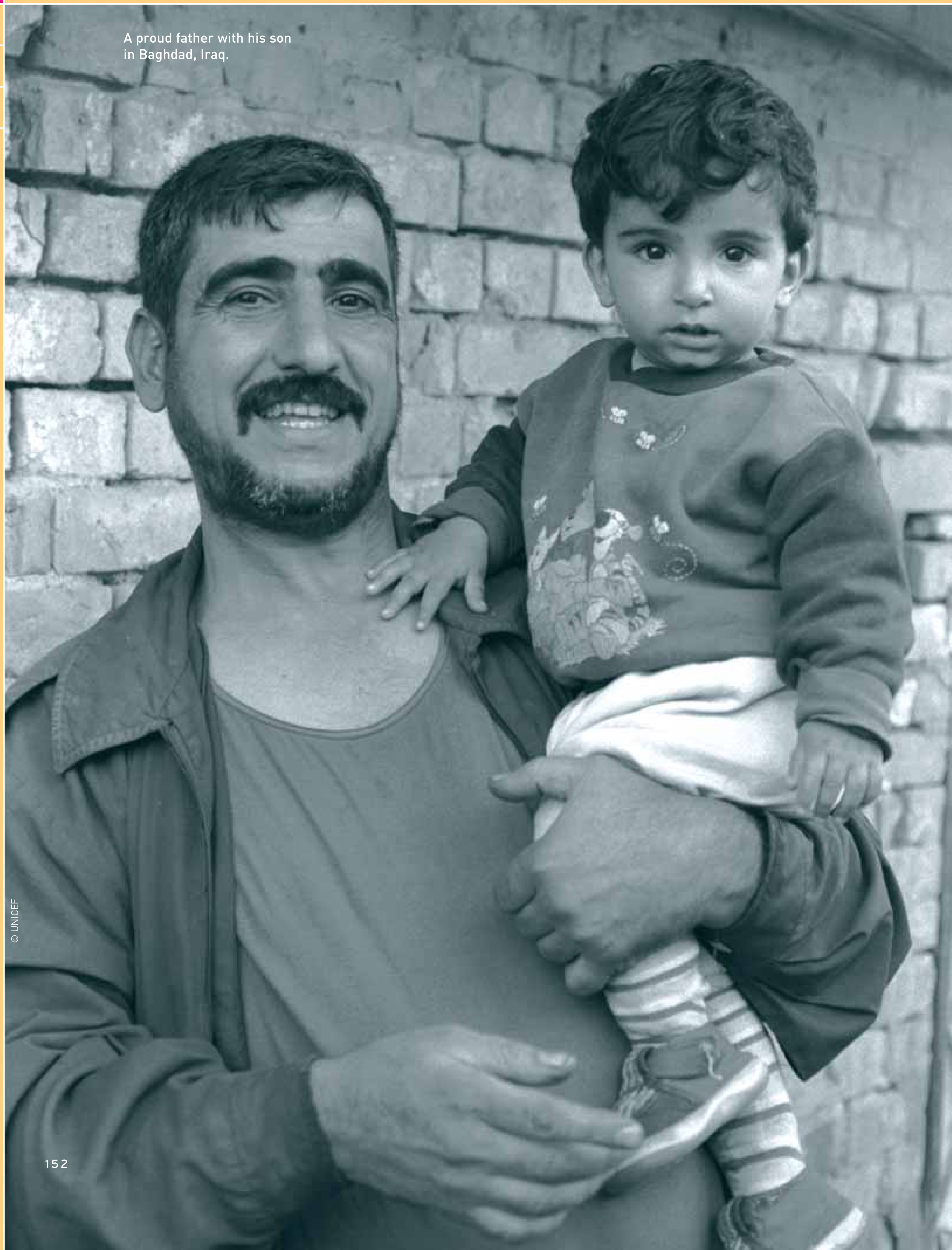

A proud father with his son in Baghdad, Iraq.

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PART III. Early childhood care and education

Chapter 7

The making of effective programmes

Early childhood programmes ensure children's holistic development by supporting and complementing efforts of parents and other carers during the early years and easing the transition to primary school. Such programmes are extremely diverse and no global model exists. However, all successful ones ensure continuity of support as the child moves from the family to a programme outside the home and eventually into primary school. One way to smooth the transition is by engaging with parents. Centre-based programmes, including pre-schools, for children from age 3 to school entry age require pedagogies and curricula that take into account the specificity of children's development and the social context within which they live. Given the relatively low participation and poor quality of many programmes in developing countries, it may be helpful to learn from and adapt others' experiences in meeting the challenge of expanding and improving early childhood care and education. This chapter offers examples from around the world.

Learning from country experiences

There is no universal model of early childhood provision that can be followed globally

There is no universal model of early childhood provision that can be followed globally. Each nation has to determine its own way forward, yet much can be learned from the experience of other countries. Good-quality ECCE builds on a nation's own experiences while drawing on and adapting lessons learned by others. For example, Western Europe's well-established and nearly universal early childhood systems, which are supported by the public sector, may not be immediately appropriate for sub-Saharan African countries where the private sector plays the key role in provision. Yet they can offer important findings relevant to curricular continuity, for example, regardless of how they are financed.

Despite the complexities of designing and implementing good-quality, holistic early childhood programmes, strong programmes share some characteristics no matter what the setting:

- focusing on and offering support to parents during children's earliest years;
- integrating educational activities with other services, notably health care, nutrition and social services;
- providing relevant educational experiences during the pre-school years and easing the transition into primary school.

This chapter examines the practices that make for continuity and a smooth transition from parental care to an early childhood programme and on to primary school.

