lot because he had new friends. The first few days I accompanied him; he stayed by himself and did not cry at all. He was happy and had no trouble incorporating; he has always been an adaptive child who likes to play with everyone so when he entered he felt very good.”

2. Difficult

“At first she did not want to go to school. She cried a lot and, well, I thought she didn’t even want to go to the kindergarten; she said she missed us. But we took her. She felt sad because she was the only one who was alone without brothers or sisters in the school. She said she felt sad.”

“It was terrible. He (or she?) missed his friends. It was a drastic change. He cried. He did not want to go. For about two weeks he was like that ...”

3. Ambivalent

“Very emotional...scared but willing”; “She felt strange because she did not know how to read when she entered, but she was happy and excited. For her it was as if now she was grown up.”

As can be seen from the examples, the explanations given by parents included reasons why they thought the transition was a good one. We found that, for the positive transitions, these reasons or motives could be placed roughly in five categories: social, cognitive, play-related, a sense of development or personal growth and changes in physical space. For the difficult transitions reasons were primarily social or cognitive; however, another category appeared (affective) related to the difficulty of separating themselves from the home. Tables 4, 5 and 6 show the classifications of reasons offered by children and their parents in each of these three modes of transition.

From the tables it is evident that both children and parents place considerable importance on social dimensions of the transition. Parents give a bit more importance to cognitive reasons than children but for both this category is also important. Interestingly, parents more often mention play-related reasons than do children. Children are more likely to mention a sense of their development and motives related to the physical space in primary than are adults. Although present, cognitive reasons such as not knowing how to read are a distant second to social reasons.

Table 4. Reasons presented in cases of a positive transition to primary school

Reasons	Children		Parents	
	Número*	%	Número*	%
Social	50	41	22	39
Cognitive	29	24	18	31
Play-related	20	16	15	26
Development (Progress)	13	11	1	2
Physical space	10	8	1	2
Total	122	100	57	100

*Multiple responses allowed

Table 5. Reasons presented in cases of a difficult transition to primary school

Reasons	Children		Parents	
	Número*	%	Número*	%
Social	23	74	22	63
Cognitive	6	19	5	14
Afectivo	0	0	3	9
Desconocimiento del espacio	2	7	5	14
Total	31	100	35	100

*Multiple responses allowed

Table 6. Reasons presented in cases of an ambivalent transition to primary school

	Children		Parents		Children		Parents		
	#	%	#	%	Positive	#	%	#	%
<i>Difficult</i>					<i>Positive</i>				
Social	13	76	5	50	Social	10	59	4	67
Cognitive	1	6	4	40	Cognitive	4	23	0	0
Affective	3	18	1	10	School progress	3	18	2	33
Total	17	100	10	100	Total	17	100	6	100

Similarities and differences in the perceptions of children and their parents

To what degree did the perceptions of children and their parents correspond? When we compared responses of specific children with those of their parents the result is what appears in Table 7.

Table 7. Correspondence between the perceptions of children and their parents *

<i>Percepciones de transición a la primaria</i>		Parents		
		Positive	Ambivalent	Difficult
Children	Positive	37	7	10
	Ambivalent	8	4	7
	Difficult	13	3	12

*3 children and 4 parents did not respond.

The table shows that there was direct correspondence in only 52% of the cases.

Perceptions of the transition and their relation to other variables

When the three categories of perceptions were crossed with other variables we found the following:

Gender. There were no significant differences between the perceptions of boys and girls.

Age at entrance into primary school. There was no significant difference between children who entered at the age of 6 years 2 months and those who entered at a younger age.

Developmental status. There was a slight tendency for children with low scores on a standardized development test³ to perceive the transition as difficult or ambivalent (57%) than for children with high scores (43%). This difference is not significant, however.

Urban-rural location. The perceptions held by urban and rural children of their transition were relatively similar. There was a slight tendency for rural children to be more positive about their entry into primary school.

Language spoken at home. Five of the seven (71%) children from indigenous language homes were positive about their transition vs. 50 of 97 (52%) from Spanish speaking homes.

³ The test administered early in 2002 when children has just entered into preschool was the Test for Psychological Development (TEPSI), developed, normed and standardized in Chile. The test has three main categories: fin motor development, gross motor development and language (broadly defined and with the greatest weight among the three categories).

