

EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



EQ Review is a newsletter published by USAID's EQUIPI to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate the successes, challenges, and lessons learned by USAID Missions.

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School Readiness

While Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Early Childhood Development (ECD) are sometimes used interchangeably in the field, there is a difference. ECE deals only with the education of young children, while ECD is a more holistic and comprehensive concept that can involve many aspects of a child's growth including education, nutrition, and emotional and social development. For the purposes of this issue of the EQ Review, "school readiness" includes both ECE and ECD.

School Readiness and Disadvantaged Populations

Why should projects focus on school readiness when, in so many countries, public primary schools are not yet soundly on their feet? Three different reasons recommend school readiness, either ECE or ECD, as a focus.

The first reason centers on ensuring that investments in the bricks and books of public education provide an adequate return for the poor. Integrated early childhood programs—programs which have health and nutrition components in addition to education—have demonstrated effects on primary school success, especially for disadvantaged populations. Children who participate in high quality preschool programs tend to enroll in primary school earlier and in greater numbers, and to repeat fewer grades. Their dropout rate is lower, they persist through more grades, and their school performance is better.¹

The payoff for investment in school readiness programs has been specifically calculated for some countries. For Egypt, Bolivia, the Philippines, and the U. S. respectively, benefit-to-cost ratios calculated have been 2.3, 3.0, 3.2, and 7.2. Every dollar spent on quality preschool programs has been estimated to bring \$2-\$7 in increased income and savings to the countries studied. And the returns in hope and dignity are priceless.

Commitment to equity provides a second reason for dedicated school readiness programming. Children of poor and uneducated families arrive at primary school with fewer supports for and models of success than more advantaged children. Relatively wealthy parents in

developing countries not only can, and often do, provide private preschool education for their children, but tend to be literate themselves. Parental literacy is strongly associated with school achievement; disadvantaged children are more likely to lack the practical and inspirational support literate parents can provide for school success. Quality preschool programs serve to level the playing field by giving children the exposure to reading materials and to the pleasures of reading that literate parents provide at home.

Disadvantaged children also often speak a different dialect or a different language altogether from that used in public primary schools. School readiness programs can give children a year or two in a favorable language learning environment which prepares them to understand and respond easily to instruction in Grade 1.

The hope of "trickle-up" change offers a third reason to focus on preschool programming. In some countries, under-functioning public educational systems seem completely impervious to change. Parents, never involved in educational matters, remain critical but excluded from any meaningful participation in education; nepotistic assignments, politicized unions, inadequate pay and nonexistent or corrupt supervision discourages primary school teachers from being agents of change themselves. Preschools or pre-primaries seem to offer a new window of opportunity.

Pre-primaries are not usually a full part of a government

School Readiness

Quality ECD Environments as Reliable Predictors for School Readiness

The question of measuring a child's readiness for school is a point of wide discussion in the ECD field. One trend in thinking supports assessing the preschool's readiness to meet the needs of young children in relevant and appropriate ways versus assessing child readiness through a test. Assessing individual preschool children is difficult and expensive and it is not easy to obtain reliable and valid measures. Maintaining early childhood environments that offer a level of quality associated with positive outcomes in school and life is an alternative strategy to assure school readiness.

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) is the acknowledged international measure of preschool quality and has been used in national surveys in North America, Europe, India, and Israel. The ECERS has been piloted in Bangladesh (2003) by Save the Children US/Bangladesh and found to be correlated with the cognitive and language performance skills of the children who attend preschool. Project SUCCEED (2004-2009), an early childhood education initiative developed by Save the Children US/Bangladesh and financed by USAID/Bangladesh, decided to use the ECERS to systematically evaluate its early childhood programs.

In February 2005, SUCCEED began to design an ECERS preschool quality study to evaluate a statistically reliable sample of its 1800 preschools on an annual basis. The study will be conducted by external examiners; however, all SUCCEED early childhood staff and teachers will be taught to use the instrument. The purpose of the classroom environmental assessment is to provide a lens for looking at curriculum, materials, instructional methods, and interpersonal communication associated with school readiness. All of these qualities are important if children are to benefit from their mornings in a preschool. The ECERS also helps staff to internalize ways of noticing how a child is developing and of supporting each one's next steps. In this way, the evaluation components of SUCCEED inform practice and ongoing program improvements to assure school readiness for every child.

A longer version of this article is available on the EQUIP website; http://www.equip123.net/EQ_Review/docs/ECD-Environments.pdf. For more information, contact Mary Hobbs, Education Team Leader, USAID/Bangladesh at mhobbs@usaid.gov.

Early Childhood Family Education Activity (EDIFAM)



EDIFAM promotes active learning aimed at developing the whole child in order to increase healthy development and school readiness.