The many meanings of early childhood

The meaning and practice of child care vary greatly within and across countries, as can be seen in the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) Inventory, one of the most widely used tools to measure the family environment, based on home visits in both developed and developing countries. Using observation and interviews, it assesses the quality and quantity of support and stimulation provided for children at home, as well as involvement with extended family and community that affects children. It focuses on three aspects of parent-child interactions: warmth and responsiveness, harshness and discipline, and stimulation and teaching. Findings include the following:

- Although body contact is a near-universal form of responsiveness to very young children, differences in culture and socio-economic conditions influence how responsiveness is enacted in different countries. Belief in the 'evil eye', for instance, is strong in some societies, which has implications for face-to-face engagement as a form of responsiveness. In societies where pre-school children spend most of their time with siblings, parental responsiveness is more limited.
- Attitudes on the use of physical punishment to control children's behaviour vary widely. Generally, physical punishment seems more culturally accepted in societies where respect for elders and parental authority are highly valued, for instance in some African societies. In other cultural models, such as Mayan families in Latin America, there is more acceptance that young children's capacity to understand the consequences of their actions is limited, and parents are therefore less likely to punish their toddlers. In general, parents in societies that believe children should be deferential do not encourage them to contribute to adult conversations and respond to their emotional needs more non-verbally than verbally. Whatever the cultural context, harsh physical punishment is generally associated with negative outcomes for small children.
- Emphasis on stimulation for young children escalated in the late twentieth century, particularly in industrialized societies. Early school achievement is particularly valued in North America, Europe and parts of Asia, including Japan, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan (China). Parents in Latin America, by contrast, tend not to emphasize academic achievement early in life, as they see children as developing more slowly. In some African societies, children are expected to learn by observing rather than through direct teaching, and much emphasis is put on responsibility training.

In all societies, however, there is a strong relationship between household socio-economic status and scores on the HOME Inventory. Above and beyond cultural differences, parental income and education have a major impact on child-rearing. In all regions models of parenting are evolving, and educated parents tend to favour

more stimulating and less punitive parenting. (Bradley and Corwyn, 2005).

Qualitative anthropological fieldwork underscores the fact that significant differences in parenting practices exist across and within countries. For example, young Kenyan children are often present as non-participants in situations dominated by adult interaction; they are not necessarily the focus of attention of the adults, but they are rarely if ever left alone. In contrast, young children in North America and Western Europe experience a sharp disjuncture between long periods when they are left alone and moments when they interact with their parents and receive much attention and stimulation. While young children in Kenya have few toys or other possessions that are considered their own, children in North America receive an increasing number and variety of gifts as they grow older, and are encouraged to develop individual tastes; as a result, young children in Kenya do not develop the same sense of individuality as those in North America (LeVine, 2003).

In small rural communities in Côte d'Ivoire, the care of young children is not individualized: as soon as they are able to walk (between the ages of 18 and 30 months), they are left free to wander around and it is assumed that any adult will take care of all children within sight (Gottlieb, 2004). Early learning thus takes place through experience and within groups of children who interact with most adults of the community, whether they are a given child's parents or not. Generally, young children in many sub-Saharan African societies are expected to be 'more obedient, less demanding, more helpful and more alert to and keen to meet the expectations of others; less linguistically precocious, although more likely to be bilingual; but also more independent and self-sufficient, and better able to entertain themselves' than young children in North America and Western Europe (Penn, 2006: p. 4).[1]

The emerging field of childhood studies places such observations of parenting practices in a broader perspective and emphasizes the following points:[2]

- Young children's development is a social process. Children learn to think, feel, communicate and act by interacting with others in specific contexts. (Richards and Light, 1986; Schaffer, 1996; Woodhead et al., 1998).
- Cultures of early childhood are also profoundly social, expressed through peer group play, styles of dress and behaviour, patterns of consumption of commercial toys, and television and other media (Kehily and Swann, 2003).
- Childhood contexts and practices are socially constructed. Most children today experience the world through built environments: classrooms, playgrounds, cars, buses and other forms of transport, supermarkets, etc. These are human creations that regulate children's lives. (Maybin and Woodhead, 2003; Qvortrup, 1994).
- Childhood has been differently understood, institutionalized and regulated in different societies and periods of history. Early childhood has been reinvented and differentiated according to children's social and geographical location, their gender, ethnicity, wealth or poverty, among other factors (Cunningham, 1991; Hendrick, 1997).
- Early childhood is also a political issue, marked by gross inequalities – in resources, access and opportunities – that are shaped by global as well as local factors (Montgomery et al., 2003; Stephens, 1995).

These perspectives draw attention to the ways early childhood is constructed and reconstructed, and how pedagogies and practices are shaped by circumstances, opportunities and constraints, and informed by multiple discourses about children's needs and nature.

Early childhood programmes should take these findings into account. Yet current programmes in most developing countries and models advocated by multilateral organizations and international NGOs are heavily influenced by developments since the nineteenth century in Europe (Chapter 6). Programmes are only rarely designed with an understanding of early childhood realities in a given country; more commonly they are driven by external ideas. The parenting practices of Western (and Westernized) middle-class families tend to be the benchmark of what is appropriate to young children's development everywhere, an assumption that can undermine the practices of other social classes and other parts of the world. When benchmarks originating in developed country institutions are used to measure what constitutes good early childhood programmes in developing countries, both the constraints and the opportunities within developing countries may be ignored.[3]

Some efforts to promote more culturally relevant programmes are highlighted in the discussion of good practice that follows.

Childhood has been differently understood in different societies and periods of history

1. See also Penn (2005).

2. The following discussion is based on Woodhead (2006).

3. For a broader discussion of these issues, see Nsamenang (2006).

Working with families and communities

The most rapid period of a child's growth occurs during the early years and it sets the foundation for later well-being. During this period it is important for children to have support in terms of protection, good health, appropriate nutrition, stimulation, language development and, most of all, interaction with and attachment to caring adults (Evans, 2000). Parents[4] or other custodial carers are children's first educators, and for the youngest group the home is the main arena of care. Carers and families can also benefit from resources in the local community that assist families in their parenting tasks.

Supporting parents

Research findings confirm that the home environment has a major impact on child development. For instance, the availability of reading materials, drawing and art supplies, and toys (especially home-made) is considered a good indicator of parental concern and sensitivity regarding play and development, and also of the quality of the home environment (Iltus, 2006).

4. As Chapter 1 points out, families may take many different forms, and a 'parent' is a main carer responsible for a young child, regardless of biological relationship.

