



Botswana: joy in dancing
Kuru Development Trust

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Stories we tell, moments that stay with us:

examining your experience with ECD
to gain a deeper understanding
of effective programming and care for
young children and their families.

Think about moments in your professional (and personal) life that have stayed with you – times when you said to yourself: ‘This is it – this is really working’ ‘This is why I do what I do’ or ‘This is just horrible!’. Think about the situations that stick in your mind as emblems of what you understand or value. Think about events that in your mind represent the best or worst or most typical ways that children are treated, or that families are living – events that opened your eyes to important perspectives or truths.



Kenya: watching and learning
Children of Kiwanja Kimaye
Child Development Project



Colombia: playing and learning on the beach
Costa Atlántica Project

All of us who work in ECD, whatever our professional role, have such moments stored either consciously or subliminally in our mental map of meaning. They are (some of them) highly personal, often charged with strong feeling, and they link somehow to our value system ('This was a perfect example of what I'm working so hard to achieve.' 'This was a perfect example of what's wrong with xxx – governments, parents, our own organisations, other organisations'). These emblematic stories we store in our minds are small worlds of meaning that we understand directly; to explain their significance to someone else is difficult.

Unfortunately most of us are trained academically to overlook these stories and anecdotal 'evidence' as too subjective, irrelevant to the larger picture, or not significant. Yet these stories offer us some important doorways to understanding experience in all its complexity.

- 1 They reflect our value system, and can reveal our prejudices, emphases, and affinities. They often influence our decisions, whether we are aware of it or not.
- 2 They show us how our intuition sorts or categorises experience – which may or may not match the way we sort things logically.
- 3 They often serve as touchstones – motivating us, energising us, and helping us to explain, to ourselves at least, why we make the professional and personal choices we're making.
- 4 They often serve as mental shorthand for whole complexes of understanding, knowledge and experience that are crucial to our intellectual and emotional understanding of

what we do professionally. (For example, you might catch yourself thinking: 'This is another of those kids-on-the-beach-in-xxxx situations'. Only you know what this shorthand means, but chances are, it is full of layers of meaning for you that would be difficult to explain fully to someone else.)

- 5 They can offer us a way to break through limited and patterned thinking, if we learn how to 'research' and mine our own understanding in more depth.

What happens if we take the time to articulate and explore our own mental maps of understanding about children, families, and communities, and to identify some of the emblematic situations and significant events that shape our personal and professional understanding? Even the most orthodox guides to social science research advise the researcher to acknowledge his or her own biases. But within social science, the goal in doing this is to be able to somehow neutralise these biases in a study design. This is important if you want to apply rigorous scientific method to the study of human experience.

However, in the discussion that follows, we are going to explore another path: applying rigorous literary/narrative/qualitative research method to the study of human experience. The premise of this is simple: the experiences of children, families and communities are coded, stored and couched in language – both in the language we use to tell our

stories, and in the symbolic mental shorthand language we each use to store our understanding. So if we wish to explore what makes a programme effective, to understand the experiences of children, families, and communities at risk, and to gain greater clarity about our own roles in supporting them, we can benefit from starting with a deeper examination of what we, individually and collectively, know from our own experience.

Within the Effectiveness Initiative (EI), our initial exploration has begun with an effort to identify our own experience (as professionals) with effective ECD programming and to examine it in more detail. We carried out half-day workshops with two groups of ECD professionals – members of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development consortium (CG) who were joined by the EI Advisory Committee, and a group of Bernard van Leer Foundation (BVLF) staff members. These workshops focused on an exploration of our individual experiences with moments in an ECD setting when we said to ourselves 'This is really working'. The analysis of the 'data' (in this case, written stories and group discussion) generated through these workshops is presented in the discussion below.

As Evans and Salole indicate in 'When ECD works: mapping the contours of effective programming' (page 7), the concept of 'effectiveness' is large and

abstract. Most of us break it down in our minds: what worked in particular situations; what had desired outcomes; what felt dynamic; exciting and productive as a process; and so on.

The workshops were further replicated a month later in Peru with programme staff and the EI team working with the PRONOEI programme, one of the ten sites being explored within the Effectiveness Initiative. Results from that workshop will be presented in a future publication.



July 1999 Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague
photo: Angela Ernst

One of the CG participants in this exploration quite rightly pointed out that effectiveness and 'it is working' are not necessarily the same thing. An effective programme may have situations that don't work, and an ineffective programme may well have moments that work beautifully. Furthermore, in several participants' thinking, 'effective' programming is linked to outcomes, and examining moments of meaning does not necessarily yield insight into outcomes. However, in the workshops we proceeded to explore the more limited realm of 'moments when we felt a situation was really working', on the assumption that it would give us, as professionals working in ECD, insights into our experiences with the dynamics of effective moments for children, parents, communities and ECD programmes in general.

The insights into 'what works' in ECD settings that emerged from this study do not offer the definitive word on effective ECD programming. They offer instead a starting place for further exploration and study: a collective map of issues and concerns distilled from the stories that stay with us personally and

professionally. What they can do is to provide us with more detail about how we shape our thinking about ECD, and to point out directions that individual EI teams might look in their own explorations.

Methodology

Thirty-three individuals participated actively in the study that I discuss in this article, twenty-five of them at the April 1999 CG meeting in Paris and eight of them at a similar workshop offered to Bernard van Leer Foundation staff. The assignment was to think of a moment in an ECD setting, when you said to yourself: 'This is really working!' We left the definition of 'ECD setting' open: it could include personal or professional moments involving children, parents, ECD planning, or anything else the individual considered to be ECD.

Then, we asked participants to take about 20 minutes to half an hour to describe that moment in writing. We told them their goal was to just tell the story – who was involved, what they experienced, what happened – in as much detail as possible. We encouraged them to just write, without censoring or

July 1999 Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague
photo: Angela Ernst



editing their thoughts, and not to worry about their English or their writing style. (We did ask them to write legibly, and to write their story out rather than just making notes, because someone else would be reading their story.)

After the writing period, we discussed the experience – both the difficulties people had with the activity, and any thoughts or observations people had

from writing their own story. Then, while participants took a short break, we selected and made copies of two of the stories (selected more or less at random, though we did choose legible and medium length accounts) for the group to 'code' and then analyse together.

