



Photo by Libby Bassett

A HEAD START

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN TURKEY

LIBBY BASSETT

The politicians in Ankara had never seen anything like it. In the late 1970s, a petition with 60 000 names came before the National Assembly — more signatures than any other petition in the history of the Turkish republic. And what was surprising, in this land of male domination, was that all the 60 000 signatories were women. What drove so many women to action? Their desperate need for child day-care centres.

In Turkey, just 50 000 children out of eight million aged six or younger benefit from any sort of preschool service. The need for early childcare has become particularly pressing in recent years. In 1950, when 80 percent of the people still lived on the land, children were cared for by their mothers and other relatives. Today, with nearly 50 percent of Turkey's 50 million people living in urban areas, often in slums and shantytowns, many Turkish women work in industry and services. Their salaries cannot pay for childcare, so often the children are unattended.

Their desperate need for help led the women to petition the government. The Ministry of Education responded by announcing it would open preschools in shantytowns and rural areas. Soon afterward, a group of preschool educators led by Dr Cigdem Kagitcibasi (pronounced Chee-dem Kyaowt-chi-bashi) offered their services to the Ministry of Education. They were asked to prepare teaching materials for the proposed schools.

In 1978, Dr Kagitcibasi and her team began to study the state of early childhood development and educa-

tion in Turkey to develop working models and teaching materials — for parents as well as teachers — before widespread preschool education was launched in Turkey.

They finished their study and published their teaching materials (which are being used in some schools), but the plan to open preschools around the country was put on hold as the government changed several times.

Dr Kagitcibasi was disturbed that the growing need for preschool education was not being met. So, she proposed an experimental 4-year project to test a new method of giving underprivileged children a head start. She proposed a project to the education

There are, basically, three places where preschoolers could be found — in Turkey or almost anywhere. They could be at home, at a day-care centre (where they are supervised), or at a nursery school (where they would get an educational beginning). The experimental program is being applied in all three settings: in three day-care centres belonging to the Ministry of Monopolies, which runs state-owned factories; in three nursery schools run by private-sector textile and pharmaceutical factories; and in 93 homes. All in all, 271 children, now five and seven, have been studied for two years — with two years to go. Ninety-eight of their mothers get training; the other

development (such as grouping things together and classification), the complexity of their behaviour in play, and their personality and social development traits. One trait — the capacity to delay gratification — has been found related both to academic success and to successful coping strategies so necessary in later life.

In addition, all the mothers were interviewed at the beginning and end of the study as to how they perceived their children. Those with children in preschool programs were asked about the degree of communication between them and the school.

Each child also was assessed twice and his or her school records were



Photo by Libby Bassett

program of the Social Sciences Division of IDRC for funding, and in the fall of 1981, IDRC approved a \$105 000 grant for her Comprehensive Preschool Education Program (CPEP). The project began the following March.

Dr Kagitcibasi believes that if cognitive development is not supported in preschool programs by teaching self-confidence, independence, and initiative, then the child's gains may be short-lived. She feels the best way to foster a love of learning is to involve the family, particularly the mother.

In addition to using women with higher education, the project employs a number of aides drawn from the community to reach mothers and preschoolers. The concept of using semi-literate paraprofessional women from the communities is new, Dr Kagitcibasi said. "It may take a long time to get accepted, but I don't see it as impossible. Actually, it takes more organization than money."

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173 are a control group to see — when the program receives its final analysis — what difference mother training makes in the child's ability to succeed in school.

The first year of the experiment was devoted to identifying and assessing the children — their IQs, cognitive

analyzed at the end of each school year. The final data for three-year-olds will cover a total of three years of preschool (which, in some control cases, will involve no schooling at all) and for the five-year-olds, three years of primary school.

At the end, the results of this study will be compared to those of adolescents who went through three years of comprehensive preschool education at one of the six centres used in Dr Kagitcibasi's experimental study.

During the project's first year, Dr Kagitcibasi and her colleagues learned of an Israeli program called HIPPY, or Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters. Since its start in the 1960s, HIPPY has helped close the educational gap between the less-advantaged Asian and African Jews and those who came from Europe. The key to its success is family — particularly mother — involvement in the program. Its success led the Israeli

Ministry of Education to open a centre in 1982 to teach the HIPPY method to others.

Dr Kagitcibasi's colleague, Dr Sevda Bekman, was among the first to go for training at the centre, because it was felt the situation was similar in Turkey, where advantaged and disadvantaged compete in the same school system.

"The important thing about HIPPY is that they developed a weekly teaching program for two years. Because it had already been tried out with women in a lower socioeconomic system such as ours, we decided to adapt it, and not to reinvent the wheel," said Dr Kagitcibasi.

daughter and her mother-in-law, Havva.