5. Such programmes have elements that can be useful for most families, regardless of socio-economic status.

Box 7.1: Supporting new parents: the Community Mothers Programme in Dublin

Dublin has a support programme for first- and some second-time parents of children aged 0 to 2. It is targeted at single parents, teenagers, members of the travellers community, asylum seekers, refugees and people living in disadvantaged areas. Support and parenting advice are delivered by experienced mothers, known as Community Mothers – para-professional volunteers who are trained and supported by family development nurses. Community Mothers visit parents monthly and use a specially designed child development programme focusing on health care, nutritional improvement and overall development. In 1990 a randomized, controlled trial showed significant beneficial effects for both mothers and 1-year-olds in the programme (Johnson et al., 1993). In 1997-98 a follow-up study was carried out to find out if the benefits had been sustained (Johnson et al., 2000). About one-third of the mothers in the original intervention and control groups were located and asked for details on the child's health, the diet of mother and child, the child's development and the mother's parenting skills and feelings of self-esteem. Overall, the mothers in the intervention group demonstrated higher esteem and enthusiasm for motherhood than those not involved in the programme. This effect was evidenced by the way they interacted with their children and supported their learning and school experiences.

Source: Molloy (2002).

In the United States, a study of 700 first-graders found that stimulation and care in the family resulted in stronger attention and memory than did similar interactions in institutional child care environments (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2005). In the Republic of Moldova, the availability of toys, and drawing and play materials in the home was a good predictor of high cognitive development scores among children aged 1 to 3, regardless of families' socio-economic status (UNICEF Moldova Country Office, 2005).

In most societies, child care is seen to be the concern of the family, immediate or extended, and not the concern of outsiders (Evans, 2000). However, as noted above, many environments affect learning and development. The best way to support the home environment is to work with the parents of very young children. Parenting programmes aiming to reach children under age 3 have proliferated in the past ten years.[5] They are most often offered through the health sector, but as ministries of education increasingly assume responsibility for education from birth onwards, they too are exploring how best to work with parents.

The two main types of parenting programme are:

- *Parent education* programmes, which provide training or learning activities for parents. They may impart actual parenting skills but can also involve livelihood skills, practical skills and others.
- *Parent support* programmes, which provide parents (or other main carers) with information on how to give children the care they require to realize their potential.

Parent support programmes, in turn, come in many different variations. They may include home visits, as in 'parents as teachers' programmes, which provide one-on-one support for individual parents. In recent years the trend has been to shift from a didactic model to a more collaborative one (Evans, 2006).

Home visiting programmes are expensive, because of the intensity of the inputs, and are thus best targeted at families at risk (Box 7.1). Visits should be weekly; less frequent visiting has not been shown to be effective. Attention must be continued for gains to be sustained. Gains achieved in programmes offered during the first two years of life are lost if the child does not continue to receive appropriate health, nutrition, care, and psycho-social stimulation. (Evans, 2000).

Parent groups are another common form of parent support. Parents with children of the same age, or with common interests and concerns, are brought together to acquire information and to share their experiences. While such groups are generally formed by professionals, it is not uncommon for parents to continue them on their own once official support has ended.

The variety of parenting programmes makes cross-national monitoring difficult. However, a review of evaluation literature on parenting support compiled in 2004[6] shows that early interventions produce better and more durable outcomes for children, and that targeted interventions (aimed at specific populations or individuals at risk for parenting difficulties) seem to work best when tackling the more complex types of parenting difficulties (Moran et al., 2004).

The many types of group-based care and support programmes for young children include home-based models (Box 7.2), community-based approaches (Box 7.3) as well as the more formal centre-based programmes discussed below.

Centre-based early childhood programmes

Centre-based care and education is the most common form of early childhood provision and government support for such programmes is increasing (Chapter 6). Centre-based programmes typically accommodate children from age 3 to the primary school entry age, offering a range of activities and learning opportunities to help young children develop the language skills, social skills and enthusiasm that are vital for their present and future well-being.

Fostering language and cognitive development

Centre-based early childhood programmes provide young children with a very different experience compared with home- and community-based arrangements. They tend to be more organized and structured, and have a stronger education component. Research in developing and developed countries has begun to identify key features of good-quality learning in centre-based programmes that have a positive

6. The review, by the Policy Research Bureau in the United Kingdom, is based on an analysis of over 2,000 journals, books and reports, and on evaluation of experiences with both universal and targeted parenting programmes.

Box 7.2: Hogares Comunitarios: mothers open their homes in Colombia

In the mid-1980s the Colombian Government set up a targeted programme designed to improve nutrition in poor households. Today the Hogares Comunitarios programme is one of the country's largest welfare programmes, serving more than a million children in urban and rural areas. This community nursery programme, catering for children from birth to age 6, now covers both nutrition and child care, allowing mothers to enter the labour market. Households eligible for the programme form parent associations that elect a 'community mother', who must meet minimal requirements set by the authorities. The community mother opens her home (*hogar*) to as many as fifteen children. She gives them three meals a day, constituting 70% of the recommended daily calorie intake. While earlier evaluations were inconclusive, a recent study looked at participation, anthropometric and welfare measures of children, and other outcomes such as female employment rates and hours of work. It found that the programme was reaching the poorest children and seemed well targeted. Stunting was offset: 6-year-olds who had attended Hogares since infancy were between 3.78 and 3.83 centimetres taller than those not in the programme. Children aged 13 to 17 who had attended the programme were more likely to be currently in school and less likely to have repeated a grade in the past year than those who had not.

Source: Attanasio and Vera-Hernandez (2004).

Box 7.3: ECCE in traditional societies: the Loipi programme for pastoralists in Kenya

Kenya's national policy of universal free primary education has put the pastoralist communities of the Samburu district in northern Kenya under pressure to become more settled and peri-urban. Parents need child care so they can perform daily tasks such as tending animals, finding firewood and working their gardens. *Loipi* (the Samburu word for 'shade') are enclosed places where young children are protected from danger and the sun. Grandmothers used to look after the children, passing on oral traditions and skills.

Since 1997 the Samburu, Turkana and Pokot people have pooled resources to provide care for children aged 2 to 5 through an integrated early childhood development programme. The Loipi programme is rooted in traditional approaches to child-rearing and offers access to health services, income generation and information on harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. The District Centre for Early Childhood Education and the Kenya Institute of Education provide professional guidance, while the Christian Children's Fund and the Bernard van Leer Foundation give financial and technical support.