Father absent. 25% of the children with their father present perceived the transition as difficult as contrasted with 47% of those with their father absent.

Siblings in the home. Of the few (13) children who were without siblings 38% perceived the transition as difficult as contrasted with 27% for those with siblings.

Mother working outside the home. Children whose mothers worked outside the home were less likely to perceive the transition as difficult than those whose mothers were at home (25% vs. 34%)

Mother's education. When educational levels were split between those who had completed primary school or less and those with more than primary school, there was no difference in the perceptions by children of their transition to primary school.

Books in the home and the practice of reading to children. Twenty nine percent of the children lived in homes where there were no books present and another 18 percent had five or less books. However, there was no significant difference between these children and those in homes with more than five books in their perceptions. There was no significant difference in perceptions between children whose mothers said they read to their children and those whose mothers said they did not.

Type of preschool attended. Children in general public preschools were more positive about their transition (56%) than those in indigenous preschools (40%) or community preschools (29%). These differences seem to be significant.

Quality of the preschool. Positive perceptions of the transition increased slightly as the quality of the preschool increased (50% for the lowest quality vs. 64% for the highest).

Type of primary school entered. Only 16% of the children interviewed in the follow-up study were in indigenous preschools, but among these, only 5% said they had difficulty with the transition. This contrasts with 30% of the children in non-indigenous preschools who perceived their transition as difficult.

B. What do primary schools do to assist transition?

In interviews with principals and teachers we found that the primary schools have little relationship with preschools and clear mechanisms do not exist for exchanges between them of information about children or curricula and programs. First year primary school teachers know very little about the preschool curriculum. In only 4 of the 62 primary schools visited did we find children's records that had come directly from pre-schools. In another 18 schools, information had been obtained from parents. The information received varied greatly in quality. We did not find evidence of programs with preschools that allow students to come to the primary

school before entering in order to familiarize themselves with the primary. In a few cases we found that children had previous knowledge of the primary schools but not as a result of any plan or program. All this would seem to indicate that schools do little to prepare themselves for the specific children who enroll.

At the same time, once children enter on the first day, about half of the directors indicated that activities are arranged that facilitate the immediate transition. These include: presentations to the staff, use of name tags, tours of the facilities, permitting parents to enter the school, talks with parents, and, in the classrooms, an emphasis on play and activities that teachers think would be familiar from preschool, particularly those stressing fine motor development.

It would seem that, after the first day or two, the school's ability to attend to immediate transitional needs of children and families falls squarely on the individual teachers, some of whom are excellent and experienced but others new and green or unable to cope. Add to this the fact that 50% of the first year classrooms in the primary schools studied teachers had more than 30 students in their class, making it difficult for them to provide individual attention to children who might need it.

C. Transition, progress through the system and school achievement: repetition

This section will focus on an analysis of the 13 students (of the 109 in the follow-up study) who repeated one or more primary school years.⁴ We will be particularly interested in whether or not difficulties with transition seem to be related to repetition. Putting these 13 cases under the microscope reveals patterns and differences that enrich this exploratory study, confirming some ideas and suggesting new hypotheses. Putting our conclusion up front, we can say that the transition to primary school seen as the moment of entrance to school during the first days and weeks has relatively little to do with repetition during the first year or subsequent years. However, the transition viewed as a continuous and contextualized process helps explain why children repeat. In some cases we see that the difficult circumstances of families are dominant; in others, the school seems to be at fault.

Who are the repeaters and how different are they from the non-repeaters?

Primary school year repeated. Of the 13 repeaters, 8 repeated the first year of primary; the others repeated the second (4) or third (1) year. The first year repeaters are of greatest interest because it is more likely that difficulties with the immediate transition might have had an affect on that repetition.

⁴ The number of repeaters is small but in percentage terms (12% of those studied) it is about three times that officially reported for the system, probable due to the rural and indigenous bias in the sample of children studied.

Gender. The proportion of boys and girls that repeated is approximately the same (12.8% for boys and 11.3% for girls). At the same time girls were more likely to repeat the first year (6 of 7 vs. 2 of 6 boys) and boys' subsequent years. It may be that girls are more affected than boys by difficulties with the initial transition.