When poor, rural children in El Salvador enter first grade, they face a high risk of repetition, desertion and learning problems. Recognizing that improved early childhood care and education (ECCE) services can reduce those risks, USAID financed the Early Childhood Family Education Activity (EDIFAM), whose current phase is implemented through EQUIP1 (Educational Quality Improvement Program – Building Educational Quality through Classrooms, Schools and Communities). In close collaboration with the Salvadoran Institute for the Integrated Development of Children and Youth, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the National Secretariat for the Family, and Salvadoran NGOs, EDIFAM addresses four key areas.

To improve the skills of early childhood educators, EDIFAM developed a [manual](#) on early childhood development, care and education and instructed 500 educators in its use. The program also guided 1000 professionals in creating innovative “Family Schools” to foster a positive school-home relationship and improve family members’ ability to raise healthy, school-ready children.

To enhance children’s cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills, EDIFAM provided guidance for teachers and caregivers in the use of a new curriculum. Workshops addressed topics such as the curriculum’s theoretical bases and the use of music, play and theater to help children learn. Follow-up activities, including a pilot Interactive Radio Instruction program, helped to ensure the curriculum is being used.

To promote the ability of public and private sector institutions to provide quality early childhood development

School Readiness

Honduras: EDC/FEREMA Program

Under the 2001 Poverty Reduction Strategy, the government of Honduras established the goal of providing one year of quality preschool education for all children. Additionally, the Honduran proposal for the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative reduced the age for enrolling children in the 1st grade from 7 to 6 and the goal was established to provide one year of preschool education for all children 5 years of age. Increasing preschool coverage of 5 year olds to 100% would take 3,600 new teachers and cost over \$9,000,000 annually in salaries, in addition to the costs for building and equipping more preschool classrooms. A lower cost alternative was needed.

In 2003, USAID/Honduras began working with the Ministry of Education, the Education Development Center (EDC), and with Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andrua (FEREMA) - a local education foundation - to develop an alternative preschool delivery system. Recorded lessons and volunteer educators from local communities are rapidly expanding coverage for one year of preschool education for all children.

During 2004, EDC/FEREMA recorded preschool lessons on CDs, and supplemented them with posters, work books, and guides for the volunteer educators. Fifty-two pilot centers, established with the assistance of NGOs and municipalities, tested the lessons. The volunteer educators received modest stipend of \$25 a month. EDC, FEREMA and the Ministry of Education prepared the volunteers, who generally had no more than a primary education, to use the recorded preschool programs.

In 2005, 180 additional preschool centers are being established with USAID funding, 915 new preschool centers are also opening with financing from Sweden, and another 1,500 centers that use volunteer educators with funding from Taiwan. The initial cost to establish a center is about \$800 for the EDC/FEREMA package developed for the Ministry of Education (a grade book for the volunteer educator, posters, a CD player and CDs, work books, pencils and crayons for children, and preparation for the volunteer educator). The annual recurring cost for one of these centers is less than 1/10th of the annual cost for a traditional preschool center staffed by paid teachers.

Also during 2005, EDC and FEREMA are completing the adaptation of the CD lessons to a radio format.

Continued on p.5

Jordan: ERfKE Support Project (ESP)



On May 11, 2005, Her Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan (top row: second from the left) inaugurated four kindergartens that were renovated by the ESP program.

The Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) initiative is a five-year comprehensive education reform effort by the Government of Jordan that began in July 2003. One of the main goals of the initiative is to provide increased and improved early childhood education.

USAID supports this goal through the Early Childhood Education (ECE) activity under the ERfKE Support Project (ESP) that began in July 2004. USAID aims to assist the Jordanian Ministry of Education (MOE) to:

- Improve the physical quality of public school facilities for ECE by renovating and equipping 100 kindergarten classrooms.
- Equip 20 ECE literacy centers in underprivileged areas of different governorates in Jordan.
- Modernize and update Jordan's national ECE curriculum.
- Strengthen the skills of ECE staff through the professional development of kindergarten teachers, principals, and Ministry staff newly assigned to supervise kindergarten.
- Enable greater parental participation in ECE.
- Promote high quality and accessible ECE in public schools across Jordan.