In 2004 over 5,200 children (slightly under 50% girls) were enrolled at about seventy specially prepared enclosed sites selected by the communities. Members of the communities provided construction and play materials and built the sites. Some *loipi* also offer adult education, mother and child health services, nutritional supplements and health information. The system has improved nutrition and access to immunization and growth monitoring; also, pre-school teachers have commented on the positive influence the *loipi* have on the transition to primary school.

Source: Pennels (2005).

impact on young children's language and cognitive development (Arnold et al., 2006; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). For example, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project in the United Kingdom found a strong correlation between a high-quality pre-school programme (one that provides warm interactive relationships with children and is managed by a trained teacher) and improvement in intellectual and social development (Sylva et al., 2004). A review of United States research indicated that children's development and well-being correlated strongly with programme quality. In particular, adult-child interactions were more closely associated with enhanced well-being than were structural features such as class size, staff-child ratios and staff training (Love et al., 1996). The IEA Pre-primary Project, one of the most significant cross-national studies of ECCE programmes, sought to understand whether and how experience at age 4 affected language and cognitive development at age 7 (Weikart, 2005). Seventeen countries[7] or regions varying in size, political constitution and level of development participated in the project, using jointly developed common instruments. Findings with respect to language development included:

Good early childhood programmes can compensate for disadvantage

- In all countries, children who at age 4 had been in settings where free-choice activities predominated achieved significantly or nearly significantly higher language scores at age 7 than those from settings in which pre-academic activities such as literacy and numeracy predominated.
- The amount of interaction with adults at age 4 was positively related to language performance at age 7 in countries with relatively infrequent use of directive approaches and negatively related in countries where direction was frequent.
- Teachers' level of education was positively related to children's age 7 language performance, while group size, and the quantity and variety of materials were not.
- In countries where adults often participated in children's activities, language scores at age 4 were more strongly related to the scores at age 7 than in countries with less adult participation.

With respect to cognitive development:

- Children who engaged in more whole-group activities at age 4 were more likely to have lower cognitive performance scores at age 7.
- In countries with more free-choice activities, the amount of interaction 4-year-olds had with adults was positively related to their cognitive performance at age 7, while the relationship was negative in countries with fewer free-choice activities.
- Greater availability of materials at age 4 was related to more positive cognitive performance at age 7, while teachers' education and group size were not.

ECCE: a powerful means of promoting equity

Besides their potential to enrich the lives of all young children, good early childhood programmes can compensate for disadvantage and hardship. They can also increase equity by promoting multilingual education, gender equality, and opportunities for the disabled and children in emergencies or precarious circumstances.

The overlooked advantages of multilingual education[8]

The frequency with which carers read to children and the number of books in the home help determine language development, reading outcomes and school success (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998). A large-scale longitudinal study of children in the United Kingdom found that the most important influence on children's success in learning to read in primary school was the extent of their direct experience with print during their pre-school years (Wells, 1985).

Poverty affects language development. By age 4 in the United States, a professional's child has heard 50 million words, a working-class family's child 30 million, and a welfare recipient's child just 12 million. At age 3, the professional's child has a larger vocabulary than the parent of the welfare child. The nature of verbal interaction also differs by socio-economic background. By age 3, the professional's child has received 700,000 encouragements, compared to 60,000 for the welfare recipient's child. School attendance later does little to attenuate these disparities (Hart and Risely, 2003). These findings clearly demonstrate the importance of exposing children – particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds – to language-rich environments in their early years. If difficulties with language development and communication are not addressed early in life, children are likely to face more difficulties learning and adapting to their surroundings later (Cohen, 2005).

7. Belgium (French-speaking), China, Finland,* Germany (former Federal Republic), Greece,* Hong Kong (China),* Indonesia,* Ireland,* Italy,* Nigeria, Poland,* Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain,* Thailand* and the United States.* The findings summarized here refer to the ten countries marked with an asterisk, which participated in both Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the project.

8. This section draws on Arnold et al. (2006).

Children acquire languages quickly in the early years, and early childhood programmes offer them the opportunity to develop their self-esteem by using their mother tongue while acquiring a second (and sometimes a third) language (UNESCO Bangkok, 2005). Although UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction[9] in early childhood and primary education since 1953, monolingualism in the official or dominant language is still the norm around the world (Arnold et al., 2006; Wolff and Ekkehard, 2000). A challenge facing most ECCE programmes is to respond to the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families.

Linguistic specialists argue that children who learn in their mother tongue for the first six to eight years (an approach known as the additive bilingual model)[10] perform better in terms of test scores and self-esteem than those who receive instruction exclusively in the official language (subtractive model) or those who make the transition too soon (before age 6 to 8) from the home language to the official language (transition model) (Thomas and Collier, 2002). It is easier to become a competent reader and communicator in the mother tongue. Once a child can read and write one language, the skills are transferable to other languages. Bilingual learning environments tend to be more comfortable for children than monolingual settings. Evidence from Bolivia, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and the Niger shows that parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning when local languages are used (Benson, 2002).

Mother tongue instruction is also important for promoting gender equality and social inclusion. Girls in some societies are much less likely than boys to be exposed to the official language, as they spend more time at home and with family members. Girls who are taught in their mother tongue tend to stay in school longer, perform better on achievement tests and repeat grades less than girls who do not (UNESCO Bangkok, 2005). Multilingual education also benefits other disadvantaged groups, including children from rural communities (Hovens, 2002).

Why, despite the research consensus, is multilingual education in the early years still unusual? There are many reasons. Some argue that opposition to multilingual education is a result of colonialism, where local political elites and international agencies have promoted colonial languages to the detriment of local ones.[11] The most common reasons are the views that in multilingual societies, bilingual education is generally too challenging to implement; it is too expensive; it would prevent children from learning other languages; and it would foster social and political division (Robinson, 2005). As regards the last point, however, multilingual education can, in fact, promote greater social tolerance among linguistic groups. Moreover, by facilitating the integration of different cultures and traditions into the curriculum, the use of local languages can enrich the content of education for all children (Benson, 2002).

