

# Peru: the role of the animator: the complex interface between PRONOEI and community

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In April 2000, we completed an investigation in four communities in Puno, the region in the South of Peru from which the PRONOEI programme originated. The point of the investigation was to learn lessons from PRONOEI's accumulated experience with community animators and – especially – to find out how effective the community animators had been in the eyes of families. To do this, we selected two Quechua-speaking and two Aymará-speaking communities; and a team of anthropologists ran a workshop with parents from each community to gather information about various aspects of the programme. In addition, the anthropologists carried out observations and interviews to deepen their understanding of the themes that most interested the families.

The work of the team was based on three questions.

1. What were the objectives of the programme, as the families saw them?
2. How did they see the profile and roles of the animator?
3. How did these perceptions impact on the effectiveness of the PRONOEI programme?

#### Outcomes 1: PRONOEI and its objectives

From the answers the families gave to the first question, the team assembled two sets of descriptive words and short phrases.

PRONOEI as an education programme: *'part of education', 'progress', 'reading and writing',* and so on.

PRONOEI as a social programme of daily

care for children  
*'it helps us', 'happiness', 'house of children', 'play',* and so on.

Overall, the answers fuse together into one single definition: *'PRONOEI is a home where children learn'.*

In Peru, the idea of education as the means for people to achieve progress is deeply ingrained in rural populations.

Thus, it is no surprise that in the investigation, the word 'education', together with words such as 'progress', 'development' and 'future', are associated with PRONOEI – and therefore with formal education. People see education as the start of a road that, ideally, helps them to improve themselves, leave the communities and cultures that they were born into, and

become part of wider society and the national culture. They think that education produces progress.

In the eyes of parents, the role of PRONOEI in the social development of children, and its role in their motor-cognitive development (something that is much more about formal education) were seen as intertwined, inextricably linked. In order that children can be educated they have to attend some kind of school or centre, and this implies a great deal of previous social learning. For example, they have to be used to being away from their families, with other children and under the supervision of a stranger.

But the advantages that the parents see in the PRONOEI programme are not just

of an educational nature: they are also about preparation for life. Spanish, for example, is a necessary tool for formal schooling but is also important in many social and economic senses as well. Parents concluded that 'children who are confined to their homes are children who are standing still'. It is in PRONOEI that they have their first contacts with others and begin the process of adapting to the education system.

Using illustrations and stories about days in lives of children, parents showed the ways in which their children benefited from the PRONOEI programme – and also showed what they felt was lost by those children who did not participate. Children who did not participate were shown as dirty, unkempt, sad, abandoned – in one case a child was represented as an orphan! In contrast, children who did attend the programme were shown as happy, playing with their companions, clean and tidy, alive and sharp.

*Children who don't go, don't know what day it is, always play alone. They can hardly mix with other people because they are almost like little*

*savages or animals. It's because they are afraid of people.*

*Its as if they are locked up in their homes. But those who attend the PRONOEI programme know how to read, identify trees, distinguish colours. They call the animator 'teacher'. They build up their confidence together.*

*In the Children's House they are taught to behave and to interact with others – become civilised. Here, those that have fear, learn to lose their fear. It is as if they were in their own homes, learning to play and talk without fear. That leaves us to concentrate on helping them acquire more knowledge.*

*They know their companions and where they can safely go together. Those that don't attend the programme just walk with their dogs, only know Quechua. They also fear people and animals, don't mix easily with others. When they get to school, they don't know how to hold a pencil, how to write, don't understand the teacher.*

Although PRONOEI is officially called an initial education programme, parents see it more as place where children are cared for each day. Parents who think that formal education is poor (perhaps because they themselves started their own education when they were older) ask if older children can also take part in the programme.

*It's good for those who do go: they have a good time ... But what about the children who are always on the street with nowhere to play. Suddenly, their parents want to take them all to the plaza and leave them there because it's not so dangerous.*

Other evidence that parents value the daily care aspect of PRONOEI is the fact that a number of them indicated that the opening times of the centres should match up with their own hours of work, so that they can collect their children after work, or be at home ready to receive them.

#### **Outcomes 2: expectations of the role of the animator**

Through drama, the parents presented their perceptions of what a typical day

in each centre is like, and how to obtain resources. From this, it was possible to discover what they felt about the animators and the implications of this in practice.

The general role of the animator emerged as to teach the children, making them learn things. Because of this, it is very important that they are friends with the children – but not so much that they lose control. They have to be able to maintain order at the same time as keeping the children happy. For the parents, the most important thing was learning to write. Reading, knowing vowels, knowing Spanish, and having a school certificate were also mentioned, but with less frequency.

