

# Editorial

This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* is on 'transitions': the physical, social and developmental thresholds that children cross from their home environment into their first experiences of life outside – daycare, pre-school and school. "Successful transitions: the continuum from home to school" is one of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's three new programme areas, launched earlier this year. The goals of our interventions in this area include the enhancement of the quality of children's learning environments and a better availability of and demand for early education.

Entering school is one of the most significant events in a child's life, and the results of and experience in the first years of education have far-reaching consequences. The Foundation looks to a spectrum of actors, including parents, caregivers, childminders, teachers and peers, in helping to make the transition from home to school a valuable experience for each child, both in terms of their current quality of life and their future prospects. A summary of the framework that we have developed to guide our work in this area is presented on page 23.

The following pages present a variety of ideas and perspectives and a number of practical examples in different contexts. While they all differ in approach, their common denominator is, as John Bennett puts it in our interview with him (see page 13): "Young children desire to move forward and the challenge of transition can be highly motivating for them. For this reason, we must see transition not as a problem but a challenge."

The issue of transition is intrinsically linked to education. UNESCO's *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007* (published in October 2006) emphasises the importance of enhancing early childhood education. It covers in a substantive way the transition period of young children from their early childhood experiences and home environments to primary schooling. A summary of the report can be found on page 5.

Early childhood programmes contribute to realising children's rights especially in ensuring access to education for every child and integrating educational activities with other services that implement rights on other fronts such as health, birth registration and protection. An example of this approach is presented in the "Parques Infantis" programme (see page 45).

A large proportion of young children around the world enter schools being taught in a foreign language or dialect. The difficulties of learning to read and write within the first years of primary school, especially in a foreign language, contribute significantly to the large numbers of children who drop out within the first years of school or who repeat grades. However, (formal) education is generally structured around national interests and the desire of parents to introduce dominant languages that allow for social mobility.

APEDIBIMI in Guatemala (see page 38) and ABEK in Uganda (page 36) illustrate how respecting the local culture, learning the mainstream language and involving parents and the community in educational activities have led to a better transition of children into school, resulting in a significant drop in school dropout rates.

But schools also have a responsibility to meet children halfway. Better communication and interaction between pre-schools, primary schools and parents would help greatly to facilitate transitions. This is the point of departure in the Mississippi Delta Children's Partnership (see page 29), and the dilemma around this issue is also outlined in "Formalise the informal, or 'informalise' the formal: Toward more child-friendly schools" on page 20.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 28 and 29) states that children have a right to education and inclusion regardless of developmental status. In practice, however, setting 'readiness' standards can mean that children who don't fit the standard are excluded. An example of how to tackle this



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challenge is shown by the Israel Centre for Learning Competence (see page 49).

Access to good early education outside the family is the first step of transitions. However, if quality of education is not good enough, children can be pushed out or leave of their own, draining scarce resources needed for human development. By introducing this topic in this ECM, we hope that future 'transitions' increasingly respect the rights of children and address the imperative for human and social development.

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