The relationship between language and power is not easy to address, but early childhood is an important place to start. Indeed, the bilingual early childhood programmes in Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Viet Nam have shown promising results and have influenced language policies and practices for the first years of primary education (Kosonen, 2005). Box 7.4 gives one example.

The use of local languages can enrich the content of education for all children

Box 7.4: Supporting grassroots efforts: language nests in Papua New Guinea

Grassroots efforts can lead to widespread change in language practices. In Papua New Guinea – the world's most linguistically diverse nation – a village-level, non-formal vernacular language pre-school movement led the central government to launch an ambitious effort to protect indigenous languages throughout the education system. None of the 823 living languages in Papua New Guinea is numerically or politically dominant. English had been the language of instruction since the 1950s even though it is the first language of only 1% of the country's 5.2 million people. In the 1970s, a group of parents worked with local government and NGOs to establish two-year vernacular language pre-schools, known as 'language nests'. The concept soon spread throughout the country. As part of its 1995 education reform, the government encouraged the formal school system to use vernacular language education in the first three years of primary school, followed by a gradual transition to English instruction. Today, the education system supports more than 350 languages. The Papua New Guinea experience shows that children who learn first in their mother tongues can transfer their cognitive, developmental and academic skills to English-language school environments.

Source: Wroge (2002).

9. The mother tongue is also referred to as the home language or local language.

10. In this model, either the mother tongue is the medium of instruction and the second language is taught as a subject by a specialist teacher, or the mother tongue is taught until about grade 5 and then the second language is gradually introduced, but is used for no more than half the day.

11. See, for instance, Alidou et al. (2005).

Curricula may emphasize gender equality; the practice is frequently different

Early childhood programmes can adopt practices that value local languages, foster bilingualism and counter prejudice towards linguistic and cultural minorities. Two key examples are:

- *Developing multilingual practices and resources.* Speaking and listening activities, especially bilingual storytelling and reading,[12] can be used in a variety of linguistic environments to give children the opportunity to develop literacy skills, which can be transferred from one language to another. Books and learning materials in other languages or dual-language books (even home-made ones) are important to promote bilingualism and tolerance of linguistic and cultural minorities as well as to raise the status of the languages spoken by children and their families.
- *Recruit linguistically diverse staff*. To successfully implement bilingual ECCE programmes, trained, multilingual staff are needed (Benson, 2002). Not surprisingly, teachers and students communicate better when both are familiar with the languages of instruction. In primary classroom observations across Africa,[13] researchers found that the use of unfamiliar languages forced teachers to use ineffective and teacher-centred teaching methods, which undermine students' learning (Alidou et al., 2005). The best language speakers are often not trained as teachers and may need support in bilingual instruction (Johnston and Johnson, 2002). To address shortages of bilingual teachers in Western Europe (e.g. in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom), 'bilingual assistants' work in pre-schools with new immigrant pupils and their parents to help strengthen the mother tongue and build familiarity with the official language (OECD, 2001). In addition, there is a critical need to recruit multilingual candidates more actively for ECCE staff education and training programmes, and to train monolingual teachers in linguistic diversity. Family and community members are rich resources. They can volunteer in ECCE settings and help support language and literacy development in the home. Older children, for instance, can read to their younger siblings (Bloch and Edwards, 1999).

Addressing gender stereotypes early

Gender disparities in access are much less common in early childhood programmes than at other levels, especially primary education. Pre-primary gender disparities at the expense of girls are found mostly in countries with very low gross enrolment ratios, although there are exceptions (Chapters 2 and 6). Reducing such disparities would contribute to closing the gender gap in education in general. In particular, parents whose daughters have attended early childhood programmes are more inclined to enrol them in primary school (Chapter 5).

Even where equal access exists, early childhood programmes often promote gender-specific expectations, a process that also occurs in homes and communities (Chartier and Geneix, 2006; Golombok and Fivush, 1994). Curricula may emphasize gender equality; the practice is frequently different. Teaching materials tend to promote gender-specific roles, for instance portraying male characters as powerful and active and females ones as sweet, weak, frightened and needy. Game playing can often conform to stereotype, with boys playing with blocks and girls in the 'housekeeping corner', and with girls in general having less access to the larger and more active toys and playground space (Evans, 1998). More importantly, teachers frequently do not treat boys and girls the same, which can create inequalities. Boys in pre-primary school receive more attention from their teachers than do girls, in part because teachers spend more time disciplining boys (Chartier and Geneix, 2006; Lockheed, 1982; Sadker and Sadker, 1994). Teachers also tend to call more on male volunteers and, indeed, non-volunteers. Teachers are more likely to listen and respond to boys, use more of boys' ideas in classroom discussions, ask boys more questions and give them more individual instruction, acknowledgement, praise, encouragement, corrective feedback and opportunities to answer questions correctly, in addition to engaging in social interaction more with boys. By contrast, they praise girls for being neat, following instructions exactly and raising their hands (Schau and Tittle, 1985; Vogel et al., 1991). Moreover, teachers discipline boys and girls for different kinds of misconduct, accepting aggression by boys but not by girls. In all these ways stereotypical attitudes and behaviours are inculcated in girls and boys.[14]

12. For example, the teacher or carer can read a story from beginning to end in one language, then in the other; or can alternate page by page. Monolingual teachers can engage bilingual colleagues and family members in such activities.

13. In Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mozambique, the Niger, South Africa, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania.

14. Teacher behaviour also varies according to children's education and socio-economic background. Teachers tend to devote more attention to 'better' or more active pupils and to middle-class children who conform to the expectations of the school system. (Sirota, 1998).

Well-designed early childhood programmes can challenge gender stereotypes (Box 7.5). Such programmes are characterized by gender-neutral curricula. For instance, in France and Sweden, pre-primary schools have relatively gender-neutral toys and games (creative games and construction blocks). Toys that are common in homes are rare: war toys (weapons, guns, military vehicles, tanks and miniature soldiers) are not found in 90% of Swedish pre-primary schools and 70% of French ones, and the corresponding figures for fashion dolls such as Barbie are 96% and 89% (Rayna and Brougère, 2000).

