Preventing School Failure:
The Relationship Between
Preschool and Primary Education
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Preventing School Failure:
The Relationship Between Preschool and Primary Education

Proceedings of a workshop on preschool research held in Bogota, Colombia, 26–29 May 1981
Résumé

Cette publication contient les exposés présentés au cours d'un séminaire sur la relation entre l'éducation préscolaire et primaire qui a été tenu à Bogota, Colombie, en mai 1981, sous les auspices du CRDI et de la Fondation Ford. Le séminaire a réuni des chercheurs en éducation préscolaire venus de diverses régions du monde et spécialisés dans différentes disciplines. L'éveil précoce des enfants fut examiné à la lumière des études de cas et des programmes nationaux présentés, et analysé en fonction des effets à court et à long terme qu'il peut avoir sur le développement de l'enfant et son succès lors de son entrée dans le système scolaire. Les travaux sont groupés sous trois grands thèmes : recherche et action en éducation préscolaire et primaire; considérations sur le problème de l'éducation préscolaire et primaire; et discussions et recommandations générales.

Resumen

Esta publicación contiene las ponencias presentadas en un seminario sobre la relación entre educación preescolar y primaria, celebrado en Bogotá, Colombia, en mayo de 1981 bajo los auspicios del CIID y la Fundación Ford. El seminario reunió a investigadores de la educación preescolar procedentes de diversas regiones del mundo y con diferentes formaciones disciplinarias. La estimulación infantil temprana fue vista a la luz de los estudios de caso y los programas nacionales presentados, y analizada en función de los efectos que a corto o largo plazo puede tener sobre el desarrollo del niño y su éxito al ingresar al sistema educativo formal. Tres amplias secciones agrupan los trabajos de acuerdo con los temas tratados: investigación y acción en educación preescolar y primaria; consideraciones sobre la problemática preescolar y primaria; y discusiones y recomendaciones generales.
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Early Childhood Programs in Latin America

Robert G. Myers

This paper has three purposes: (a) to provide an overview of early childhood interventions in Latin America, (b) to raise some thorny questions about the preschool/primary school relationship, and (c) to set that main topic in broader perspective. Following a brief summarizing of the current state of affairs, I will discuss several shifts that seem to me to be occurring in early childhood projects and programs in Latin America, raising questions as I go about the transition from preschool years to primary schooling.

Overview

Providing an overview of early intervention programs in Latin America should be an easy task, given the spate of excellent reviews appearing in the last 2 or 3 years. Indeed, it is tempting simply to refer the reader to the works listed in the reference list and let it go at that. But an overview seems needed to provide a general background for discussion of the Latin American research being presented in this workshop.

Efforts to provide early education and other services for children 0-6 years old were found only rarely in Latin America before 1970 (Halperin 1980; Maurás et al. 1979). Previously, governments had taken little interest, leaving the field to private organizations. Preschooling was a formal upper-class affair. But pressures for expanded and reformed programs have grown steadily during the last 25 years, resulting in a new expression, post 1970, of interest by national governments.

Today, almost one-fifth of the population of Latin America is under 6 years of age, more than one-half of whom (or at least 40 million children) live, through no fault of their own, in conditions of abject poverty (Galofre 1979). With birth rates remaining high among the poor, while survival rates improve only slowly, the number of children occupying the anteroom of poverty continues to grow. At the same time, poverty and inequality are thought to be on the increase, pushed by the rising costs of survival associated with worldwide inflation and by the merging in several locations of regressive liberal economic policies with repressive politics. By the year 2000, the number of poor children in Latin America is expected to increase to 60 million. Simply keeping pace with growing numbers provides a challenge.

Other changes have increased the pressure for child care, preschooling, and other services for disadvantaged children. Poor women have had no choice but to join the labour force and have been doing so in unprecedented numbers (Maurás and Ossandon 1980). A shift away from the extended family toward the nuclear family has meant that fewer family members are immediately available as caretakers. No longer can mothers count on grandmothers or aunts, who may themselves be working. Heavy migration has exacerbated the isolation of the family and has meant in many cases that women must take over as heads of households. Nor is it as acceptable as in the past for older siblings to drop out of school to watch over younger brothers and sisters. Finally, attitudes toward women working are changing, but very slowly, in the machista Latin American society.