Developmental level measured by the TEPSI. 69% of the repeaters had a score below 50 on the TEPSI administered upon entrance into preschool as contrasted with 26% of the non repeaters. The test seems to serve, despite difficulties, as a relatively good indicator of subsequent repetition in primary.

Age of entrance into primary. The percentage of repeaters older than 6 years and 2 months at entrance is the same as that for children under that age.

Rural-urban location. Only one of the 13 (8%) repeaters resided in an urban area as contrasted with 49% of the non-repeaters. The concentration of repeaters in rural areas is not surprising but is worrisome.

Family conditions. The probability of repeating was related to 1) coming from a home where an indigenous language was used, 2) father absent, 3) number of books in the home, 4) whether the child was read to at home, and 5) mother's education. It was not related to whether or not the mother was worked outside the home.

When these findings are compared with those from the analysis of the initial transition it is clear that there is a different pattern. Whereas there were almost no significant relationships to family factors in the case of a difficult or easy transition, most of the family characteristics included do relate to repetition.

Type of preschool. The level of repetition among students from different types of preschools was approximately the same with the exception of the 4 students from a private school, none of whom were repeaters.

Quality of preschool. Whereas 8 of the 13 (61%) repeaters came from preschools with quality levels judged to be below the minimum desired as contrasted with 51% for those who did not repeat.

Repetition and perceptions of the transition to primary school

Of the 12 repeaters who expressed their perceptions of the transition, 6 were positive, 3 difficult and 3 ambivalent. Of the three cases who indicated a difficult transition one repeated the second year, one had difficulties associated with the absence of her father and another had to repeat because she changed from one primary school to another. It is difficult, then, to identify a clear link between initial transition and repetition; causes seem to lie elsewhere.

Reasons given by parents for repetition

In four of the 13 cases where parents gave reasons, lack of attendance was cited. One parent said the problem was a change of primary schools. Two parents said their children simply did not apply themselves (they were distracted, failed to do their homework). Six said the difficulty was the failure to learn (to read in 5 cases and mathematics in 1).

Parents did not criticize teachers who seemed to be free of blame from their perspective. At the same time, children said they would have liked the first grade teachers to help them more with reading and mathematics.

Conclusions

About perceptions of the transition at entrance to primary school

1. Almost half of the children perceive entrance into preschool as difficult or both difficult and good.
2. The difficulty of the immediate transition to primary school in this sample of children seems NOT to be associated with: gender, age of entry into primary, the developmental status of children at entry into preschool in 2002, urban or rural location, mother working outside the home (although there is a slight tendency for those whose mothers are not working to report a more difficult transition), or mother's education (primary or less vs. more than primary), the number of books in the home or the practice of reading to children in the home.
3. The difficulty of the immediate transition to primary school was associated with: indigenous language spoken in the home (indigenous more positive); an absent father; the quality of preschool; and the type of primary school entered (indigenous more positive).
4. The perceptions of parents correspond directly with those of their children in only about half of the cases. Both parents and children, however, tended to emphasize the importance of social relationships in making a positive transition; cognitive preparation was a distant second.

About the preparation of primary schools for the children they receive

5. In most cases, primary schools do not set up programs to help families and their children prepare for the transition into primary. They seldom collaborate directly with preschools or the community at large to try and ease the transition. Information from preschools about children seldom arrives at the primary school. Principals and teachers make some

effort to ease the transition when children actually arrive, with introductions to the school and staff and by emphasizing play early on. The responsibility for transition falls mainly on teachers who may or may not be experienced and well prepared.

About repetition

6. The transition to primary school seen as the moment of entrance to school during the first days and weeks has relatively little to do with repetition during the first year or subsequent years. However, the transition viewed as a continuous and contextualized process helps explain why children repeat. Repetition is related to: developmental status on entry to preschool; urban location (12 of the 13 repeaters were from rural locations); language used in the home (even though the ease of transition was perceived as greater by indigenous children repetition was more likely among indigenous students); father absence; the number of books in the home and whether a child was read to at home; and mother's education. It was NOT related to gender or age of entrance into primary.
7. The reasons given by parents for repetition tend to blame the child (did not attend, distracted, unable to learn to read or learn mathematics) rather than the teacher, even though children wanted greater help from their teachers. In at least one case the reason was administrative.