Changes to the curriculum are effective only if accompanied by changes in teacher attitudes and behaviour. These in turn require changes to the teacher-training curriculum, including training in gender sensitivity and awareness, and approaches that help teachers become more reflective about their practices and the environments in which they work (Evans, 1998). They also require changes in staffing policies and practices in early childhood programmes. Women are predominant in the early childhood professions (Chapter 6). Taking care of young children has long been identified with motherhood and thus considered a female activity, associated with low pay and low status. It is often assumed that no specific training is needed to work with children. Conversely, men working with young children often evoke suspicion or prejudice, or concern that they will threaten women's sphere of power within early childhood institutions and even within the family (Murcier, 2005).

Encouraging more men to work in early childhood programmes could challenge prevailing assumptions about gender responsibilities in society more generally (Cameron and Moss, 1998).[15] Male child care workers can provide a role model of carers for boys and girls alike (Cameron, 2001). There are implications for families, too, as early childhood staff often focus on the mother as the main carer (Bloch and Buisson, 1998; Blöss and Odena, 2005). If more men worked in this field, closer relationships with fathers might develop. The impact on gender disparities would of course depend on whether men were committed to gender equality and properly trained so as to avoid perpetuating gender-unequal practices.

Despite their overall dominance among staff, women are underrepresented in administrative and leadership positions in early childhood institutions. It is important, therefore, not just to increase the male presence among early childhood staff, but also to improve the gender balance in management (Cameron, 2001; Sumision, 2005).

Box 7.5: In Sweden, government drives the effort for gender equality in early childhood

In 2003 the minister for pre-school education formed a delegation to investigate the question of gender equality in Swedish pre-schools and to (a) promote lifelong learning that incorporates a gender perspective, (b) end stereotyped gender roles and patterns, (c) encourage debate on the promotion of gender equality in pre-schools and (d) encourage practical solutions. The delegation educates teacher trainees and politicians on these issues and distributes funds to pre-schools whose staff wish to develop methods for working with gender equality.

Source: Wetterberg (2004).

Changes to the curriculum are effective only if accompanied by changes in teacher attitudes and behaviour

Meeting the early education needs of vulnerable groups

Chapter 3 provided a detailed review of policies and programmes to overcome exclusion in formal school settings. As EFA goal 1 makes clear, overcoming exclusion is also important even before young children enter formal schooling and, indeed, can help offset disadvantage and vulnerability. The most common form of disadvantage is poverty and many of the school-level measures described in Chapter 3 can also work in early childhood. This section focuses on programmes to provide early childhood education for two vulnerable groups that are often ignored: disabled children and those in emergency contexts.

Inclusive early childhood education for the disabled. Disabilities are common among young children in developing countries. Research in which more than 22,000 children underwent the same type of screening showed high disability prevalence rates in Bangladesh (8.2%), Jamaica (15.6%) and the city of Karachi, Pakistan (14.7%) for impairments such as seizures, cognitive, motor, vision or hearing disabilities. (Durkin et al., 1994). A study in Nigeria reported a prevalence rate for sensory-neural hearing loss of 13% among children entering school (Olusanya, 2001). Screening of 2,000 South African children under age 2 revealed a disability prevalence rate of 60/1000, including mild learning or perceptual disability, cerebral palsy, hearing loss, moderate to severe perceptual disability and epilepsy (Couper, 2002).

15. Nordic countries have actively recruited men to the early childhood field. Denmark has been most successful: almost 20% of its pedagogues are male. They work with young children in kindergartens and older children in after-school programmes (OECD, 2001). Other countries have been less proactive.

Good-quality early childhood education is important for children with disabilities, as it enables early identification and remediation of impairments and for certain disabled children can aid transition into mainstream schools. Box 7.6 describes how Chile has paved the way for an inclusive approach to ECCE programmes.[16]

Sustaining children in emergencies. Provision of relevant, flexible education is critical to the support of the many young children in the world living in emergency contexts (Chapter 3). ECCE is a key part of such efforts, as it can help offset some the negative consequences of crisis and conflict. A review of experience and literature suggests the following principles are generally applicable (Kamel, 2005):

Access

- The right of access to early childhood education, recreation and related activities must be assured even in crisis situations.
- Rapid access to education, recreation and related activities must be assured, followed by steady improvement in quality and coverage.
- ECCE should serve as a tool for child protection and harm prevention.

Resources

- ECCE programmes should use a community-based participatory approach, with emphasis on capacity-building.
- They should include a major teacher-training component and provide incentives to avoid teacher turnover.
- Crisis and recovery programmes should develop and document targets for funding that adequately meet their educational and psychosocial objectives.

Activities/curriculum

- Curriculum policy should support long-term development and encourage lasting solutions.
- ECCE programmes should be holistic, incorporating such dimensions as health and nutrition, water and sanitation.
- They should be enriched to promote tolerance, human rights and citizenship within the context of political disasters and complex emergencies.

Child Friendly Spaces, which UNICEF has established in countries including Angola, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia, are based on these principles (Box 7.7).

16. Chile's First National Study on Disability, published in 2005, identified 129,994 pupils with disabilities in primary and secondary education. Of these, 100,521 attended special schools and 29,473 attended programmes integrated into mainstream schools (De Bonadona, 2005).

Box 7.6: Chile's first steps towards mainstreaming children with special needs

In Chile, 5.8% of children under 16 have physical, psychological, mental or sensory disabilities. A 1994 law on integration of people with special needs, covering all social sectors, requires public and private mainstream education institutions to develop the innovations and curricular adaptations necessary to enable access for people with special needs. The Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles (JUNJI), or National Board of Kindergartens, established in 1970, administers ECCE provision for more than 120,500 children. Since 1995 it has been mainstreaming nursery and pre-school programmes targeting the poorest children with special needs. JUNJI centres serve children aged 3 months to 5 years with special needs (including physical, mental, visual and hearing impairments) in mainstream settings. Adapting ECCE programmes to children with special needs has involved sensitizing and training teachers through courses supported by the Special Education Department of the Ministry of Education. The National Fund for Special Education financed equipment such as wheelchairs, prostheses and hearing aids. Technical guidelines and principles were established to identify children with special needs and adapt structures to accommodate children with physical disabilities. Private organizations working with JUNJI were offered projects for sponsorship. Though coverage levels remain low, the efforts made by JUNJI and other early childhood institutions in Chile provide a good example of how to encourage practices to include children at risk of exclusion or marginalization.