Preschool programs throughout Latin America reach less than 10% of the population, and most of the children reached are from the middle class (Halpern and Fisk 1978). The limited coverage is illustrated also by a recent study in Colombia where, despite important national initiatives to extend coverage, only 4% of the preschool children in rural areas had been reached by assistance programs of nutrition or health or stimulation. Those who had participated did so over a period of 1 year or less (Kardonsky-Titelman et al. 1981).
Governments of almost every country within the Latin American region have shown interest in early child development and, to a lesser degree, in programs of child care. That recent interest is evident in policy pronouncements, in laws, and in government-supported experimentation with a variety of approaches to child care and attendant problems of health and nutrition.

Several examples will suffice:
- In Colombia, through the passage of Law 27 in 1974, a huge fund has been collected by taxing payrolls, for support of integrated day-care programs for children of working parents. The main use of these funds has been to create Centres for Integrated Attention to Preschoolers, (CAIPs). The government, through the Family Welfare Institute (ICBF), is experimenting with other models as well.
- In Venezuela, the Fundación del Niño has created a system of Hogares de Cuido Diario (day-care homes), paying mothers in poor areas to care for children of others in their neighborhood who are working outside the home. Similar experiments are under way in Ecuador and Colombia. More recently, the new Ministry for the Development of Intelligence has undertaken a wide range of activities designed to improve the development of preschoolers, including a television series about child development and care.
- In Peru, the educational reform of 1972 officially made the Ministry of Education responsible for the education of children from ages 0–5. The Ministry has responded by establishing preschools (Centros de Educación Inicial), by experimenting with programs providing parental education, and, occasionally, by assisting local initiatives involving centre-based child care using community volunteers.
- In Panama, the Instituto Panameño de Habilitación Especial carries a broad range of early childhood program activities aimed at averting mental retardation in all those Panamanian children at risk.
- In Chile, the military government has favoured the continuation and extension of massive preschool efforts instituted by the Frei and Allende governments and seeks coverage of all children from low-income families in some type of institutional day-care and nutrition program.
- Cuba has for many years had in operation a national program of child-care centres.
- The new Nicaraguan government is moving ahead on programs of child care through both its Ministries of Education and of Social Welfare.
- Brazil has many experiments under way through its Ministry of Social Welfare, the National Institute for Nutritional Assistance, and other agencies. These include preschool, crèche, and food supplementation programs, at national, state, and municipal levels.

Privately funded experiments have also blossomed. Again, a few examples, in addition to the research-related experiments reported on here, will indicate the variety:
- Along Colombia's poverty-stricken Pacific coast, a Van Leer-funded project, built around providing a healthy environment for the development of children, includes nutrition, health, income-generating, and parental education components.
- Feminist groups in Peru, Brazil, Colombia, and elsewhere are establishing child-care centers and training programs for poor working women.
- A novel approach for the problem of space is being tried out in Brazil where discothèques are used during off hours to house preschool programs.
- Experiments focusing on youth caregivers are under way in Jamaica, Colombia, and Chile.
- In Mexico, Peru, and Chile, projects to care for children have grown up around community kitchens.
- The "Parents and Children" project in Chile helps community volunteers organize parents to discuss problems related to the healthy growth of their children and provides some materials to help them with the task. The method and program are being experimented with in Argentina and Bolivia.

Many other examples could be added, from both the public and private sides, of more traditional programs and of health- or nutrition-related programs directed toward children in their earliest years. In brief, the apparent interest and action is impressive, at least on the surface.

Although interest has grown, and experiments have proliferated, few systematic evaluations of these experiments exist and we do not yet have a good idea of which intervention strategies work best when and for whom. We know even less about long-term impacts. Even without evaluations it is clear that there is no magic formula. It is clear that programs, in addition to covering only a small portion of the preschool population, are generally of low quality, and usually cost much more than most governments can afford.

Moreover, preschool interventions are seldom directed toward those for whom the need is greatest. Usually, governmental programs lack integration and flexibility, and tend to be imposed, despite sometimes valiant efforts to correct these failings (Salazar n.d.). Thus, despite evident interest and initiative, programs generally lack breadth, depth, and impact.
Meanwhile, the knowledge base on which programs might be constructed is growing slowly. (I say “might be” because policies have not been informed by research.) There is now little doubt that intervention programs can make statistically significant, even dramatic, differences in physical and mental development (McKay et al. 1978). Both home-based and centre-based programs can produce results (Pollitt 1979). How long and under what circumstances these gains occur and can be maintained is not so clear.

