

Mapping the contours of effective programming:

The Effectiveness Initiative 1999-2002

In January 1999, the Bernard van Leer Foundation and partner organisations in the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development* initiated a three year investigation known as the Effectiveness Initiative (EI). Our overall goals within this effort are to discover what we can about what makes an effective programme work, and to initiate an international dialogue on effectiveness that deepens our understanding of how to create and/or support effective programming for young children and families.

To achieve these goals, the EI set the following objectives:

- to identify ten diverse Early Childhood Development (ECD)

programmes that people consider effective (and that have operated for at least ten years) and to explore them in depth;

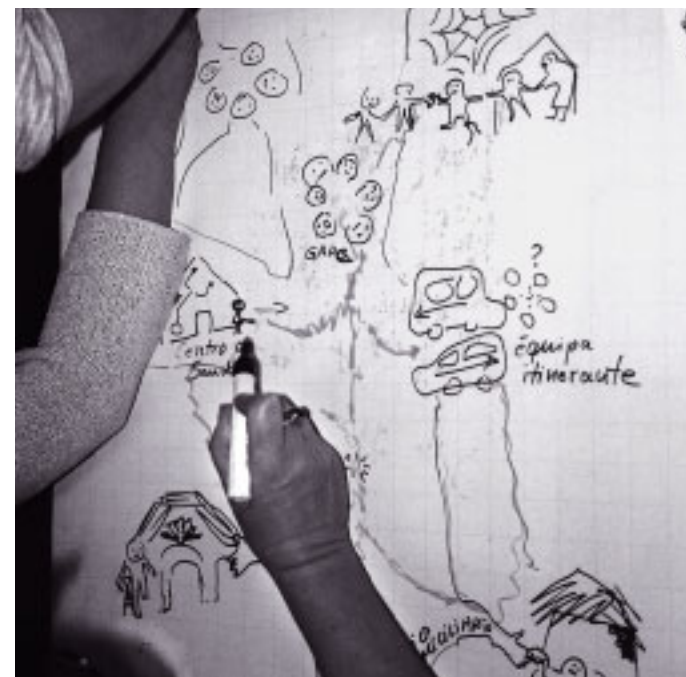
- to engage people from the chosen sites, together with staff from international NGOs, to work in cross-site, cross-cultural teams to carry out such explorations;
- to learn how to apply qualitative research techniques in the examination of ECD programmes;
- to create tools that allow us to understand the complexity of these programme experiences more fully;
- to stimulate cross-site and inter-agency dialogue about what makes ECD programmes effective, how, and for whom;
- to understand more fully the

interplay between a programme's processes, activities, and outcomes; and

- to map the contours of effectiveness, defining what makes a programme effective, under what conditions, and for whom; what supports and what hinders a project under particular conditions and in particular contexts; and what these contours tell us about effective programming more generally.

We called the project the Effectiveness Initiative despite some hesitation. The word 'effective' is, we feel, one of those words that is used much too glibly in the development field, as if we knew exactly what it

July 1999 Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague
photo: Angela Ernst



The Philippines: ECD at Mount Pinatubo
photo: Dr S Anandalakshmy



means. As we have already discovered, effectiveness means different things to different people and this has played a crucial role in helping keep our minds open about what effectiveness is and where it resides.

The Effectiveness Initiative is now underway. The programmes included in the EI represent a diversity of settings and of approaches to early childhood programming (see page 9). Working with each programme is a team of at least four people – some insiders and some outsiders – who are selecting and creating tools appropriate to help them develop an understanding of the programme. While a common framework is being explored at each site (generated by the teams from all the sites working together with a 10 person 'Advisory Committee' of international ECD specialists), teams have also established what the important local issues are for them, and have devised their own ways of exploring them, that are unique to their setting.

From the very beginning, we have conceived of the EI as an opportunity to learn more about what makes

programmes work in an open and transparent way, sharing our assumptions, confusions and findings as we go along. We begin, therefore, with some candour: we expect to make mistakes along the way, we expect to be surprised, and we are open to changes of direction. We know that we run the risk of asking the wrong questions and we are prepared to share both the excitement of discovery as well as the awkwardness of finding our way. In short, we are at the beginning of a voyage together.

In this issue of *Early Childhood Matters* we are trying two new things: first, we are sharing a process that we are currently engaged in, as it is happening. In essence, we are showing you several pages from our project diary. We are inviting you to peek in on a developing process and are hoping that this, in turn, will encourage you to react to and contribute toward the further formation of the Effectiveness Initiative.

Second, we are presenting this material in a special edition of *Early Childhood Matters* that is a joint publication with the Coordinators' Notebook (CN) of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood

Care and Development. In recognition of the collaboration and dialogue built into the EI, we have decided to join forces in this initial publication to reach out to both the *Early Childhood Matters* and *Coordinators' Notebook* audiences. Regular readers of the ECM will find the layout and design familiar, regular readers of the CN will recognise the longer, in depth article format that is a CN tradition. As part of this collaboration, Ellen M Ilfeld, Director of Communications for the Consultative Group since 1993, was asked to guest edit this issue; and Judith L Evans, former director of the Consultative Group, has moved to The Hague, as of January 1999, to commit herself full time to the Effectiveness Initiative as Director.

'When ECD works: mapping the contours of effective programming' (page 7) provides an overview of the Effectiveness Initiative; a discussion of what we hope to achieve; some of the assumptions we are making as the project gets underway; what has happened so far; and some of the surprises we have already had. In 'Stories we tell, moments that stay with us' (page 18) we introduce a specific qualitative research technique, which is

designed to get at people's own experience of something that has worked for them in relation to early childhood development. We tested this activity with partners in the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development with staff within the Foundation, and with the PRONOEI programme in Peru. The article presents the results from our trial run using qualitative research. It illustrates what can be generated when we open ourselves to different sources, different kinds of data, and different ways of processing them. Each site will determine whether this and/or other methodologies are appropriate to their contexts, as they find ways of soliciting the perspectives of the key players: children; parents; care providers; community planners; intervention agents and others. In future editions of ECD we will describe our experiences with other techniques. We welcome your responses, questions and comments.

Ellen Meredith Ilfeld, Guest Editor
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Director of the Effectiveness Initiative
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* Organisations that belong to the CG consortium include: Aga Khan Foundation; Bernard van Leer Foundation; Christian Children's Fund; Save the Children USA; Radda Barnen; High/Scope Foundation; Academy for Educational Development; Inter-American Development Bank; World Bank; UNICEF; and UNESCO. In addition, regional ECD networks/convenors represented within the consortium include: Arab countries (Arab Resource Collective); Latin America (CINDE); Caribbean (Caribbean Child Development Centre); Eastern Europe (Marta Korintus); Central Asia (MOCEE); Southeast Asia (Feny de los Angeles Bautista); South Asia Network (Caroline Arnold); and Anglophone Africa (Barnabas Otaala). Visitors at the April 1999 Consultative Group meeting included representatives from Plan International; Redd Barna; a consultant to DANIDA; Ryerson University Toronto; and diverse UNESCO staff.

The next edition of Early Childhood Matters will focus on participation by children 0-7 years in the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of ECD programmes.

Zimbabwe: discussions between stakeholders
Kushanda Project