Appendix 1. Case studies of repeaters

En esta sección presentamos de una manera descriptiva, seis casos de repetidores, cinco que repitieron el primer año y uno el segundo año. Tres de los repetidores percibieron su transición en los primeros días como positiva y tres de forma negativa. Las descripciones están basadas en los datos representativos y en respuestas de los niños y sus padres.

Caso 1. “Gloria”. Gloria es una niña que vive en un pequeño pueblo rural en la Mixteca Alta. En 2002-2003, a la edad de 5 años y 2 meses, vivió con su abuela de 65 años quien no sabía leer o escribir. No sabemos si sus padres estaban presentes o si migraron para trabajar en esa época pero, en 2006-2007 su madre estaba presente. En su casa se hablaba Mixteco. Dice que solamente había un libro en la casa que no era ni texto escolar ni la Biblia.

Asistió a un preescolar indígena con dos maestros, uno de los cuales funcionó como responsable además de estar frente al grupo. La escuela fue evaluada en este entonces por arriba del mínimo en su calidad y ella fue en un aula con un maestro excelente según las observaciones. Cuando administraron el TEPSI al empezar el año escolar 2002-2003, Gloria fue calificada como “normal” en su desarrollo, aunque su puntaje se ubicaba en la parte baja del rango de normal.

Gloria recuerda su sensación durante los primeros días de la primaria con entusiasmo porque “no sabía” y esperaba saber. No había tenido experiencia directa con la primaria antes de entrar. Al principio le gusto porque “dibujaba lo que quería.” Al mismo tiempo, extrañaba se preescolar porque “había juegos, hacíamos dibujos, recortamos.” Con el avance del año las cosas no fueron bien. No aprendió a leer ni salió bien en matemáticas. Dice que se reprobó el año porque “no sabía leer ni escribir los números.” Dijo también que “no hacía bien las tareas”.

Su madre concordó con Gloria que “sí le gustaba ir” al preescolar, aunque había un compañero que, desde el preescolar le pegaba a Gloria. Pero notó que ella tuvo que repetir porque “no le echaba ganas”. La segunda vez que curso el primer grado, tuvo una nueva maestra que la animó y a aprender y estudiar.

Después de repetir el primer año Gloria ha avanzado con regularidad en la primaria y en el momento del estudio se la encontró en el 4º año. Sus notas promedios son aproximadamente 7s.

En este caso, parece que:

- No hubo una dificultad durante los primeros días de la primaria. La transición inmediata fue positiva.
- Pareció difícil aprender a leer. Aunque no sabemos porque, puede ser relacionado al hecho de que español no fue su lengua materna y con una maestra que no motivaba bien.
- Tanto la niña como su madre depositan la culpa en la niña por no haberle echado las ganas durante el primer año.

Caso 2. “Miriam”. Miriam vive en una pequeña comunidad rural en el Estado de México. En 2002-2003, a la edad de 4 años, ella vivía con su madre y padre, ambos con trabajo fuera de la casa. Su madre no terminó la educación primaria. En su casa la lengua materna era el español. No había libros en la casa, y no había la práctica de leer a la niña. Faltaba juguetes pero había una televisión en la casa.

El preescolar al que asistió Miriam fue una escuela comunitaria administrada por CONAFE. El centro consistió de un salón con solamente 10 niños y niñas con una “instructora”, con secundaria completa, en su segundo año con el programa de CONAFE. La evaluación de calidad del preescolar lo ubicó ligeramente por debajo del mínimo de calidad esperada. Cuando se aplicó el TEPSI en 2002, Miriam fue ubicado en la parte baja de la categoría “normal” pero durante el año mejoró su puntaje mucho. La evaluadora la calificó como bien, preparada para entrar en la primaria en términos de su lenguaje y competencia con números.

Sobre su transición a la primaria en los primeros días, Miriam dijo:

”Sentí bonito y estaba yo contenta porque ya iba a saber leer y escribir. Llegue a la escuela con mis hermanos y conocí a todos ahí. No lloré porque conocía a mucha gente. Mi maestra se portaba bien con todos los niños.” [Era] “en otra primaria y no tenía puertas ni ventanas ni piso y me sentía un poco incomoda porque había mucho polvo.”

La madre de Miriam notó que su hija “entró contenta. Le gustaba estudiar mucho.” “No se le dificultó ingresar, era fácil porque iba con sus propios compañeros del preescolar y con sus primas.”