Research has begun to yield tentative and provocative conclusions about the difficult and complex relationships between poverty and multiple deprivation in the early years and cognitive disabilities and later behaviours. In contrast to the simplistic explanations offered at one stage, it is now evident that health, nutrition, and stimulation interact and all are important. For instance, a poor diet affects the activity and responsiveness of a child and less active children are also less apt to be properly fed. Research studies have now documented the very high degree of plasticity children exhibit, a fact that cuts two ways. On the one hand, much more impressive physical and mental recuperation can occur than was previously thought possible — even for severely malnourished children (Montenegro et al. 1977). But backsliding also occurs frequently. Thus, programs built around “one shot” efforts will not be particularly successful, and the importance of continuity is even more obvious including continuity between preschool and primary school programs.

Research results from Latin America also suggest that, even with prolonged multiple interventions, the poor and multiply deprived are unlikely to close completely the gap between themselves and upper-class children (McKay et al. 1978). An obvious explanation has been that the poor simply cannot take full advantage of the opportunities improved development affords, including opportunities for schooling. Seemingly obvious also is a finding that, in general, the earlier the multiple interventions occur, the better.

From this research we see that improvements are possible to obtain, but the apparent need for multiple interventions and for continuity makes the task mammoth and costly. There is a need, therefore, for low-cost models for identifying those most “at risk” and for sorting out what is the most appropriate strategy for which groups.

Although the above provides a general idea of the current state of early childhood programs in Latin America, the field is undergoing changes constantly. In the following pages I will discuss briefly 10 shifts (some very slight but potentially important) that seem to be occurring.

**A shifting rationale: from welfare toward development:** Until recently, arguments for preschool programs in Latin America were phrased largely in welfare terms (Halpern and Fisk 1978). The continuing welfare bias of today stems from a history of remedial programs sponsored by religious or philanthropic organizations, upper-class do-gooders, and governments. Although the target of this frequently paternalistic, patronizing, and restricted approach has broadened in recent years — from abandoned or neglected children to poor children in general — the bias has remained, institutionalized in family welfare institutes, foundations for child welfare, and social promotion ministries. It is symbolized by the common practice in Latin America of assigning responsibility for early childhood programs to the President’s wife.

During the 1970s, however, social and economic development objectives have slowly become more prominent in discussions of early childhood programs, with several variations on the theme. In some cases the main orientation is toward economic development, in others toward alleviating poverty, and in others toward overcoming discrimination and correcting social injustices. When the focus is on economic development, preschool interventions are rationalized as an investment in human resources that will increase productivity and reduce “wastage” of human talent and potential (Selowsky 1980). It is argued that healthy, mentally alert children will not only be able to work harder and learn more easily, but they will also be more likely to remain in school longer, a circumstance that is thought to affect future productivity in several ways. While increasing human potential for learning, preschool investments are presumed also to have a payoff by reducing dropout, repetition, and the need for special attention to meet minimum standards. A parallel argument is made for reducing postprimary costs and other social costs such as those related to delinquency.

The investment rationale has not yet been widely accepted in Latin America, with the notable exception of Chile and perhaps Venezuela. In part, the resistance is ideological. Beyond that, however, it has been hard to “prove” that early interventions are a good investment. Although a number of studies link nutrition and health improvements to improvements in abilities crucial for future learning, the evidence is not as strong or as consistent as it should be to be convincing. Some longitudinal work in Latin Amer-
ica and elsewhere suggests that early improvements in intelligence quotients (IQs) wash out. That conclusion is extrapolated to other effects, but without evidence. Moreover, the link between improved school performance and subsequent productivity is still questioned. Longitudinal data on access to and performance in primary school, to date, has not been brought together. Longer-term assessments of economic effects have not been made.

The hope that early interventions will help modify the cycle of poverty has had greater appeal in Latin America than the investment approach to early childhood programs. There are two main variants. In one, emphasis is placed on child development under the assumption that improvements in the early years will not only increase the chances that poor children will realize their potential as productive members of society, but also that they will be more likely to keep up with advantaged peers as they learn and earn in later life. A second variant places more attention on family earnings and on associated child care that will free family members, particularly women, for work outside the home.