Coding the stories involves going through and underlining each 'unit of

meaning' for the author. For example, in the following paragraph, each underlined phrase is a separate unit of meaning:

In the Choco project – two years after it had started the mothers and community of Panguí were reflecting about their experience in the 'preschool at home' programme that had come to an end for them: what they had learned, what the children had learned, how the community had improved, how the men were active in improving the sanitation, how they were interacting with other neighbours. They thought collectively about how to continue the experience with their own resources. They decided to build a centre where children could spend 3 hours a day, and the community could meet. Someone donated a piece of land, every person in the meeting committed herself to participating in the construction: clearing the land, getting the sand, the wood and other materials. They appointed one of the 'promotoras' (the educational agent for the preschool at home) as the teacher. She committed herself to work with children and parents. (NB)

The goal in this activity is to work as closely with the text as possible to identify and distil the meaning that the author has encoded there. It also allows the analyst to identify what phrases and language the author uses to express meaning. Several participants jumped ahead and began to synthesise or summarise the main 'message' of the story. Instead, we asked them

to stick with a closer sentence by sentence recognition of what was there. Analysis and synthesis is a later step, once you have identified all the pieces of meaning the author has included.

One participant observed that working this carefully with the text made her realise how often she jumps ahead and summarises what she thinks a person means, rather than taking the time to really look at the person's meaning in its own context. She said 'Sometimes when I think I'm listening to someone, I'm actually only hearing my own conclusions about what she must mean'. Another participant noticed that adding the step of 'distilling meaning' allowed her to work with narrative accounts in more detail – she had gathered stories before, but hadn't known how to analyse them once she got them. Carrying out a process of coding and distilling allows you to produce concrete data to work with in your analysis.

At each step of the way, we asked the authors to confirm or refute our observations. It is useful to have the authors there to consult, since the point of the activity is to find out what an experience means to the person telling the story. In a few cases, the explanations the author provided added another layer of meaning to the account – and a deeper way for the group to understand the author's experience.

Once all the units of meaning, or 'themes' were identified in the two stories, we then discussed those

themes that were common to the two stories, and those that were significant but individual. This is the same technique that later was applied by a small group of people analysing the full data set of 35 stories. Themes within each story were 'distilled' and then common themes and individual themes were identified. The discussion below was then shaped by the ways that themes appeared to 'cluster' across the stories, and by the ways individuals addressed them. We have used the language of the original story writers (informants) as often as possible, to stick as closely to their meaning as we could.

Overview

There were 21 women storywriters and 12 men (two individuals wrote two stories). In total, we collected 35 stories about diverse aspects of 'What is working' in ECD. Because we left the parameters open, the choice of topics and perspectives people wrote about are significant: it gives us a range of themes that stand out for us individually and collectively, rather than giving us depth of understanding into one particular experience (another possible way to use this methodology).

Nine of the 35 stories were focused on the writer's personal experience as a parent; all of these were by women. It is remarkable that although the stories were gathered in a professional context, from people who work in ECD, so many women chose to write about a

moment with their own children, or friends' children, as emblematic of when an early childhood setting/situation was working.

Fourteen of the stories focus in on specific interactions between adults and children; 21 stories focus on whole programmes or settings as emblematic of what was working. Similarly, 13 of the stories show a moment of breakthrough or learning that revealed a new insight, and 22 are more generalised descriptions of situations that represent to the writer a perspective, quality or situation they wanted to depict.

The stories take place in 29 different countries, in 12 different kinds of settings:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1 family/home settings | - 7 |
| 2 preschool /centres (kindergarten - 1) | - 5 |
| 3 community based ecd, intergenerational, family and community activism | - 6 |
| 4 daycare centres | - 4 |
| 5 regional training workshops plus international ecd meetings | - 3 |
| 6 women's groups | - 2 |

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 7 parent education/mother training groups | - 2 |
| 8 home visiting programme | - 1 |
| 9 teacher training | - 1 |
| 10 university paediatric training | - 1 |
| 11 family resource centre | - 1 |
| 12 filming/documentation activity | - 1 |

This reminds us that effective ECD can and does take place in diverse settings. It is perhaps significant that so many people chose to write about the family/home context. This may be because one third of the storytellers chose to write about effective moments with children they knew personally. It may also reflect a professional consensus that for young children, effective experiences in the home and family context are very important.

Making sense of our ECD experience

Despite or because of the setting?

It is not just story telling convention that leads us to start our tales with a description of the place and situation. These elements matter, and in some

cases, are the motivations for a programme to be created:

Yacambu - This is a bunch of very tiny rural villages in the north end of the Venezuelan Andes. Peasants were running a preschool programme on their own, because the university had failed to provide one. No teacher wanted to go to a place where more than a day journey is needed to visit the small villages around the xx. Therefore a group of mothers decided to create 'family preschools' in each village, and with the support of five universities of that region, they got training and had an education student to visit and plan every week. (MZ)

The remote setting and difficulty of access to resources led local people in this account to create their own structure for a programme - one suited to the place, their culture, and to the resources they could draw on. The limitations in this situation created a natural 'pressure' for local people to have to get involved, create something for their children, reach out to regional and national resources, and take the lead - in other words to participate in the fullest sense of the word.

Participation - an ideal espoused in many of the stories - was ironically encouraged by limitations in the setting. If a trained teacher could have easily commuted from a nearby city, it is quite possible this set of villages would not have generated such an innovative approach.

Almost five years later ... the project was spread through the regions to more than 300 communities, a national university is training mothers for early care of children, the regional government has assumed the project as a local strategy to increase the coverage of early childhood care and education and, in Yacambu, peasants have yielded a land ownership to their preschool children, where the parents must work, in order to fund children's meals and dress. (MZ)

Because the approach was created in response to the setting, it was a viable model for similar communities, and it 'spread' - a theme that appears in several accounts of effective programmes. Spreading is a significant word: it has an organic element to it; it is motivated



from within, rather than imposed from without by governments or international donor agencies trying to replicate models.

A setting is made up of more than its geographical characteristics: a setting may be a remote village next to a stream, where the weather is hot and humid and people gather under the trees or in bamboo huts where they can get shade – and where they traditionally meet and interact. A setting may be a ramshackle set of 'poor communities living alongside a railway line, where material conditions (are) minimal, (and) there (is) so much 'waste' lying around that people could use to make toys or games.' (kb)

Equally a setting may be a 'village', which through several accounts takes on a meaning that goes beyond a small compound of dwellings. The village is described in terms of its human and cultural arrangement as well as its physical set-up.

When I walked around Baragoi I didn't find any brick buildings, but

instead an active group of children and some adults under a big shady tree. They were busy playing, listening to stories from the grandmothers, and once in a while mothers would come in to breastfeed ...