Durante el primer año Miriam no encontró problemas y sacó buenas notas. No obstante, según su madre,

“Ella entro muy chiquita a los 5 y medio y la maestra le dijo que la iba a pasar, pero luego ella tuvo problemas y la maestra no pudo hacer nada y Miriam repitió el año. ¿Qué problemas tuvo?, pues que no la pudo pasar porque dijo que era muy chica, que en la escuela no la podían aceptar.”

Después de repetir el año, le fue bien en segundo, tercero y cuarto, a pesar de un cambio de escuela primaria en tercero. Sus notas actuales en cuarto son, en promedio, arriba del 8.

De este caso, parece que:

- La repetición no tuvo nada que ver con su transición en los primeros días.
- El sistema, por razones no explícitas, no quiso aprobar una niña lista, contenta y con buenas notas al final del primer año. Fue una repetición no merecida y forzada.

Caso 3. “Juan”. Juan vive en un pueblo rural pequeño en Puebla. Cuando hicimos el estudio en 2002, tenía 4 años 9 meses. No tenemos información completa sobre la composición de su familia en 2002. En 2007, vivía con su madre y padre, los dos con un nivel de educación de primaria completa y los dos con trabajo fuera de la casa. No tiene hermanos. Según una entrevista incompleta, el idioma materno fue Nahuatl (aunque en 2007 dijo que la lengua principal en casa es el español).

El preescolar en el sistema de educación indígena, donde Juan pasó tres años, fue de muy baja calidad, según nuestro estudio en 2002-2003, con un puntaje (2.3) muy de bajo del mínimo esperado (3.0). Le gusto su preescolar donde “todo ya me salía; era el más listo de la salón”. Según el resultado de la aplicación de la prueba de desarrollo (TEPSI) aplicado en 2002, él iba bien, con un resultado arriba del promedio de todos los niños y niñas en el estudio.

A pesar de sus tres años de preparación en preescolar donde destacó, su transición a la primaria fue difícil. Al entrar, Juan dijo que fue nervioso y tenía miedo. “Pensaba que me iban a pegar. Tenía mucho miedo; cuando conocí a mis compañeros pensé que iban a ser mis amigos, pero no, me pegaron”. Echaba de menos un amigo quien se matriculó en otra escuela primaria. Según su madre, “No le gustaba, la maestra. Ella lo regañaba sólo a él en la escuela, lo maltrataba.”

Durante el primer año, las cosas no iban bien, Juan dijo “...el abc se me olvidó. La maestra nos explicaba, pero al otro día si no nos apurábamos nos daba unos regalazos. No me gustaba hacer nada”. Su madre indicó que:

“No le ponía atención al estudio y la maestra a él. No hacía los trabajos. Era muy distraído, se le dificultó leer y escribir. La relación era muy mala y cohibía al niño.”

Pero, según la madre tenía buenas calificaciones a pesar de estas condiciones. Incluso, ella alegó que la razón principal por la repetición en el caso de Juan fue su cambio de escuela no un problema de calificaciones.

Después de repetir el primer año y cambiar de escuela, Juan avanzó bien en segundo, tercero y cuarto. Su promedio actual en cuarto en el momento del estudio fue de 8.1.

De esto estudio parece que:

- No tenemos suficiente información para saber las causas fundamentales de las dificultades vividas en su transición, que causaban su miedo, pero parece que la falta de amigos (y un amigo en especial) fue uno de ellos.
- Es evidente que la maestra no pudo relacionarse bien con el niño y no dio apoyo sino fue una parte de la causa de sus dificultades.
- La repetición no pareció por falta de habilidad.

Caso 4. “Tania”. Tania viene de una comunidad rural en Puebla. En 2002-2003, a la edad de 5 años 3 meses, vivía con su madre, padre, seis hermanos y dos tías. Su lengua materna es el Español. Su madre y padre llegaron a terminar la educación primaria. No había libros en la casa y nadie tenía la práctica de leerle a la niña pero, tuvo radio y televisión en la casa además de unos juguetes.

Su preescolar fue parte del sistema de educación rural general. Su preescolar no fue de muy buena calidad; la evaluación asignó un puntaje (2.5) que es por debajo del mínimo esperado (3.0). La calidad del proceso educativo en las dos aulas de la escuela fue aun más baja. Cuando se aplicó el TEPSI en 2002, Tania obtuvo un buen puntaje y esto mejoró con la aplicación al fin del año. Parece una niña capaz.

