

TEACHING PARENTS TEACHING CHILDREN

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The old mansion on Erasmo Escala, in the older part of Santiago, Chile, is a hive of activity. These are the headquarters of CIDE, the Centre for Educational Research and Development, a private institution established in 1974. Today, CIDE carries out a large number of programs throughout the country.

There are three main integrated dimensions to CIDE's activities: research, development, and diffusion. In the words of its director, Patricio Cariola: "We want to be good conceptually, intellectually, and scientifically and at the same time keep our feet very much in the development process of poor groups and *campesinos*, while remaining involved in the whole Chilean education process."

Leaving CIDE headquarters in the sunny Santiago valley, the traveller passes through less fertile lands to emerge in a very different world. Here, 900 kilometers to the South near the city of Osorno, is the site of one of CIDE's preschool education programs.

It rains much of the time in the Osorno region. The land is then transformed into a quagmire, and the peasants huddle in their isolated shacks for some semblance of warmth.

This is a land of little comfort, marked by a history of conflicts — border squabbles with Argentina and class struggle. During President Allende's time in the late 1960s some of the farms were seized by militants trying to accelerate the process of land reform. Reprisals after the coup were swift. The region has been shrouded in a blanket of fear ever since. People began to fight among themselves and disorganization ensued. Unemployment is high, and *chicha*, a crude alcoholic drink made from almost anything, is the release mechanism. But alcoholism is only a symptom of deeper problems.

In an area where the infant death rate is 13.5 percent, one might expect that surviving children would be nurtured and cherished. But the problems are so numerous and the individual plots of land so small that children are often viewed as a debit, not a credit. Communication between children and parents is therefore often lacking, and reserved for the basics of life such as the time to eat and sleep. Misery and the struggle to survive fray tempers.

In such conditions, there is little room for praise or encouragement, little time for teaching or showing affection. The children who make the long

trek over muddy paths to school are often not adequately prepared. The drop-out rate is high. Ignorance and apathy might appear to have a good future in the 10th region of Chile.

The great educator, Paulo Freire, identified apathy as the main enemy of education and development. Armed with the spirit of Freire and experience in another part of Chile, CIDE entered these hills in 1978 to launch a program aimed at parents and children, *Programa Padres e Hijos* (PPH).

For this preschool education program, 35 sets (a total of 660 in all) of worksheets were developed by child psychologists for parents to use in helping children aged 4 to 6 learn at home. They include basics such as learning to write, count, and speak properly, but they also cover broader issues of nutrition, hygiene, sex education, and emotional and social problems such as alcoholism and lack of affection between parents and children.

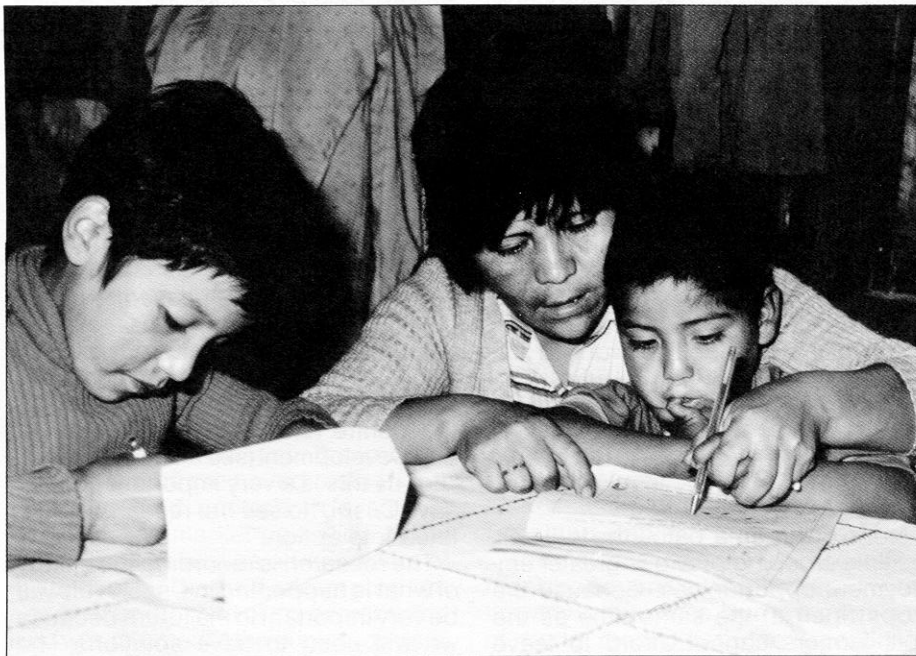
Instruction manuals for the parents are provided with the worksheets. Each of the worksheets has clearly stated objectives. On one, for example, a cartoon drawing of a father asks a child to compare two saucepans. The text reads: "With these games the child learns to concentrate and to pay attention."

In order to put the program in place, CIDE identified and trained 10 coordinators. Another 100 people, working as volunteer coordinators in various localities, helped to organize the program and enroll parents and children. CIDE estimates that 6000 people were directly involved or affected.

The PPH program is divided into 12 units, each dealing with different topics. For instance, the first is on general child development. Pictures of a well-nourished and a poorly-nourished child, and other representations of poor hygiene or lack of affection are used as conversation starters. The coordinators raise the question of how the family can help the child learn. Gradually, the parents learn to talk of their own situations.