When social justice is put at the centre, the arguments mentioned above can be applied but will be given a social justice twist related to reducing inequalities and/or to overcoming discrimination — against women in the working world, for instance. When that is done without simultaneously pointing to the need for social reorganization, these arguments seem empty, however. Thus, those who are seriously concerned about social justice are likely to emphasize the value of child development and child care seen in terms of its potential for facilitating organization needed to bring about broader social changes.

Programs of child development and child care are beginning to appear that build on the established fact that concern for children can mobilize community groups to action on many fronts in conjunction with providing a healthy environment for the development of their children (Walker et al. 1981). This organizational dimension to programs is still rare, however, the political threat inherent in the viewpoint makes it unpalatable to many and unlikely that it will be widespread — even though it is increasingly recognized that "community participation" in preschool programs is essential to their success (Bernard Van Leer Foundation 1979). Participation does not necessarily lead to organization.

Whether or not one emphasizes economic, social, or human justice ends when considering early childhood programs will make a difference in the way programs are evaluated. So will the relative importance accorded to needs of the child, needs of the family, and broader social needs — of the community or of society at large.

During this workshop we should be alert to the built-in bias it has toward viewing preschool interventions as investments and toward emphasis on individual child development with relatively little regard for effects on the family or on the community. The bias leads us naturally to focus on reductions in "wastage" in primary schools associated with the extension of preschool education. But in doing so, will we miss more important effects? It may be that the type of preschool program most likely to cut down repetition and wastage is one in which children have been taught to be more docile, to adjust better to authoritarian teachers, and to accept an irrelevant curriculum presented in unimaginative ways. Will an investment bias lead us to seek out the ways children with early education adjust better to primary schools when the reverse should be done? Will an emphasis on individual development and subsequent performance in schools lead us to overlook important effects of early programs on the family and the community that, in the longer term, may be more important for bringing about changes — in the primary school as well as in other areas of life?

Shifting scope and coverage: As implied in the introduction and in my previous discussion, the coverage of child development and child-care programs is low but increasing slowly. No longer is the field an upper-class monopoly, providing enrichment for their own and extending beneficial care to a few selected poor — a salve to the conscience. The 10% figure quoted is probably out of date. But even a 15% figure is not much to brag about if, as is the case, most of the 15% are middle-class and urban children.

As preschool programs expand, they may or may not have a democratizing effect. As indicated earlier, poor children exposed to intensive programs of stimulation and care do not catch up completely with richer peers. Moreover, preschools can easily become another, and earlier, social tracking device, with richer children going to private, costly, well-equipped, high-quality preschools, while poor children enter public, low-quality programs of custodial care. Where there is competition for admission to primary schools, preschool attendance could become the not-too-rational basis for deciding who, from among the poor, gets to enter which schools and how soon they can enter. As the workshop discusses the preschool/primary relationship, this selection function of preschools, which is already evident
in many Latin American settings, should be kept firmly in mind.

As expansion has occurred there has been little effort to adjust the content of preschool programs in Latin America from their class and cultural biases taking into account possible differences in child rearing practices and needs. Systematically identifying these differences is a task still to be undertaken in Latin America. The poor parents whose children are increasingly being incorporated into preschool programs are likely to insist that their children learn to read and write, much to the consternation of their progressive middle-class teachers who wish to emphasize prereading skills, the development of basic concepts, and to promote an active inquiring spirit. But should poor parents and their children be denied their request when richer children are being taught at home by parents? To what extent does rigid adherence to one set of child development principles undercut results by isolating parents from the programs and with what effect on later performance?

Toward a combination of custodial and developmental care: Programs of child development and of child care seem to have moved along two separate tracks despite their obvious overlap. Child development programs are oriented almost exclusively to the child’s physical, mental, and social growth, with little or no thought to effects on caretakers or on the community. That is true of most preschool nutritional supplementation and health programs. Child care programs have a custodial bias often originating in the need or desire of family members to work. Whether child development occurs in programs of child care is a minor consideration, particularly in those programs serving the poor. These separate, short-sighted approaches continue, but increasingly, efforts are being made to bring the two together.