They have a lot of interesting traditional toys, for example, a little donkey made of straw that carries the whole household of the family on its back. The grandmothers use these toys to tell stories of how the Samburu move from one place to another, building their Manyattas (homesteads), and what are the important items they need – a calabash for the milk, cooking pots, rope to tie the animals, long poles to build the home, and so on. (UW)

In the village setting multiple elements come into play in determining whether the care for children is working; the typical buildings, the streams and meeting places, the cultural habits of the place, and also the traditional cultural habits of the group of people are all called into play and somehow 'harnessed'. The implication is that effective programmes build upon the village that is there and are structured

in keeping with the village that is there; the visitor is pleased to find no brick buildings. That would imply imported and superimposed structures from outside. She finds it effective that children are taught about their nomadic traditions, and are taught using the important 'items' of their people.

The importance of the village as a setting for childcare is highlighted poignantly in accounts of people whose villages or home settings have been destroyed: people living in refugee camps and resettlement sites:

This memory of effectiveness, the 'Ah Ha' experience of 'this is working', took place in a Malawian camp... A programme of early childhood care based on the model of 'Escolinhas' (little schools) was introduced. The project had multiple sites in the camp according to its village structure. The sites were very informal and consisted of trees or thatched roofing to provide shade. They were guided by 'animadores' or adult animators, primarily women, who had received basic orientation according to the practices in Mozambique... (LH)

Several accounts of people disrupted by war or displacement highlight the importance of recreating a village-like structure, or a cohesive sense of community (in several cases the village stands for the storyteller as a symbol of 'community').

Thus the setting – and its natural features (shady trees, rivers, crops and seasons), as well as its cultural features (traditional items of daily use, languages, work patterns, available people, and stories, songs and dances) is highlighted as a framework which allows an effective programme to arise or be introduced successfully.

All of the accounts praising a village setting as a holistic and rich setting for children are given by visitors, outsiders who find the programmes that build on these contexts effective. Several cite reasons for considering the programmes successful: the programme has spread to other areas; it has been adopted by regional or national authorities; preschools are still running without external funding five years later; they have spawned other community-building activities such as sanitation efforts, political activism to improve

infrastructure, training and education for mothers, and so on. Thus, while it would be useful to look further into how children, parents, and other community members experience village-moulded programming, it does seem to stand out as a rich model for the group of ECD professionals who wrote about it as significant to their experience.

There is a thin line between what people choose to set up for their children because of the setting (its limitations and its resources), and what is created despite difficult conditions.

We came upon a small centre run by the Mobile Crèches (in India), for the infants and young children of construction workers in the NCERT compound. It was a small improvised room of three by four metres or so, and there were about 25 children and three caregivers inside. Three infants were asleep in the hammock (attached to a wooden frame) and looked clean and fed ... The facilities were minimal, as was the space. The floor was sanded, and only where the infants and toddlers sat were there straw mats ... The centre had been there for four months at the time of our visit ... (BM)

This centre made a deep impression on the visitor, because despite the very 'minimal' conditions, the children were clean, well fed, and active. The daily routine appeared to be so well established after only four months that for the visitor it highlighted 'the organisation and training that must have gone into the programme for it to appear so simple for a casual visitor'. (BM) In this case, like in several others, organisation and training were the factors that were key, despite lack of physical resources, space, or sophisticated equipment.

The setting is an early childhood education centre in a low-income neighbourhood of Mexico City ... (a teacher is observed having a rich exchange with the children) ... Observing this experience, I felt that the curriculum that had been developed and the training that had been provided, was working even though material conditions were not very good and the teachers were not certified. (SH)

The setting is important, and it may also be irrelevant. If quality programmes can be established despite

difficult conditions, then they are often due to curriculum, to dedicated staff (as we will discuss below), to organisation, or to practical training provided to under-educated caregivers. Sometimes their success is due to a 'magnetic pull' (HT) that some caregivers seem to achieve through a combination of a 'bottomless resource bag, a toolkit ... a magic bag' (HT) of activities and a dynamic way of working with children and adults.

Important people, arrangements of people

To an outsider it looked like a 'traditional' arrangement for extended family childcare. However, what the grandmother and mother of the children shared was the mutual need of the arrangement ... So extended family care 'works' but not as (Î) previously understood. (LB)

If we understand people, and their inter-relationships, strengths, interests, and motivations, we are touching on an important element of what makes an ECD setting work. Thirteen of the stories touched on moments of personal or collective breakthrough –

when something new was learned, small 'moments of happiness' (DP) took place that illuminated something important, when 'what looked like the end of a part of the programme became a new, exciting, and challenging beginning for all of us'. (NB) These moments revolve around relationships and interactions that fell into place and allowed children and adults to grow, gain insight, see solutions to problems, and/or change. Some of them revolved simply around a moment of joy, achievement, or pride:

- a parent enjoying a moment of laughter and surprise with her children;
- a father experiencing a moment of breakthrough in learning how to communicate with a multiply-disabled child;
- a teacher using a child's question about a cat to explore a whole world of children's observations and deductions;
- a playing child who is finally, after several tries, able to take some nested dolls apart by herself, and is ecstatic;
- a group of mothers thinking collectively, and through their

- discussion, arriving at a new plan of action;
- a teacher trying unsuccessfully to interest children through didactic methods, having a moment of release as she throws out the lesson plan and tries something active, that works;
- illiterate parents discovering they could explain their programme to trainers and outsiders, and trainers discovering that they had something important to learn from illiterate parents;
- a mother, discovering through watching a skilled home visitor, that she could also play that role herself.

According to these authors, what makes an ECD situation work hinges on such moments of personal significance and pleasure. The success and effectiveness of the programme, or parenting style, or setting, rested on its ability to enable the people within it to experience success, pleasure, or new awareness.

On the other hand, 22 stories presented more emblematic 'situations' such as an overview of a programme that the writer considered to be working. Within these accounts too, a rich weave of interactions between a vast cast of

characters emerges, far more extensive than one might expect. And in these accounts as well, the people are interacting in ways that seem to 'carry' the meaning and significance of the moment:

- daycare centre staff planning together to help a child to be able to play better with peers;
- paediatricians learning to treat children as serious partners;
- grandparents in refugee camps providing the stories, songs and dances that helped recreate a sense of community; teens in the camps learning to be mentors and teachers for younger children;
- an NGO programme officer asking questions of villagers that lead them into an excited discussion of what their children need and how they might organise themselves to provide it;
- an inter-generational community in which the relaxed, child-friendly atmosphere allows children of all ages to be active, find nurturing when they need it, and to participate in multiple ways;
- outsiders to a programme discovering

in the course of an evaluation that the programme leaders know far more about what they are doing than the outside 'experts' would expect;

- ECD professionals learning to find shared language and common terms, through long and sometimes passionate discussion;
- mothers in a rural community discovering that they can collectively put together the resources they need in order to provide safe daycare for their children away from the fields.