Occasionally, said Dr Sevda Bekman, who arranged the meeting with Ayse and her family, husbands and mothers-in-law disapprove of the preschool experiment because it gives women a new sense of assurance and the traditional structure of family life changes. But grandmother Havva approved. She said it makes her happy when Sibel tells her stories and what she has learned. And she thinks it is good for Ayse to get out: "She should have some time to herself."

Ayse gets 10 000 Turkish lire a month (about CA\$30) for her work as an aide in the program. It is not much.

around long tables all day long singing songs, drawing, painting, cutting, and pasting. If the weather is good, they are marched outside to sit in a small courtyard with no play equipment. There is no formal preschool education program, "Just what the teachers bring in," said Dr Bekman, "and singing and storytelling are not education."

Sabriya Lacinkaya (La-chin-kaya), the good-natured nurse on duty, was somewhat despairing. She said the centre is always dark and unhealthy, the management does not provide a balanced diet and that it needs an education program. She said it is easy to spot the children in the CPEP program. "They are more enthusiastic about taking part in activities. They like to draw and paint."

Even in better equipped nursery schools, such as the one in the poor Zeytinburnu section, teachers also see a big difference in the children who are taking part in the experimental CPEP program. Seventy children whose mothers work at a private-sector textile factory nearby learn about colours, shapes, numbers, natural events such as rain and snow and, during our visit, about health and diet.

"The problem," said Nese Postalçilar (Ne-she Pos-tall-chilar), a young, well-educated teacher, "is that what most children get at our school just stays here." Miss Postalçilar said the children receiving extra help from their mothers through the CPEP program "are much more enthusiastic and take a leading part in activities. And, they know much more than the others."

Dr Bekman said, as we drove away, that "children attending custodial nurseries like the one we visited in Cibali are behind in every area of development compared with educational nurseries like this. By continuing the education at home we prepare the children so that when they go to primary school they will be ready to learn and will be more successful."

Dr Kagitcibasi said at the end of a day visiting CPEP sites, "If we can show that this program makes a long-lasting difference, then it will be important not only for Turkey but also internationally. Here, we are forming in the mothers new habits of reasoning and talking with the child."

"Our expectation," Dr Kagitcibasi said, "is that these changes will be self-sustaining once our experimental program ends because there will be continued support from the mother to the child."

The hope is that this experiment will prove so successful that Turkey's Ministry of Education will use it as a model for greatly expanded preschool training — for both mothers and children.

Libby Bassett is Director, Publications and Communications, World Environment Center. She traveled to Turkey recently to visit the Comprehensive Preschool Education Program (CPEP).

DESIGN				
	Custodial Day Care	Educational Day Care	Home Care	All
Mother Training	A) Three's: 24	B) Three's: 13	C) Three's: 16	53
	Five's: 19	Five's: 17	Five's: 9	45
No Mother Training	D) Three's: 31	E) Three's: 16	F) Three's: 38	85
	Five's: 35	Five's: 23	Five's: 30	88
	109	69	93	271

So, the HIPPY program for cognitive training was adapted for Turkey. Each week the 98 sets of mothers and children who are in the training program get a brightly multicoloured booklet with which to work. It includes a storybook a month, with corresponding material in the workbook. Each mother spends 15 minutes a day working with her child. For this, the mothers had to be trained to encourage cognitive development of the children by asking them questions and by providing information.

This program goes one step farther by including what they call mother enrichment — group discussions on topics important to the mothers and their children. These topics include nutrition, child care, discipline, how to avoid accidents, creative play, activities at home — and two weeks of family planning. The mother training develops their own sense of competence and self-esteem and provides group support to mothers so they can deal with everyday life and feel secure enough to provide freedom for the children.

This is considered both innovative and revolutionary because, said Dr Kagitcibasi, "It is an attempt to change family style in this culture."

Ayse Cevre (pronounced Aisha Chev-re), one of the 14 aides training other women, lives in the Zeytinburnu area of Istanbul, a section jam-packed with factories and slum houses. Her husband works in a coffee house, her nine-year-old son is in school, and she stays home with Sibel, her five-year-old

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The cheapest apartment costs three times that much. She does it for her child and because she wanted to have something to do, to get out and to meet people.

Sibel is far more advanced than her nine-year-old brother since they began the home-study, Ayse said. "While I teach her, I have to teach him too. He doesn't know a star or a triangle. He says, 'Mommy, why didn't you send me to preschool?'" In some preschool centres in Turkey, he would have learned little more than how to sit still.

In Istanbul's Cibali section there is a typical centre for the workers' children at a 100-year-old tobacco factory overlooking the Golden Horn. In an equally ancient building with no playground and with cramped, airless rooms, 260 children — about 130 on each shift — are looked after by three teachers, 30 aides and two nurses. A doctor is supposed to be on staff, but he left some time ago.

The older children, four to six, sit