Sources: Chile FONADIS (2005); Larraguibel Quiroz (1997); Umayahara (2006).

ECCE can ease the transition to primary schooling

ECCE of good quality is not only an end in itself; as the EFA goals recognizes, it is also an important foundation for subsequent education. This section examines how ECCE programmes can make children ready for primary school and how primary schools themselves can adapt to young children.

The two main approaches regarding the transition to primary school may be summed up as 'school readiness' and 'ready schools' (Fabian and Dunlop, 2006). The former stresses the importance of ECCE in promoting children's development and assuring their school readiness; it seeks to identify the characteristics that children should display if they are ready for school. The consensus from research is that school readiness encompasses development

Box 7.7: Child Friendly Spaces: havens for mothers and children in emergencies

In emergency contexts, UNICEF, often working with local groups, sets up 'Child Friendly Spaces' in refugee camps, schools and other sheltered situations. They fulfil several important functions, ensuring that children have access to ECCE services and incorporating several dimensions of care, not least that of creating a sense of security for mothers and children. In Liberia, UNICEF established spaces that provided comfortable places for mothers to breastfeed; early childhood development classes with components on hygiene, nutrition, the importance of play and so on; and services related to health, nutrition, early stimulation and learning, water, hygiene and sanitation, and protection of young children. Similar spaces were set up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at community-based early childhood development centres. When Angola's long-running civil war ended, national and international NGOs supported the creation of Child Friendly Spaces that served over 30,000 children in seventeen war-affected provinces; with UNICEF support, two international NGOs trained trainers for the spaces who also worked with parents on child development. These trainers in turn trained over 450 volunteers from among the displaced populations to conduct child development activities.

Source: Kamel (2005).

in five distinct but interconnected domains (Arnold et al., 2006; Copple, 1997; Offord Center for Child Studies, 2005):[17]

- physical well-being and motor development (measured in terms of health, growth and disabilities),
- social and emotional development (e.g. ability to control one's own behaviour, or to play and work with other children),
- approach to learning (e.g. enthusiasm, curiosity, persistence and temperament),
- language development (e.g. vocabulary, grammar and ability to learn and communicate) and
- cognitive development and general knowledge (e.g. cognitive and problem-solving skills, such as learning to observe and to note similarities and differences).

Children vary greatly in all these areas.

The concept of 'ready schools', on the other hand, focuses on characteristics of the school environment that facilitate or hinder learning.[18] Researchers have identified several factors that can undermine readiness, among them overcrowded classes, the 'language gap' (when the language of instruction differs from the child's mother tongue), an absence of qualified and experienced first grade teachers and inadequate learning materials (Arnold et al., 2006). These factors have been particularly challenging to address in developing countries.

The relative importance of school readiness and ready schools is much debated, and transition strategies are difficult to evaluate,[19] yet it is increasingly clear that the key to effective services for young children is continuity of certain elements that characterize all good early childhood programmes (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002; Kagan and Neuman, 1998). Strategies include the integration of ECCE with primary education, continuity of curriculum, continuity between home and school, and, for disadvantaged children who have not benefited from ECCE programmes, special activities aimed specifically at easing the entry into primary school.

Continuity through integration of ECCE with primary education

The strategy of integrating ECCE with formal primary education aims to develop a more coherent system of policy, governance, administration and monitoring for ECCE and primary schools. The trend of integration into education systems is most evident in Europe (including in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) but is observed in a few other countries, such as Brazil, Kazahkstan, South Africa and Viet Nam.

Implementing this strategy entails creating administrative structures that unite previously separate ECCE and primary education structures. To do so, countries have unified pre-primary and primary education under the governance of the public school system, fully integrating childhood services from birth through compulsory education, and sometimes even holding pre-school classes in primary school buildings. In some cases, countries have lowered the entry age for compulsory schooling to include pre-primary children (as in Argentina, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Norway, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela).

The key to effective services for young children is continuity of certain elements that characterize all good early childhood programmes

17. School readiness is influenced by the same factors as children's overall development. In addition to being positively associated with participation in pre-primary programmes and exposure to transition activities, it is affected by family income, home language, parents' education and family size. Differences between public and private pre-schools, and urban and rural residence have also been found, as have variations linked to geographical location and neighbourhood (Kohen et al., 1998; Magnuson, Meyers et al., 2004; Magnuson, Ruhm et al., 2004; Margetts, 1999; National Center for Human Resources Development, 2005; Ngaruiya, 2006). Some also found adverse effects of pre-kindergarten programmes (Magnuson, Ruhm et al., 2004).

18. This analysis is based on Arnold et al. (2006).

19. Few programmes and schools focus on the transition stage and, at those that do, transition activities are usually part of more comprehensive efforts, making it difficult to assess their impact.

While structural integration may yield benefits, it entails a risk of the education component of ECCE overshadowing the welfare, health and care components, resulting in a school-centred view of pre-primary and other ECCE services. Carried to an extreme, this can lead to undue pressure on children for academic achievement at an early age (Shaeffer, 2006; Shore, 1998).

Curriculum continuity

In most countries, ECCE programmes and the primary education system developed for different reasons, with different aims and philosophies, so the important aim of achieving continuity of curriculum is not straightforward. Examples of strategies include:

- Developing and using an integrated curriculum for pre-primary and primary school, with learning cycles organized around the development cycles of the child. This approach is taken in the Pre-Primary to Primary Transitions project in Jamaica, the Transition from Nursery School to Primary School project in Guyana and the integrated curriculum cycle used in France. Sweden has developed two curricula that are conceptually linked.
- Making an intentional connection between – or overlapping – teaching and learning styles and materials between the pre-primary and primary levels. The Releasing Confidence and Creativity programme in Pakistan provides similar instructional materials at both levels.
- Ensuring that classmates from a given pre-school classroom are transferred together to the same primary classroom, as with the Step by Step programme of transition to primary school in thirty countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
- Grouping learners not by age but rather by level of development. Bodh Shiksha Samiti in India and Escuela Nueva in Colombia involve multigrade classrooms using an active curriculum, methods and lesson plans that respond to differing abilities and interests (as does the Step by Step curriculum cited above).