The stories revolve around children of all ages, mothers, grandparents, fathers, teenagers, preschool teachers, family friends, caregivers, visitors, village leaders, diverse types of groups, ECD planners, government representatives, trainers, evaluators, collectives and unions, NGO and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) representatives, health workers, and even horses, cats, toys, and dolls.

Training for whom?

The word 'training' showed up in six of the stories, and referred in most cases to

preparation for a preschool teacher or daycare provider. But another ghostly form of training emerged as a theme: the need for all people involved in caring for children and living within the child's sphere to learn to understand, respect, respond, and work effectively with each other.

Several stories highlighted the need for all people living within the child's sphere to understand about the culture, the community context, and the work and economic factors that affect children, as well as about 'child development'.

With such a wealth of people who are significant to situations that work, the concept of 'training' needs to be looked at far more broadly than it often is. The question of 'training for whom?' is brought up indirectly in several stories: as the outside expert discovers she does not know as much as the 'untrained' people who organised the programme; as it becomes apparent that both the parents and the staff of a preschool centre need to learn more about each other; and as professional trainers of

trainers are confronted with their lack of experience with illiterate parents and other grass-roots level programme participants. As one author wrote in a tale of what didn't work:

This was not working. By talking with the women a childcare option was evolving. When others (the male organisers there to work with the husbands) stepped in and lectured, the real needs were trampled on as were the ideas and solutions that were coming from the people! (KF)

If the visiting INGO was to be effective in that situation, it had to go beyond thinking about how to support the women and provide them with training; it also needed to provide consciousness-raising to its own staff and to the men in the villages, and to train itself to navigate more skilfully in a situation where existing gender inequities are easily activated.

In many of the situations that worked, the holistic nature of the setting and the inter-generational population of the programme means that staff are called upon to play multiple roles, and

to interact with many different kinds of people:

Twenty children aged two months to twelve years are playing in three different groups, and parents, men and women (three of them are breastfeeding), are seated on the benches, the floor of Ko Miguel's bamboo hut, on the ground, listening to the (NGO's) child development worker who is introducing the day's activity – it's an activity about herbal cures for their children's skin diseases. She had already explained that some time will also be spent after to discuss the vegetable gardens and rice production projects. (GB)

This is an ECD programme that ranges far beyond the subject matter of child development and child health. One point that is implied by this writer and others is that a setting for ECD does cover more ground than just what happens for young children. Training and support for such a setting must match such an expanded vision.

Thus, in the Yacambu villages cited earlier, when the Peasants' Association asked for training from a representative of the Ministry of Education:

They wanted some training for these mothers, (and) other adults, in order to upgrade their ability to teach properly their kids. They also wanted that this training would fit the local context (curriculum). (MZ)

Training that would fit local context needed to go beyond child development information. It needed to mesh with the realities of the setting (the place was hard to get to), the strengths of the programme (it was organised and run by a very strong peasant's association), the training needs of the people who were involved (the mothers had little or no education, but had plenty of expertise in advocating on behalf of their children and working collectively), the culture of the people, and the home-based curriculum that had already been established.

Insiders/outside and intervention

Fifteen of the storytellers told their stories as insiders; they were participants with a clear role in the situations they described or they reached back to their personal

experiences as parents and workers in ECD settings. Fourteen storytellers told their stories as outsiders; they were visitors or observers, some of them on the scene in order to evaluate, make funding decisions, or provide training and resources at a later date. Six were invisible narrators – the situation was described with familiarity, but the narrator was not present as a participant or observer.

Cameroon: working while breastfeeding
photo copyright Jan Stegeman



But despite this rather even distribution of insider and outsider narratives, the group of people who participated in the study are mostly professionals who work at NGOs, INGOs and donor organisations to help promote ECD and plan or finance programming. Thus they are professional outsiders much of the time, and the whole topic of intervention – the role of outsiders in creating programmes; the programme planning dialogues between intervention agents and community members; the differing agendas of beneficiaries, programme implementers, programme planners, and outsiders – is woven in and out of the stories.

The following six excerpts from accounts of effective programmes (or intervention moments in the first two cases) illustrate the range of intervention stances or roles of outsiders that emerged through the stories. In these examples, the intervention agent acted with various amounts of involvement as: facilitator/listener; animator/activator; resource person/ responder to

community requests; funder who helps shape the programme's agenda; programme provider/seed-money funder; programme planner/designer.

Facilitator/listener

A women's organiser was hired (in Northern Pakistan) to begin to focus on women's needs. On one trip I accompanied the women's organiser to several villages where we sat with the women, heard about their lives, and talked with them about their problems. Eventually they talked about issues related to childcare. The women work in neighbouring fields and during the planting and harvesting season, in particular, they are away from home for most of the day. They sometimes bring children along, but this slows them down. Sometimes, a few admitted, they leave the children home alone. This worries them and they feel pulled between getting their work done and caring for the children.

We began to talk about how this problem might be solved. When the idea of having an informal childcare

set up in the village was suggested, they immediately began to think about how that might be organised. They thought of a woman who would be an excellent one to care for the children. Someone else offered her house since she has a large veranda and a place for the children to play. And the discussion went on ... (KF)

In this example, the intervention agent (a visiting INGO programme officer) aims to take a back seat, describing her role as sitting with the women, hearing about their lives and talking with them about their problems. The seed of a programme appears as a suggestion, perhaps from the visitor and perhaps from one of the women themselves. But the focus of the tale is the engagement of the women themselves as they think of who, how, and in what ways the programme could be formed, using their existing resources.

The implication of this example is that what is working is the women's ability to both identify and decide how to address their problems, when given an opportunity to do so.

Animator/activator

Explaining to a group of teachers from hill-tribe communities (in Thailand) how to translate knowledge and experience into an ECD programme. They have no outside exposure to such programmes; do not know how to articulate needs or how to imagine possibilities beyond their everyday reality. I started speaking at length about the pictures of children and families they presented to me; that early childhood is not just about a preschool building with trained teachers inside. They have clear ideals about how children should be (like the dog, like the stone, and so on). They have a strong desire to knit the generations back into a whole but feel that the youth have dropped out of the community as well as out of school.