Su recuerdo de la entrada a la primaria fue que “Me sentí alegre, un poquito nerviosa, bien. Lo nerviosa era porque ponerme a estudiar, pasar de año, lo alegre porque mis papás me dijeron que me sintiera alegre.” Al mismo tiempo extraño su preescolar por la maestra, los juegos y las amigas. Esta visión fundamentalmente positiva, a pesar de su nervio, no fue compartida por su madre quien vio un poco más difícil la transición. Ella dijo, “Sentía miedo. Son cambios que no conoce. Piensan que le van a pegar. Pasó del juego a otro nivel se hace difícil.” “Se le dificultaba escribir.” Tuvo ayuda de sus hermanos: “Se iban, se juntaban en el recreo y le daba más confianza.”

Durante el primer año, no le fue bien. La madre dijo que sus notas eran muy bajas porque “es muy distraída, no pone atención.” Su relación con el maestro de primaria no fue muy buena porque “el maestro es muy estricto, no la consiente. Por eso ella se preocupó más por hacer sus cosas.” La razón por repetir el primer año, según Tania fue que, “A veces se me olvidaban las tareas, mis libros, a veces llegaba tarde, a veces no venía.” Según la madre, fue que: “La descuidamos mucho, además de que ella en el preescolar no aprendió a leer, por eso no tenía el perfil. Las maestras cambiaran su método de enseñanza, tienen años que no promueven la escritura, puro juego, no saben agarrar el lápiz, puro juego, nuestro kinder está muy mal.”

Después de repetir el primer año, Tania ha progresado normalmente por el sistema. Aunque dijo en su entrevista que ahora le gusta mucho la escuela, sus notas en el 4º año donde se encuentra actualmente son bajas en español y matemáticas y es probable que vaya tener que repetir otro año.

De este caso vemos que:

- La transición durante los primeros días y semanas puede haber sido mejor; la niña necesitaba más apoyo de la escuela que aparentemente no se dio. El vínculo con los logros en años subsecuentes no es claro.
- Sale el descontento de la madre con el sistema educativo, tanto al nivel del preescolar como la primaria. Este descontento está muy enfocada en aprender a leer y escribir temprano.
- Tanto la niña como su madre pusieron mucha culpa en la niña por no aplicarse bien a sus estudios.

Caso 5. “Rosa”. Rosa vive en un pueblo pequeño en una zona rural de Puebla. En 2002-2003 tenía 5 años de edad. Su padre estaba ausente y no contribuía a la economía del hogar. Su madre, quien terminó la primaria y entró pero no terminó secundaria, trabajaba fuera del hogar. Tiene un hermano. El idioma materno es español. En la casa, había unos libros para niños y su madre dijo que ella leía a su hija.

El preescolar a que asistió Rosa fue parte del sistema de educación rural general. Según la evaluación de calidad fue arriba del mínimo esperado con un puntaje de 3.31 en la Escala de Calidad. Cuando se aplicó el TEPSI en 2002, Tania obtuvo un puntaje muy bajo, que se calificó en “riesgo” en su desarrollo en general y en su lenguaje. Durante el año su desarrollo mejoró y en 2003, al fin del ciclo escolar, llegó a ser calificado como “normal”.

La transición a la primaria fue difícil. Ella dijo:

“Estuve muy triste porque no conocía a mis compañeros. No me gustaba la primaria porque había muchos niños y pensaba que me iban a pegar. Lloraba porque no me gustaba, estaba muy triste y no me gustaba trabajar porque no sabía leer. Estaba aburrida porque no había con quien jugar, no me llevaba con mis compañeros, todavía no los conocía bien. Extraña a mis compañeros con los que me llevaba bien, extraña a mi maestra, lo que hacía. Los extraño porque me querían mucho y me llevaba bien con ellos.”

Su madre estaba de acuerdo:

“Ella no le llamaba la atención, no quería venir, tenía miedo de que las maestras la regañaran, no avanzaba, le enseñábamos para que se pusiera a leer, pero no ponía cuidado. Se sentía triste, se sentía mal porque no tenía papá y ella ya no quería venir porque los niños le decían que no tenía papá. No podía aprender, ella venía y se sentaba y el maestro decía que estaba muy distraída.