The most important element in this process is group dynamics, according to CIDE researchers. The coordinators only guide the discussion, encouraging people to talk about their own problems and draw conclusions.

In an unimpressive building on a



Learning at home in Chile using materials developed by the Parents and Children Project: the entire family benefits.

side street of Osorno is an organization that is perhaps as important as the coordinators. It is "The Voice of the Coast," a one-kilowatt radio station set up by Capuchin missionaries from Holland.

One of the services provided by the station is the Radio School Foundation for rural Development (FREDER). Without FREDER's services, the PPH program would have been much more difficult to implement in the south of Chile. For the last few years, the scattered households on the hills west of Osorno have been united by at least one thing — FREDER.

The Parents and Children Project benefits from its partnership with FREDER in a number of ways. Announcements of project meetings and activities are broadcast, saving the coordinators miles of walking and months of work. FREDER also participates directly in the project by broadcasting radio plays written by people to communicate their conclusions on issues raised by PPH.

Perhaps the most important contribution is the continuity assured by FREDER. Having completed its two-year program in 44 communities, PPH has moved on to new ones, but FREDER remains in the original project area. In fact, one of the criticisms directed at the project has been that the centres should have been called "FREDER centres" rather than "PPH centres".

That criticism and a host of other issues are discussed in a report on the Parents and Children Project by Dr Howard Richards of the University of Indiana and members of CIDE. Richards helped start PPH in Chile in the early '70s and returned to evaluate the program near Osorno in 1980.

Richards sets out in the beginning of his report to tell the reader that the study is not a systematic, cost-benefit evaluation of PPH. Such an evaluation would measure the "efficiency" of the system.

Social scientists who attempt to evaluate PPH using the usual systems approach would first ask for the objectives of the program, and then measure efficiency in terms of cost per desired outcome, he says. However, nowhere in the project documents would they find a clear statement of objectives. By pressing further, "reasonable social scientists", as Richards calls them, might discover some objectives for the program — 660 of them, one on each of the worksheets for the children. If satisfied with these, the social scientist could begin the systematic evaluation by measuring the program inputs. In this way, Richards maintains that the evaluator would eventually find that PPH cost US \$6.83 per month per pre-school child in 1979, whereas the national kindergarten program cost US \$28.15. The differences in achievements between PPH "graduates" and kindergarten students could then be measured on up to 660 scales!

In addition to the problem of getting bogged down in the measurement of so many objectives, Richards maintains that the reasonable social scientist

would be missing what are perhaps the main achievements of the program. These are what he calls the "non-objectives" of PPH: community fundraising; events such as sports tournaments, bazaars, and raffles; and craft activities such as knitting, textile painting, embroidery, making children's clothes, woodworking, and sisal weaving.

In addition, PPH has fostered such activities as making a community first-aid kit, organizing funerals, composing and singing songs and poems, aiding needy neighbours, planning and building a community centre, and repairing a school or chapel. Committees formed to carry out these activities have also begun to take grievances to the authorities — for example, the lack of health clinics in their communities and the broken-down bridges.

How can one measure such "non-objectives"? Through what Richards and others have called the "illuminative approach", a participatory process. First, 10 "informants" were elected from the communities. They travelled to Osorno where they were interviewed extensively. From these interviews, a "verbal image" of the project was drawn. Taken back to community meetings, the image was reviewed by others who confirmed whether or not their communities had participated in the "non-objectives" mentioned above. A final "verbal image" of PPH was thus arrived at.

This method of verifying the verbal image is what social science theorists have called "triangulation". It is adapted from the method of geometric calculation used by surveyors and astronomers. Richards says: "By analogy, we can think of the various pieces of information we can assemble about PPH or some other social reality as 'sightings' that 'determine' whether facts we cannot check directly are true."

When pressed to give more evidence for the peasants' statements about PPH,

he offers more proof by triangulation: direct observation of meetings, teacher's opinions, inspecting completed worksheets, reports of independent observers, content analysis of worksheets, case studies, and specific psychological tests. All of these corroborate the previously established image of PPH.

"The key to determining whether PPH is cost-effective is in the study of attitudes," says Richards in the first few pages of his report. "If attitudes change, it is." He points out that PPH's methodology is "essentially a technique for achieving participation. The attitude change brought about by participation is essentially a new identity or perhaps two new identities — one as a member of a community, another as instructor and friend of one's children."

Did attitudes change? According to the report, there is evidence that alcohol consumption declined in PPH communities. People became more concerned with the welfare of their children and community problems. The objectives set out on the worksheets were achieved, but perhaps it was more important to achieve those generated by the people themselves. If PPH was evaluated for its efficiency alone, these activities might not only be ignored, but the voluntary time taken to achieve the changes in attitudes would be added to the "input" or "cost" side.

There are problems, nevertheless. One has been the inability to integrate PPH into the existing education system. Some of the committees are not allowed, even today, to use the community schools for meetings.

In spite of this, one can sense that something important has happened in the 10th region of Chile. The Parents and Children Project appeared at a time when it was needed. Old values, suppressed but not forgotten, have been revived. Perhaps the fog has lifted a little from the hills west of Osorno. □



A renewed interest and involvement in community life were main achievements of the program.