I discussed how a programme can try to knit the generations back together (child to child, elders and children, new mothers and experienced mothers, adolescents and life skills). How to devise activities to make children resourceful (like the dog) and strong

(like the stone). I used the knowledge they gave me, and put it into some programme 'frameworks' that I have learned from other partners. Finally a look of comprehension was coming into their eyes, questions came out, teachers started discussing spontaneously with each other. (MH)

The key phrase in this example is 'I used the knowledge they gave me', but in fact, the visitor (another INGO programme officer), plays a much more pro-active role, instructing and informing the community, while working from pictures they supply and the stories they tell about them. A similar result as in the previous example is highlighted as important: 'teachers start discussing spontaneously with each other'.

Resource person/funder

I visited Yacambu in 1995 as National Director of Preschool Education for the Ministry of Education ... When I was there, the peasant association leaders asked me about three problems:
1. they needed a place to continue, because their own houses cannot be used in crop season.

- 2. They needed some money for (a) student, so she can be there beyond the academic year. They also wanted some payment for the 'teacher-mother'.*
- 3. They wanted some training for these mothers, (and) other adults, in order to upgrade their ability to teach properly their kids. They also wanted that this training would fit the local context (curriculum). (MZ)*

In this example, the community has already held its discussions, presumably without the need for an outside facilitator/animator, and has identified what it needs. So the role of the intervention agent, in this case a government representative, is to fund what needs to be funded. In this story it is clear that the government agent in fact supported the programme plans as presented, and thus played the role of resource supplier.

Funder who helps shape the programme's agenda

The women's group began to contact other organisations for assistance, both

financial and pedagogical ... To fund the teacher's salaries and operations, they relied on their own resources and donor funding (an international NGO). Concerned about the sustainability of the programme, the INGO helped fund a revolving loan fund for income generating activities, whose profits would be reinvested in the preschool. (UM)

Within this excerpt, initiative has also come from the community. However, the donor organisation plays a more active role in shaping the programme, by introducing its own concerns about sustainability. In a number of the stories, the donor-introduced agenda of sustainability is mentioned. In this account, the storyteller tells us that it is in fact doubtful that the programme was able to become self-sustaining, since the income-generating aspect of the programme was not particularly successful.

One might be tempted to attribute this lack of sustainability to the fact that it was a donor-introduced concern. And it is true that those programmes that are described as having 'spread' (implying

grass roots replication) also seem to have taken root in their contexts. However, the following example, with a donor-introduced concern for sustainability, claims more success with longevity.

Programme provider/seed-money funder

In one hotel ballroom (used for refugees in war-torn Croatia) we find a couple of displaced Ph.D., several teachers, nurses. Out of the chaos, the misery of displaced status, it becomes possible to develop a recognisable preschool activity. Women ... began to take charge of their new context. Preschool groups became organised – associations formed. The principle, applied first successfully on the Croatian Coast, could be carried forward into Bosnia and beyond ... Associations could be supported and could learn to generate their own resources for their own future. 60,000 children and 60% of the centres still stand five years later. (FW)

It is possible that because this programme activated preschools in a

place where kindergartens existed before the war, and built on talents already present within the group, there was a strong basis for sustainability. In other words, ownership of the idea was implicit in the setting, so it did not function as a donor-overlay. In this example, while the donor is activating talents found within the group, both the initiative for forming preschools and seed funding for implementation is provided by the 'outsider' INGO.

Programme planner/designer

In 1991, I was part of an initiative intended to respond to psycho-social needs of Mozambican refugee children living in camps in Malawi and Zimbabwe. Following a series of visits to generate a situation analysis, we concluded that two of the most vulnerable populations were preschool aged children and adolescents ...

A programme of early childhood care based on the model of 'Escolinhas' (little schools) was introduced ...

The actual Ah Ha! experience was

based on watching the intergenerational exchange and realising that multiple needs were being met at one time as the resources of each 'group' were being drawn upon ... Visits with a randomly selected group of parents, many of them single mothers or on their own,

suggested broad support for the project. (LH)

In this example, a programme that was considered highly effective was in fact planned by a visiting group of outsiders (accompanied by some insiders) who assessed the needs, designed the



Brazil: working in our garden
Criança Rural Project

programme, and provided the funding and training for the local implementers. In this situation, the author attributes the success of the programme to the fact that what it provided was an excellent match for the people being served – it met their multiple needs and drew on the resources of each sub-group within the population.

In summary, a range of intervention styles emerged as effective in this group of professional *outsiders*' experience. Questions that emerge as we look at these stories aren't answered within the accounts: how does the intervention agent's role enhance or detract from the effectiveness of the project? Under what conditions is each intervention stance most effective?

COMMUNITY INITIATION

We see from the story of the visiting Education Minister, that when a community's agenda is fixed or processed by the community, provision of funds and services can be an effective intervention. On the other hand, in the first example, in which women from Pakistan began to shape their concerns and solutions, a coda is added to the story, turning it into an example of what

OUTSIDER PROVISION

doesn't work. The male organisers, who had not been part of this effective process, met with women in two additional villages, lectured them about what the donor would provide (cars and buildings – this was untrue) and destroyed both the rapport that had been developed, and the willingness of the women to participate. The effort fell apart in the face of offers of funds and resources from outside, and no programme could be established.

It is possible to create a grid with 'who initiates' on the vertical axis (community initiation – outsider initiation) and 'who provides the programme' (community provision – outsider provision) on the horizontal axis, and find successful programmes anywhere within the grid.

Thus, it appears that having a programme initiated by the community is not necessarily the magic ingredient that makes a programme successful or valuable. Instead, the question of what makes an ECD programme work appears to reside partly in the quality of the match between the following factors:

- needs existing within the community, and what the outsider has identified and has to offer in relation to the need;
- needs recognised or identified by the community, and recognition that this can be provided by the outsider;
- talents and resources existing within the community, and the ability of implementers/insiders and outsiders to build on these;
- resources supplied from outside that match community recognised needs;
- sensitivity and skill on the part of the intervention agent, and identified or perceived needs of the insiders;
- a felicitous combination of personalities;
- timing – the right idea at the right time;
- cultural readiness for the intervention/activity at the time that funding or other resources are available.

While it is far too ambitious in the scope of this small study to try to pin down what makes these particular programmes work, it is possible to look across the descriptions to get insight into some of the factors that were highlighted as important.