Durante el primer año no le fue bien a Rosa. Ella dijo, “No sabía contestar bien; copiar las lecciones fue difícil porque yo juntaba las letras, me equivocaba y salía mal mi trabajo, no me calificaban porque estaba mal y no salíamos al trabajo, me ponía triste.”

A pesar de estas dificultades, la madre fue contenta con la maestra. Por un lado, “los regañaba a los niños que se burlaban y les dijo que no dijeron a Rosa que no tenía papa.” Por el otro, “les enseñaba bien, pero ella no ponía nada de su parte, era muy distraída, el maestro me decía que la sacara a pasear, pero a ella no le llamaba la atención.” De todos modos, fue necesario repetir el año.

Según Rosa, la razón por repetir el año fue que “No le echaba ganas, no sabía todavía leer y no me gustaba la escuela. No aprendía porque no venía seguido a la escuela. Tenía miedo de venir a la escuela pensaba que mis amigos me iban a pegar.” La madre dijo que fue “Porque no podía leer y no ponía nada de su parte y no cumplía con sus tareas.”

Una vez logrado pasar a la segunda de primaria, todavía Rosa tenía dificultades y tenía que repetir el segundo también. Ahora que está en tercero, parece que va mejor. Dice, “Ahora me gusta porque mis compañeros no son muy pegalones, me llevó bien con ellos y el maestro nos pone a leer y hacer cuentos. Me gusta mucho trabajar, no me gusta jugar cuando estoy en clase con mis compañeros. Su madre advierte que ahora, “ella llega y hace su tarea. Lea libros.”

De este caso parece que:

- La ausencia del padre fue un factor en los problemas que tuvo en la escuela
- Nuevamente, fue presente la tendencia para la niña y su madre poner la culpa en la niña por ser distraída y no echarle ganas.
- Existe una relación entre una entrada difícil a la primaria y problemas de aprendizaje; la escuela no fue capaz de mitigarla.

Caso 6. “Alfredo”. Alfredo es el único niño entre los repetidores quien vive en una zona urbana grande, en la ciudad de Oaxaca. En 2002-2003, a la edad de 5 años un mes, vivió con su madre, padre, hermano y un abuelo. Su lengua materna es el español. El nivel educativo de su madre y padre es de primaria incompleto. En la casa no hay libros para niños pero tiene juguetes, tv (no cable), radio y un video.

El preescolar de Alfredo en 2002 fue dentro de sistema general de la SEP. Aunque era en un zona urbana, la evaluación de calidad indicó que fue de bajo (2.52) del mínimo esperado (3.0) en la Escala de Calidad. En Octubre de 2002 cuando se aplicó el TEPSI, el puntaje de Alfredo fue uno de los más bajos de todos los niños en el estudio y fue en la categoría de “riesgo.” Al fin del año preescolar, en 2003, había mejorado su puntaje en el TEPSI y llegó al medio de la distribución, con una calificación de “normal”.

Aunque no recordó muy bien sus primeros días al entrar en la escuela primaria, dijo que fue triste porque extrañaba a su preescolar. La percepción de su transición de su madre es que Alfredo fue “contento y con ganas.” Además tenía la ayuda de su hermana con quien junto durante recreo. El único problema mencionado fue dificultad con la pronunciación de la letra “r”.

Durante el primer año, sus notas fueron bajas pero suficientemente buenas para pasar el año. Al principio era flojo y siempre traía nota de mala conducta por parte de la maestra. A pesar de esto, la madre reportó que la relación con la maestra era buena y ella “apoyaba y le ayudaba a resolver sus dudas” y “la maestra siempre estaba dispuesta.” La madre atribuye su desempeño regular en el primer año “En parte a la falta de apoyo de los padres, pero también a Alfredo porque es distraído y flojo.”

Pero Alfredo tuvo que repetir el segundo año. Según su madre fue porque “no hacía las tareas y no pone su parte.” En tercero, donde estaba en 2007-2008, sus notas siguieron regulares con tendencia a bajas.

De este caso parece que:

- La transición durante los primeros días no fue relacionada con su repetición que ocurrió en el segundo año de primaria.
- Nuevamente la culpa por no desempeñarse mejor se asigna al niño.