Programs that are set up to respond to family needs are much more likely to emphasize the custodial dimension of care. Family needs affecting programs for children will of course depend very much on the economic circumstance and composition of the family. Whether rich or poor, however, families frequently express a need for their children to be “enriched” or more intelligent. Whether rich or poor, one-parent families, or those in which both parents work, require custodial care for their young children. The rich can meet these needs on their own by hiring a servant or paying for their children to attend a private preschool.

Poor families have difficulty meeting both the developmental needs and custodial needs of the child. They not only lack resources but often the knowledge and ability to take advantage of resources made available by others. They are forced to make unfortunate compromises in the quality of the development and care they can provide. Sometimes the compromise is to abandon a child in the hope someone else will be willing and able to provide the proper care they cannot. Too often the solution is to lock the child in the home, unattended, while the parents work. Generally, however, the solution involves leaving children in the care of an older sibling, a relative, or a neighbor who, unless exceptionally loving and motivated, does little for the development of the child. Thus, most child care among the poor in Latin America is, de facto, custodial, rather than developmental, responding first to the family need and only second, and perhaps not at all, to the needs of the child. Most governmental programs of child care for poor families are also primarily custodial, despite professions of developmental goals. Guarderias (day nurseries—a word that instantly conjures up a custodial image) are notorious for their lack of developmental attention to children and have been shown in some instances to have had a negative effect on the development of the children parked there.

By way of contrast, programs established for children of poor working parents and energetically directed toward developing children, seldom do a good job of meeting the custodial needs of the families they serve. The hours during which care is provided do not correspond to times when child care is most needed. Or, access to the caretaking centres is difficult; working mothers with access to a program in the workplace, for instance, must take small children with them on crowded bus trips of over an hour to reach a work-based program.

One cannot argue with the desire to add developmental elements to custodial preschool programs. At the same time there is a challenge associated with a shift toward child-centred developmental programs; to make that shift without disregarding the “child care” needs of poor families. When we look at the relationship between preschool and primary school programs, we should not forget that most primary schools in Latin America (and elsewhere as well) are essentially custodial institutions, overlaid with a tiny bit of developmental help for children. That fact raises an interesting problem for primary schools when preschool programs are truly developmental. Most schools are not ready to receive active, exploring children who have already mastered the few concepts they are sup-
posed to learn while being baby-sat. Can primary schools make the adjustment?

**From recuperation toward preventive intervention:** Labeling this as a shift may be more wishful thinking than fact, but an increase in attention to parental education and "ecological" approaches to early attention suggests there is a change. The need for preventive actions, although seemingly obvious has been slow to emerge. The shift has been helped by evidence that children treated in and released from nutrition recuperation centres are likely to be repeaters. It has been helped by the stir created over reductions in the practice of breast-feeding and the earlier appearance of malnutrition. It has been aided by studies showing that full recuperation is difficult, and it is common sense.

Most preschool interventions that have an explicitly educational purpose are directed toward children in the 3–6-year-old range. This workshop deals with preschool programs for children 0–2 as well as 3–6 years old but does the workshop emphasis on the transition to primary school favour discussion of programs at the older age? In so doing, will we reinforce a recuperative bias and overlook more important and earlier interventions affecting school performance and later behaviour? Can we, instead, use the information at hand to compare long-term results from earlier rather than later interventions — or is that a task that must await future studies?

In conjunction with the shift toward a preventive posture, some work has been done on ways to identify families whose newborns and infants will be "at risk." Sorting and verifying these indicators (a general index of socioeconomic conditions, a "crowding" index, nutritional and health measurements for the mother, the presence of one or more malnourished or otherwise retarded child, and so on) remains to be done, and the real effect on children of acting in a preventive way based on such determination has yet to be established.

Evidence establishing an effect of parental education on the development of children is hard to come by. Programs can be shown to bring changes in knowledge and attitudes, and occasionally practices, but the real effect on the child, and the duration of that effect, is not well documented. How do parental education efforts help the transition to primary school?

The following three shifts from an "innoculation mentality" toward continuous intervention, from single toward multiple "integrated" interventions, and from a one-model approach toward "planned diversity" have been alluded to in discussion of previous points. All three are seen as increasingly important, but they run up against problems of cost. The latter two create administrative headaches and problems of bureaucratic coordination as well. They also tend to put an overload on systems that are short of trained talent.