Watching and listening intently

This theme emerged most directly when people were talking about children, who are described as 'watching and listening intently'. This will be discussed later in more detail. However, the theme also appears as a strong implication in accounts of adults who play an intervention role, who are trainers, and who are visitors to a situation: 'After a long observation of what they were doing I found out that ...' (ET); 'All the adults of the house, and the adolescent too, were drawn one by one into the room where the activities were going on and were spellbound by the proceedings ... The mother said to me: It looks so easy! Even I can do this ...' (HT); 'I saw the settling in process applied in practice ...' (NL); 'We were watching behind a one-way mirror but quickly felt drawn into the room.' (KR)

One of the examples above (of an intervention situation in Northern Pakistan) also emphasises the importance of watching and listening. The visitor sat with the mothers, listened to their stories and later watched their reactions as the men lectured to them. Through this observation, she picked up the cues for what her input and contributions should be. The accounts of visitors viewing programmes are full of observations made through watching. It becomes apparent that the storywriters consider it valuable for them to have time and opportunities to stand apart from the 'action' and observe.

We talked on and on

The focus of the meeting was on networking. We were hearing the reports, region by region, of what had happened in ECCD in various places and what various organisations had been trying to do... once people started reporting, the details got richer and richer, and the discussion got more animated and engaged. I don't remember exactly what moment I

said to myself 'this is working'. I just remember feeling more and more excited, as I realised that the work was just moving steadily ahead. Sure there were problems and issues, but you could see all the willingness and hard work that had gone into making the regional efforts go forward ... (FN)

The role of talk was highlighted in the stories for two main purposes: 1) as a way to create common ground, common understanding between people within projects and between project people and outsiders, and 2) as a tool in collective problem solving.

There was a differentiation between talking to or at someone (lecturing – considered a negative trait), and talking with/discussing. In several stories, there was an effort on the part of the narrator to impart information in a context – the visitor to Thailand shared her programme experience in relation to pictures and explanations that the villagers themselves had provided. In this way, she avoided preaching or lecturing, and was able instead to share her knowledge in the context of a dialogue.

They thought collectively

In a regional workshop, with a group of ECD practitioners from several Arab countries, a long discussion (was held) about which Arabic terms to use as equivalent to 'care' and 'education', and which of them reflected their practice; it was a 'collective mind' in operation, not easily in agreement with itself, but it worked ...

What helped the exercise to 'work' was a fairly successful 'facilitation' process, which created a neutral space for strongly-minded professionals to interact passionately but positively. (ZI)

Collective mind is significant in effective discussion and group work – it relates not only to problems being solved through a group discussion, but also to a process of integrating diverse individuals into a shared understanding of problems. It involves creating a shared language, literally in some of the stories and metaphorically in others. It also acts as a springboard for activism.

... two years after it had started the mothers and community of Pangui were reflecting about their experience in the 'Preschool at home' programme that had come to an end for them: what they had learned, what the children had learned, how the community had improved, how the men were active in improving the sanitation, how they were interacting with other neighbours. They thought collectively about how to continue the experience with their own resources. They decided... (NB)

As several writers pointed out: concern for children is a motivator for adult activism:

Then the discussion continued. 'So, what else do you women do? Just make toys?' 'No, we do lots of other things. We have got together to clean away the garbage in the streets. We have built a wall to keep the river from flooding the village. We have made pig pens. And we have even written a letter to the President of the Republic telling him that we too are voters and he had better get a road built through to this place'

‘And all this in the name of a preschool programme?’

‘Yes, sure. We do all this for our children.’

Lesson – women in groups get highly motivated through engagement with their children. The motivation is sparked off, but if properly guided, will not end there. (FW)

Properly guided

This notion of guidance wafts into the accounts in the guise of facilitation, donor input, expert participation in ‘dialogues’, role modelling and reference to dynamic community leaders, trainers and others whose role is to help steer discussions, help shape programme designs, help educate people.

In relation to adults guiding children there are clear techniques set out by several writers:

The positive, gradually introduced (encouragement to open up) what he was doing, while respecting that what he was doing was fine, made him start to enjoy playing together (with other

children). (TF)

In other words, with children, it is important to start with where they are, introduce new ideas through encouragement and exposure to new possibilities, while respecting what the child does on her/his own. With adults, this same value is implicit in the ways storywriters described their roles in intervention situations. When an outsider oversteps the attitude of guidance-as-a-mutual-exchange, it becomes a negative feature:

The idea of the session was to have the mothers, grandmothers working in this setting explain what it was all about. So the trainees were given the opportunity to ask questions and dialogue with the women (the majority of them illiterate), to get a description of what the project was and why it was good to have it in their particular neighbourhood. Most of the trainers were Trainers of Trainers and had never really worked directly with parents, let alone illiterate mothers, and at first were lost, as they could not use the usual techniques they were accustomed to and some of them

(were) having difficulty to admit that ... (BC)

In this example, trainers were not used to being the learners, and were lost in a situation where their guidance was not being sought!

They have clear ideals for their children

Just about everyone has ideals for children – the parents, the community leaders, the outsiders who wish to intervene. One way ideals are used is by listening to parents, and using their own ideals and aspirations for their children as a starting point for discussing programme options. As the Thailand visitor mentioned, ‘I discussed how a programme can try to knit the generations back together ... How to devise activities to make children resourceful (like the dog) and strong (like the stone).’ She built upon what the parents and teachers told her they wanted for their children.

A second way ideals arise is when the outsider teaches or creates an appetite for an ideal. For example, a programme to teach parents of severely-

handicapped infants focuses on having parents learn how to interact with their children in simple and non-verbal ways, and then practice that interaction, until the rewards create a strong appetite and value for communication.

This very small interaction continues for 4-5 minutes and then the boy turns his head very slowly towards his father and gives him a broad smile – the first smile ever! (he is about 12 months old! and severely disabled). The father’s and observing mother’s/staff’s happiness cannot be described ... (BE)

There is hesitation on the part of storytellers to discuss the ‘values’ and ‘ideals’ they are in fact trying to introduce when they act as intervention agents. Yet glimpses of such activity appear: in situations where outsiders are trying to strengthen the roles and powers of women within cultures that don’t value women’s autonomy; in situations where donors ask programmes to include elements aimed at making them sustainable; in programmes where preschool is introduced as an organising factor for disrupted communities, when ECD may



Botswana: sibling care
Kuru Development Trust

play a role in what is happening within these programmes. Sometimes that role is positive, sometimes disruptive, and often mixed.

It would be useful to focus on the question of 'whose ideals and values' have been adopted and integrated into the formation and evolution of effective programmes. What difference does it make if a programme is built on people's traditional values or if, in fact, a programme strives to introduce 'new' values and ideals?

still be an acquired taste for those communities.