There were many other replies not related to formal education about what the animator should provide. We call these 'family care' elements because they are the kinds of things that a mother typically does with/for her children. These include: making recommendations; caring for them; toileting them and training them to toilet themselves; teaching them their names and addressing them by name or by their relationship or kinship to

others; and making sure that they are fed properly. But the function that parents most expect from the animator is to help children lose their fear of being away from their parents. This is linked to helping them adapt, at this half way stage between home and school, to meeting unknown people and dealing with new rules.

Parents also expected the animators to establish good relationships with them. The animators have responsibility for the well-being of the building in which the programme operates. That means that they have to devise and sustain activities that maintain and repair the building, and that replenish the materials that the children use. Parents expect animators to have meetings with them in which such things can be discussed, and to organise obligatory work days to make games for the children. In two of the communities, it was obvious that the animators had made at least half of the games themselves.

The animators are also responsible for attracting children to the programme. When a centre closed, it was because not enough children attended. When this

happened, the parents blamed it on the disinterest of the animator. The opinion of parents is that the animator must motivate the community in every way:

*... she has to animate the community to ensure that the building is repaired. That will help us to respect her as a good animator ... She must drive these activities along and gain the respect of the community. If she does this, we parents will commit ourselves to working with her for years.*

Parents frequently made remarks about formal aspects of being an animator. These included: 'that she keeps good time'; and 'that she is prepared for work and, above all, is a responsible person'. But what does it mean for an animator to be responsible? Some parents defined this as being present in the centre from the moment of opening until it closes. Many expected more: that the animators should collect the children from their homes in the morning and take them back there at the end of the day – and if the parents had not yet returned, then to take the children to their own homes until the parents return from work and could collect their children.

In response to the profile that the animator needs if the programme is to work well, a small group of parents wanted the animator to come from outside the community because she would be 'better prepared'. However, the great majority wanted their animators to come from their own community. The reasons given were: that they would have the time; that good communications between them and the parents would be easier to maintain (necessary to promote good parental participation in the programme); that they could count on the support of their own community; and, above all, that they would be people who could support families, especially in accompanying children between their homes and the centres.

Other advantages in having a local animator included: better cooperation between them and the parents in other community activities; and better control by the community over the animator's work. In addition, parents felt that local animators were more appropriate to help children make the transition from home to the centre in which the PRONOEI programme operates because the children would already know them.

Taking the four communities together, it was clear that the communities in which the animator was an outsider wanted them to be more responsible people. In contrast, the communities that had a local animator wanted them to be better educators. A number of mothers had thought about taking their children away from the programme because of the irresponsibility of the non-local animators; yet other parents wanted local animators to be more like the non-locals.

*We want the animators to teach our children well and we would like to monitor this and have some control ... she wants to teach them all to write neatly and well. But first they should learn to recognise colours, then to write.*

*We could help the animators, give them advice about teaching our children well. If not, our children will not do well when they go to formal school and this will mean that the prestige of her and our community remains low.*

*Teach the bigger ones to write, and the small ones to play.*

## Reflections

According to the parents consulted during this investigation, the ideal role for animators is mostly about formal education. This made us reflect about the perceptions that they have about the effectiveness of the programme, given what this must mean about their expectations.

What has emerged is that they see two roles for the animators: one oriented to education; the other to the social development of their children and the maintenance of what it means to be a person growing up in these traditional communities. At first sight these two findings do not seem to be in conflict – in fact, they complement each other. But the problems arise in practice: in trying to guarantee one of these, the other may be jeopardised. In the eyes of the communities, non-local animators may be better prepared yet may also be irresponsible in that they do not respond to the implicit expectations of the community (gathering the children and looking after them in the absence of the parents, for example). On the other hand, a local animator may ensure that the programme operates



Peru: parents drawing at a workshop about children who do and those who don't go to the PRONOEI preschool.  
photo: Servios Urbanos para Mujeres de Bajos Ingresos (SUMBI)

well in most ways yet may not be able to maintain the education at an adequate level because of the scarcity of training for them by the Ministry of Education.

This is not so much an irresolvable conflict as a simple reality in these

communities, one that affects the ways in which the parents appreciate and commit themselves to the programme – or not. For us, there are still some outstanding questions: How is the effectiveness of PRONOEI affected by the conflicts between the expectations of the roles and functions of the

animators, and the profiles of the local and non-local animators? What is the impact of the personal strengths of the animators on the pertinence of the programme? Have do these roles and functions contribute to making PRONOEI an effective programme? ○