For "planned diversity" to be effective, much more information is needed about what works when and for whom. Under what circumstances is it best to establish neighborhood centres, work-based centres, or home-based or school-related programs of early care? What "spontaneous" forms of child care exist that could be built upon to help diversify care — from the ground up? What combinations of materials, methods, and forms of organization can be put together that are applicable in enough settings to provide general help within a diversified system?

The following two trends from "directed" toward participative programs and from certified professionals or parents to working with many caregivers open myriad options for programs of child care and child development — options seldom considered seriously in the past. These new models hold promise for being closer to reality and lower in cost than more traditional programs, but the question of quality is ever present.

Participation takes many forms: at the centre of an activity or on the margin, as an individual or as part of a family or community unit, by donating money or materials or by acting directly, as part of a learning process or not, and so on. In the preschool program in Puno, Peru, participation by parents and community members occurs through the choice of the volunteer "animator," the construction of a locale for the program, and the daily preparation of lunches (with most, but not all, of the food provided by outside sources) for the preschoolers. However, the community does not participate in the running of the program, in decisions about its content, or by helping inside the preschool. Parental education through the program is minimal, and there is relatively little participation generated by the program directed toward improving the general conditions in the home or community that affect child development (Checa et al. 1981). The "Portage" model, also in use in Peru, requires active participation by parents in child development, but there is no element of group participation and the program is set (Jesion et al. 1979).

In 1979, a meeting in Cali, Colombia concluded that, to be effective, preschool interventions needed to go beyond activity involving individual parents or families to involvement of
communities (Bernard Van Leer Foundation 1979). Only then would one begin to get at the environmental and social conditions affecting negatively the early life of children. More than one experiment has been designed to do exactly that — the Colombian projects in Cartagena (Rojas and Durán 1979) and along the Pacific coast, for instance. From these and other projects the value of community involvement is evident, but so is the difficulty of building and maintaining participation where none existed before and where strong community institutions are not in place.

The primary school is part of the community environment affecting children. It is not a "participatory" institution, and is controlled by the state, with content beyond the control of a particular community and often with a teacher the community has not chosen. If community participation is felt to be so necessary for the success of a particular community and often with a teacher the community has not chosen. If community participation is felt to be so necessary for the success of a participatory institution, and is controlled by the state, with content beyond the control of a particular community and often with a teacher the community has not chosen. If community participation is felt to be so necessary for the success of an "education agents." In Latin America, projects or programs are under way built around community volunteers, older siblings, youth groups (such as scouts or recreation clubs), the aged, unemployed poor women, paraprofessional health workers, high school or college students, and social workers, none of whom have been "certified" for child care. We know very little about the impact of these various programs on the development of participating children, or for that matter, on the caregivers. Among the many possible caregivers, and within the context of this workshop, it seems worthwhile to single out primary school students. In Latin America, as in many other parts of the world, most children who pass the age of 7 or 8 are already in a sense adults. "Childhood" is a product of recent development and still reserved for the wealthy. Whereas children from 8 to 12 are considered part of the child-care problem in the United States, their counterparts in poor families in Latin America are often part of the child-care solution. Because the poor tend to have larger families, the probability that siblings will have a child-care (and, therefore, child development?) role in poor homes is greater than in middle-class families. In some places, children seem to have a major role in the child-care process; in others they do not because they are in school, because they have other family related tasks they must carry out, or because families are young. The possibility that siblings can serve as caretakers is conditioned, then, by family structure, by the pressures on youth to work, and by the extention and organization of schools (whether or not they function on a shift system, for instance).

Involvement of older children in the care and development of younger children carries potential benefits well beyond the obvious one of forcing parents to work. In some places, youth cannot find employment, and, because they are at loose ends when school is out, get into trouble. Youth caregiving could not only keep older children busy but could also lead to a career line for some and, if accompanied by some education, provide them at an early age with knowledge and skills related to parenting.