This hesitation to discuss NGO's ideals, funders' ideals, and even government and private sector's ideals for children directly, makes it difficult to identify how these imported or highlighted values influence what happens within ECD settings. Yet there were clear indications throughout the stories that outsider-defined ideals, cultural practices, curricular practices and beliefs about child-rearing, all

Community participation, community commitment

The majority of stories that focussed on programmes, group settings, and community settings mentioned community participation as a marker of a programme's success. A sub-text, though, is that parents and communities are not just participating; they are committed to the programmes, they are active, and they ultimately take ownership. Participation is variously spelled out as:

Community participation in the management of the school, running all the way from food preparation to paying teachers' salaries, to physically constructing the school itself, to fund-raising, to starting agro/animal husbandry projects, to support the school. (UM)

They got training and had an education student to visit and plan every week. They also gathered money to buy food for children's breakfast and lunch ... They

mobilised private enterprises, local government and they were trying to get a broader support from universities and national government. (MZ)

The methodology was very participatory. Mothers had the opportunity to share their experiences and reflect about how they were raising their children, their own attitudes and beliefs, and how to use resources of the environment in a more productive way for the benefit of their children, families, and community. (NB)

In these stories, parents are identifying their own needs – sometimes at the instigation of dynamic community leaders, or in response to outside facilitators – and are identifying resources they can tap amongst themselves, and resources they can pursue in the local, regional, and national infrastructure. They organise themselves and others, they set conditions, in some cases, on the help they do receive – refusing support that deflects them from their

purposes. There is a balance in the stories between defining community participation as *response*, as *activism*, and as *initiation*.

They explained

What is set out as an ultimate ideal of community commitment is that community members have taken ownership of a programme. One key marker for this in many stories was the fact that community members and participants in the programmes could explain what they were doing with and for children, and why they did what they did, and could articulate for others what that meant in terms of children's development.

And what came out was that those illiterate women were actually explaining basic early (childhood) concepts in simple words to the trainers. For the organisers of the workshop (myself included) this little dialogue ... was a clear indication that the project the mothers were running ... was working, as they could explain the project and what they felt about it. Their words showed that they had taken ownership of the project. (BC)

One important thing is that they (the community parents/organisers) used every chance to promote their project, like an international meeting of coffee growers in Costa Rica ... These people have just been invited to international meetings to present their project. (MZ)

They used their own resources

The goal of sustainability, as mentioned earlier, appeared in the stories as a donor-driven goal with only moderate success. One notable exception was a programme that was ending, which women decided to continue on their own:

They thought collectively about how to continue the experience with their own resources. They decided to build a centre where children could spend three hours a day, and the community could meet. Someone donated a piece of land, every person in the meeting committed herself to participating in the construction: clearing the land, getting the sand, the wood and other materials. (NB)

This form of community ownership takes the discussion full circle to the question of community commitment. As outsiders, the donor community tends to stress outcome markers to measure the success of a programme: programme longevity and community take-over of programme maintenance are considered primary goals to work toward. But in several of the stories, other equally valued dimensions of programme effectiveness were evident at the beginning: the community recognised a need and activated itself; the community responded to opportunities offered by a visitor; the community participated, had meaningful experiences along the way, and changed its ways of taking care of children because of what it learned, even in the course of a short-term

project. How can these process-related 'successes' be factored into our understanding of effectiveness?

In the following section, we look at what the 'insider' and

- difficulty playing together
- on his own
- he would feel lost
- show difficult behaviour
- staff started to sit him in the group
- would ask him
- what he would like to do
- his preferred toy
- would be offered
- gradually (this took some time)
- stayed at the table with other children
- staff started to make positive references
- about what he was doing
- involving both my son and other children
- this stimulated him
- made him proud
- show what he'd done
- the next step (steps in process)
- ask him to teach other children
- how to make a puzzle
- slowly he began to see
- it was fun
- doing things together

event-focussed stories tell us about the impact and growth and success of individual moments that worked, individual interactions that created an opening, and individual experiences that stayed with the storyteller and were formative in the choices they make as parents and ECD professionals.

Experiences of, with, and for children

Adults planning for children's success

My son had difficulty in playing together with other children. On his own he would be fine but with others he would feel lost and started to show difficult behaviour ...

The daycare centre staff started to sit him in the group and asked him what he would like to do. His preferred toy would be offered. Gradually (this took some time, but at least he stayed at the table with other children) the staff started to make references in a positive way about what he was doing – involving both my son and other children. This stimulated him and made him proud to show what he'd done. The next step was to ask him to

'teach' other children how to make a puzzle. Slowly he began to see that it was fun doing things together. (TF)

This is an excerpt from a story about a two and a half year old boy in a daycare setting that we used in one of the workshops for our group discussion. Even at first glimpse, it is rich and full of themes:

The story brought up discussion of many aspects faced by young children in care settings, including the planning that these teachers carried out in order to provide a consistent experience for the child, the opportunities and learning it involved for him, and ultimately the pride and engagement that resulted as the plan was carried out successfully over a period of about six weeks.

Each of these themes is worthy of exploration in its own right. For example, the theme 'He would feel lost' – what is it that makes children feel lost, compared with feeling 'found'? And what can adults, other children, and environments do to help children find anchors?

However, after the workshop group had given much consideration to the factors that emerged as part of an effective moment for her son, the mother confessed that although she had chosen the moment as a particularly effective one, what had not emerged in her story was the ambivalence she felt. Did a two and a half year old boy need to play together with other children? Would he

have done better to just play on his own until he had outgrown his discomfort with others? Was his negative behaviour perhaps a signal that he shouldn't be in such a large group setting at all?

This ambivalence, between admiring the planning and skill with which her child was helped to adapt to a situation, and wondering whether the goals for him were imposed, brought up a whole discussion of adults' expectations of and goals for children. What is the healthiest and 'best' experience for the child in a setting, and what are the best and healthiest settings that are possible for each child?

The stories addressed these questions on many levels, by identifying elements of the experience for children and adults in ECD settings, and by bringing up resonant moments that stayed with the story writers from their own childhood or their children's early years.

Several storywriters identified planning and organisation as the reasons why settings for children worked. They admired the well established routines that allowed children to feel safe, to interact without chaos or conflict. Smooth behaviours were cited as evidence in several stories that this was a well conceived and well designed setting, and the absence of difficult behaviours (crying, clinging, and fights among children) was identified as evidence that children were getting their needs met. On the other hand, one writer spoke of 'busy noise' as a sign that this was a vital and quality setting for children.