Less integrated strategies have also contributed to pedagogical continuity and integrated learning experiences. Portugal allows children to be 'followed' over the years by the same teacher or group of teachers (a practice commonly referred as 'looping'); 'buddy programmes' in Sydney, Australia, which pair older students with those just starting, recognize the importance of early peer support (Docket and Perry, 2005).

France uses community mediators to link schools with low-income neighbourhoods

Home-to-school continuity and parental involvement

Language and communication barriers between teachers and parents are challenging. They can be overcome, and children's transition eased, by sharing information and involving parents, taking into account their preferences and values, and respecting ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and other forms of diversity (Docket et al., 2000; Margetts, 1999).

Approaches include providing bilingual ECCE and primary school programmes, establishing good communication and participation networks between schools and parents, involving parents in class activities and suggesting home activities that may help prepare children for school. In the Step by Step programme in transition countries, parents and pre-school teachers review the primary school curriculum together and discuss the child's readiness. In Pakistan, parents in poor rural communities become resource people, teaching local songs and stories and demonstrating skills such as construction. The *adulte-relais* or 'resource adult' initiative in France uses community mediators to link schools with low-income neighbourhoods so as to break down communication barriers (Neuman and Peer, 2002).

In Kazakhstan, pre-primary education classes prepare 5- or 6-year-olds who have never attended pre-school (especially in rural areas) for formal schooling through a 32-week crash course in school readiness. There is some concern that such classes focus too narrowly on academic skills; it is important to focus as well on children's emotional well-being, which is vital to their adjustment to primary schooling (Choi, 2006). France's *lieux passerelles*, 'crossing places' for children with no experience of early childhood activities outside the home, are designed to foster socialization with peers and transition from home to pre-school through structured activities and free play. Parents, often from poor, immigrant backgrounds, get staff support in separating from their children, meeting other parents and taking a role in their children's education (Neuman and Peer, 2002). Though the focus is on transition from home to the *école maternelle* (pre-school) – the first contact with the school system for many immigrant families – similar activities can be adapted to transition to primary school.

Where television is widely available, either at home or community centres, television and radio programmes such as those produced through the

Sesame Workshop (Box 7.8) have proved helpful in getting children ready for school and easing the transition.

Improving transition opportunities for the disadvantaged

So far this section has been about children with access to some form of pre-school education and care. The reality for most children in the world, particularly the most disadvantaged, is that the first school experience is the start of primary school, usually around the age of 6 (see annex, Statistical Table 4). In contexts where pre-primary school is not compulsory or has low coverage, various measures can help prepare children for primary school even without formal ECCE programmes. They include visits to primary schools to familiarize children with the school environment (as in Nepal), visits by first-grade teachers to home- or centre-based ECCE settings; low pupil/teacher ratios in the early primary grades; and readiness programmes or tutorials before primary school entry or during the first few months (as in Cambodia).

In Guatemala the Centros de Aprendizaje Comunitario en Educación Preescolar (CENACEP), or Centres for Community Learning in Pre-school Education, is an accelerated thirty-five-day course of preparation for children from various ethnic backgrounds who have not had access to pre-school. Sponsored by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, and involving community volunteers, the programme is provided to groups of thirty-five to forty children under age 6 in the three months before the beginning of the school year. Participants are better prepared socially and academically for primary school, and repetition and dropout rates have fallen in places where they were formerly a problem (Elvir and Asensio, 2006).

Box 7.8: Using television to promote school readiness around the world

The Sesame Workshop illustrates the potential of the broadcast media for promoting school readiness in young children, including those without access to formal early childhood programmes. Founded in 1968, the Sesame Workshop created the legendary Sesame Street children's television series in the United States. Now in 120 countries, the Sesame Workshop partners with local writers, artists, researchers and educators to create culture-specific television and radio programmes with characters, sets and content designed to address local children's educational needs. Storybooks and other materials are distributed to children of pre-school age, and teachers and parents are trained to use the materials to support the children's learning. Examples of television and radio programmes from selected countries:

- In Egypt, *Alam Simsim* includes special emphasis on girls' education. Khokha, a female Muppet, encourages young girls to have a limitless sense of possibility.
- In South Africa, on *Takalani Sesame*, Kami, a vibrant and affectionate HIV-positive Muppet, helps children and their carers overcome the stigma of the disease.
- In Bangladesh, *Sisimpur* features the Muppet Halum, a Bangla-speaking vegetarian Bengal tiger. Once a week, flatbed cycle rickshaws carry televisions, DVD players and generators to villages with limited or no electricity so children can see the programme.
- In Israel and the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* promotes cross-cultural respect and understanding among Arab and Jewish pre-schoolers, countering negative stereotypes by introducing children to the everyday lives of people from different cultures.

Children around the world appreciate the Sesame characters, develop academic skills that promote their school readiness and learn from the programmes' health and social messages. Evaluations in Mexico, Portugal, the Russian Federation and Turkey have found significant differences in cognitive skills, especially literacy and mathematics, between viewers and non-viewers. Consistent though weaker findings have been found for social attitudes and behaviour.

Sources: Cole et al. (2003); Cole, Richman and McCann Brown (2001); de los Angeles-Bautista (2006); Fisch (2005).

Conclusion

While successful ECCE programmes are extremely diverse, both within countries and around the world, certain general lessons emerge. First, early childhood programmes need to be rooted in the young children's cultural environment and care must be taken not simply to import models from abroad without appropriate adaptation. Second, parenting programmes can support positive child-rearing practices, which again need to be understood in their social and cultural contexts. Third, good relations between pupils and ECCE teachers and staff are crucial to programme quality, and much more important than material inputs. Fourth, inclusive ECCE programmes can help offset disadvantage, whether poverty, emergency situations or special needs. They can also promote gender equality and other forms of inclusion through appropriate role models and linguistic diversity. Fifth, maintaining continuity is key in easing the transition from pre-primary to primary school and effective approaches are available even for those who have not been able to attend ECCE institutions such as pre-schools. Chapter 8 now examines policy issues raised by the expansion and improvement of ECCE as envisaged in EFA goal 1. ■