Despite its seeming importance, we know relatively little about the frequency with which youth act as caregivers, how often their role is a main one, or under what circumstances it is most likely to occur. Nor do we know how frequently these demands are responsible for primary school (or later) dropout. Nor do we know whether or not programs of education for children 8–12 years old performing caregiving roles will make them better caregivers (and, not incidentally in the long run, better parents). It is possible to imagine, for instance, that programs directed at older children would reinforce negative feelings toward a job in the home that is unwanted or resented. It is possible to attempt to build upon something that occurs naturally could take away the spontaneity elements in care for younger children by older ones — with a negative rather than positive effect on development of younger children. The expectation is, however, that results of "child-to-child" programs will be positive, and there is evidence from the health field to support that (Shuster 1979). Still, one must look on new ideas with a critical eye.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, programs involving older children who care for younger ones are not widespread, but examples can be found in Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, and Jamaica, for instance. In most cases, these programs are directed toward high school youth. Almost nothing has been done to involve or educate primary school children with respect to child development and care.

In a few places, nursery schools or kindergartens are located next to, or even in, rooms of a primary school. Yet there is virtually no coordination between the preschool and primary school
programs. Hours are different making it difficult for older siblings to bring younger ones to their preschool and take them home. Teachers have no contact. The primary school curriculum takes no note of the presence of preschoolers. The seeming inability of primary schools to adapt themselves is again apparent.

It is interesting that the neighbourhood and the workplace and even churches have figured much more prominently as locations for preschool programs than the schoolyard. As we discuss preschool/primary school relationships, we should give a place to discussing the potential advantages and disadvantages, short-term and long, of associating early intervention programs with primary schooling and of involving older children more permanently in the care of younger children. Could such arrangements foster participation of parents and other members of the community in matters related to primary school as well as preschooling? Could programs benefit, at relatively low cost and with reasonable quality, other younger and older children? Could the association provide greater continuity during transition?

From more expensive toward lower-cost programs: Costs must be part of any discussion of preschool interventions. Unfortunately, we are working from a weak base. There are very few good (and public) evaluations of the costs of preschool programs. The traditional accounting methods used are seldom adapted when evaluating less formal, community-based early interventions. We need better methods as well as better information.

From the existing studies of costs, we can divine some obvious conclusions: that government-run, professionally-staffed programs are generally more expensive than local community-based programs involving volunteers; that most pilot projects are too expensive to replicate; and that hidden costs associated with foreign donations of food or services, or even with the time of "volunteers," can be high and hard to sustain (Jesien et al. 1979). In the move toward lower costs, there may be a trade off with quality, affecting the impact that can be expected from programs — in primary school and beyond. On the other hand, the need to seek lower costs has helped break away from an imported, upper-class, tradition that demands fancy conditions, too beautiful materials, and overly trained personnel. The challenge of providing quality care at low cost has been accepted but the results are not available.

What is much harder to divine is how costs, however calculated, should stack up against benefits — to children, caregivers, families, the immediate community, and society at large. The ability of traditional evaluation to capture such benefits is limited (but not to be discarded). Long-term impact of programs must be considered on physical growth, IQ, school "readiness" (in terms of social skills, language ability, conceptualization), access to primary schooling, progress through the system (how far, how fast, with what repetition, and with what special attention), school achievement, and educational motivation and aspirations. They should probably be related to costs. But it is important to include also less obvious benefits to families and to the community. For this, we need to apply more open, qualitative evaluation methods, as is being done, for example, in the ongoing evaluation of the Parents and Children project in Osorno, Chile. In that evaluation, primary school access and performance are only two among many criteria for program success.

Concluding Comments

In the foregoing, I have tried to capture something of the state of early childhood thinking and programming in Latin America. New objectives, organization, content, and modes of participating are emerging; many variants are being tried; interest is high. But progress is slow. Major problems remain: of coverage, quality, cost, flexibility, prevention, continuity, cooperation and integration (among different parts of the bureaucracy, and among different levels of any system), and family and community participation. The custodial and developmental lines of early childhood programs need to be brought closer together. Articulation with primary schooling is obviously inadequate.

As suggested throughout this paper, much more research and evaluation needs to be done in some crucial areas. However, much of the information to be derived from research and evaluation that is needed to provide guidance for improving early childhood programs is already in hand.

Adding up what we have learned, putting it in a form that can be used by decision-makers, and making that information available must receive as much attention as carrying out more research. While avoiding the simple answer, I hope we can advance that task in this workshop.

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