Peru: today I'll build with tins, tomorrow with barrels
Ate-Vitarte II Project



Consider some of the following 'markers' of a successful setting, as presented within the stories:

Three infants were asleep in the hammock ... and looked clean and fed ... Five or six toddlers were in a small circle ... There were about ten children 4-6 years of age listening to a story. One or two children were helping the caregiver with her task of getting the mid-morning snack ready. One child – a boy – was in a corner with a doll in his lap, very quiet, just hugging the doll. There was some free movement and some conversation among the children, but there was no shouting. No instruction was given to the children to be quiet. (BM)

They (a multi-age group of children) were busy playing, listening to stories from the grandmothers, and once in a while mothers would come in to breastfeed. It was all done in a very natural and child friendly way. The parents bring water and fire wood each morning, and the project makes sure the children get a meal of porridge. When times are good and there is a lot of milk, parents also bring extra milk for the children. (UW)

Nidi and Suresh are in the market learning area using stones as weights to buy potatoes. As Nidi and Suresh choose and discard stones to create a balance for the tower of potatoes, Saibu, the

student teacher, observes the process – the process of Nidi mentoring Suresh, learning about heavy and heavier, using play as a learning tool, and the quiet yet intense concentration of other children as they collaboratively succeeded in balancing the scale, and then take great delight in knocking all the potatoes off the scale. (MA)

Two of the three examples focus on centre-based care; the middle example might be called 'village-based' care; all three are situations where children are living in poverty. Thus it is no surprise that the health and care aspects of children are highlighted (as they are in several other stories): children are clean and fed, often with snacks or meals provided by the programme, and when possible brought in by the parents. If they are younger children, mothers come in to breastfeed. In the first example, the writer goes on to explain that children and their clothes are washed when they arrive at the centre, if they need it.

Breastfeeding is mentioned throughout the stories, both from a nutrition perspective, and as a way the youngest children are getting nurtured. Other forms of nurture arise: a boy is cuddling a doll, a young child playing with a grown-up sits in her lap while exploring a new toy, a three year old whose mother is giving birth to a younger sibling is given the role of 'chief cuddler' to support her mother and be part of the experience.

These successful settings have a balance of interaction and quiet activity. Children are gathered in circles for singing, playing games, listening to stories; children are off in corners playing quietly, or alone, hugging a doll. In all three excerpts, and in other stories as well, children have freedom of movement. They are not restricted to desks or expected to sit in one place.

Play is highlighted as the primary task children engage in; in fact it is notable that little direct teaching appears in the accounts. The settings these authors selected are ones in which children learn through exploration, interaction, and doing. They are playing with potatoes, stones, toys, dolls, counting toys, puzzles, and other materials that can be manipulated and used in role-play. One author highlighted role-play as a particularly important element for her. 'One of the things that worked for myself as a child and in being a teacher has been role play ... Being able to express things through 'somebody' has given (me) room to showing feelings and emotions in a non-threatening way.' (bb)

Watching and listening intently

As mentioned earlier, watching and listening play a strong role in most of the stories. For children, watching is a form of learning:

A male teacher had an infant on his hip while he was helping two preschoolers with a building task at a table. The infant was watching the

two children intensely and listening to them. (Much more interesting than a mobile designed specifically for infants). (KR)

The emphasis on children watching and learning from older children, and being able to move in and out of the 'action', is as strong in the stories as the emphasis on active learning. This watching and listening activity takes place in the context of descriptions authors give of rich environments – where children and adults of all ages are gathered, where multiple levels of activity are going on, and children have the freedom to move in and out. Thus this mode of learning may be particularly tied to situations that provide such a rich and 'holistic' environment for children. In the example of the two and a half year old boy having trouble playing with peers in the daycare centre, cited at the beginning of our discussion of children, there does not appear to be much room for the child to watch and listen and find his place among his peers over time; and that is possibly the root of the mother's ambivalence about the teachers' well-planned technique,

despite its success.

One story, in which the writer never directly states why he has chosen this as an example of a moment that is working, sketches this form of rich environment learning in a cinematic way:

Two very small girls – maybe three years old – show up ... They walk through the activities, sometimes asking questions (usually of each other) and often laugh. After a while they stroll away. Later, I see them sitting in the middle of a field, talking earnestly together ... When the preschool takes a break, they join a group of children who are making a dam in a drainage ditch ... At lunch time we find them sitting on the knees of two of the village grandmas, talking with them ... (κτ)

In this account, we see a form of ‘active learning’ that is not engineered; the village itself offers the learning areas, and there is little adult guidance or effort to make each activity ‘developmentally appropriate’. The prevalence of this phenomenon in the stories brings up some questions, which might be fruitful to explore: what do watching and listening offer to a child, in the overall learning process? What opportunities for watching and listening are available within a child’s care situation? To what extent does a programme strive to provide a ‘rich environment’ approach, and to what extent does it focus on planned learning?

Something familiar, something new

A good deal of attention is given to how adults support children, both in their transitions into the care setting, in learning new things, and in situations of change, such as the birth of a new sibling.

Days before, Lina and her two friends had spoken at length about how to include (three year old) Juanita and make the experience positive ... the adults concluded that participation without fear for her mother’s well-being was the goal ... The two friends, whom she knew well, prepared (her) with games and activity, including forays outside to see friends and neighbours ... Juanita had talked constantly about the birth and new baby for weeks ... but although curious, was not insistent about being present at the moment of the birth. She knew enough to be cautious ...

(The whole experience) was joyous. Each person had a role. The three year old was informed and engaged, but not overwhelmed. Her impulse – to cling to her mother – was anticipated and validated. Her community was there to support her, direct her, and reinforce her role as a child who could explore, walk, play, talk, share with friends, help her mother, and even help her new sibling. (DP)

In this experience, the adults have planned together to create a role for Juanita, to help her know what to expect, to make sure she has familiar toys and people around her, and most important, to make sure she has a clear role in her family’s change.

The line between home and the school or care setting is more blurry than you might expect; the themes apparent in helping a child at home cope with the birth of her sister emerge as well in a story about a transition into preschool:

In Hungary, there is about a two week period (called ‘settling in’ period) for each child when the mother or any other family members can come and be with the child at the centre ... During the first days, the mother does all the caregiving routines (washing hands, diapering or toileting, and so on) and the caregiver just observes and assists ... Later, as the child grows more confident, the caregiver takes over these tasks ... It is considered to be one of the ‘turning points’ (or first signs of settling in) when the child allows the caregiver to wash him or to feed him. (NL)