The ECE component of ESP has supported the MOE education of teachers in more than 250 public kindergartens. The Ministry plans to expand the program to include 10,600 kindergarten children and 1,000 ECE professionals by 2008. The major accomplishments of

Continued on p.5

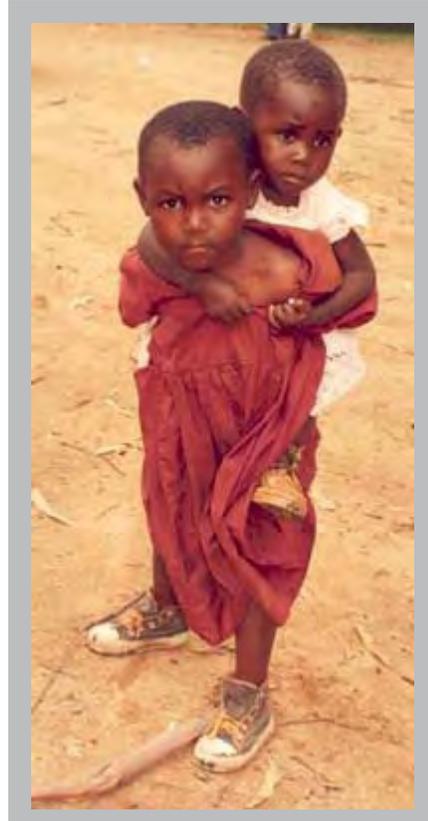
School Readiness

Speak for the Child

Young children are most drastically affected by HIV/AIDS, as they are more vulnerable than older children to disease, malnutrition, and unmet psychosocial needs critical for socialization and survival. Community-based action to support families caring for young children affected by HIV/AIDS is essential to providing the care they need to grow into healthy, contributing members of society. The Academy for Educational Development (AED) has designed and is currently implementing a model program called Speak for the Child (SFC). SFC supports families and communities in Kenya to improve the education, health, and nutrition of orphans and vulnerable children age 0-10 years; 4,665 children are currently being served by SFC and over 9,000 will be served by 2006.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) serve as key partners in the delivery of services and support to children. Through field-tested, intensive and ongoing education and monitoring, SFC insures that a comprehensive, multi-sectoral program of care is delivered and CBO capacity to administer, implement and monitor the program is strengthened. SFC works with CBOs to:

- Recruit and educate household mentors in the SFC home visiting activity in which mentors counsel caregivers on improving their children's health, nutrition, and emotional well-being and facilitate caregiver support groups.
- Collaborate with local Ministry of Education officials to cover preschool fees and monitor preschool and primary school attendance.
- Collaborate with local Ministry of Health officials in order to provide immunizations, and anti-malarial, acute respiratory illness, and de-worming medications.
- Ensure that children have blankets and insecticide-treated bednets and that households have water purification products, soap, seeds and fertilizer, and emergency food, when needed.



Through Speak for the Child, Carol Kakai (age 4) enrolled in preschool and her sister, Salome, (age 2) completed immunizations; they also received blankets, bednets, medications, and supplemental food.

For more information, please visit <http://www.aed.org/Projects/speakforchild.cfm> or contact Jerusha Karuthiru at jkaruthiru@usaid.gov.

School Readiness

From page 1, School Readiness

system, even if they are organized on school property. Parents can be invited to form management communities, make materials or provide rehabilitation for classrooms, and come to school to share their own expertise. Teachers, therefore, are free to use new materials, teach new topics, and take a more child-centered and active approach. The hope is that parents, once empowered through preschool experience, become a force for change in primary school and that teachers and administrators, experiencing the results of new techniques and more active parents, become more open to change. Additionally, via these initiatives parents are encouraged to pursue their own literacy and numeracy.

Whether it is the hope for a more literate populace more prepared to compete in the 21st century marketplace, the commitment to more equitable educational opportunities, or the desire for a more modern education system, many developing country governments have begun exploring early childhood education as a critical first step to improving economic growth and social development.

For more information, please contact Diane Lusk, Ph.D., ECD Advisor for the Global Education Group and Senior Program Manager for the Center on AIDS & Community Health, Academy for Educational Development, at dlusk@aed.org.

¹ Van der Gaag, J. and J. Tan, (1998), *The Benefits of Early Child Development Programs: An Economic Analysis*, Washington, DC: World Bank.

From page 2, EDIFAM

services, EDIFAM built capacity among the national organizations responsible for ECCE and helped to coordinate the efforts of the three groups, which together are developing a strategic plan for the continued improvement of ECCE, services beyond the June 30, 2005, conclusion of EDIFAM.

Finally, to raise general awareness of the importance of child-rearing skills, EDIFAM helped local experts and practitioners develop a public awareness campaign tailored to the Salvadoran context. The campaign's television spots, books, and posters feature *Sesame Street* Muppets and are designed to supply families with ideas and activities they can use in everyday life.

For further information, please visit <http://www.equip123.net/equip1/edifam/> or contact Dr. Carmen Henriquez at CHenriquez@usaid.gov.

From page 3, Honduras

Commercial radio stations are donating a half hour of air time for the daily lessons, which should further expand the coverage of preschool education for children. As a consequence, the coverage of preschool education on the preparatory level for children 5 years of age should increase to about 75% by the end of 2005.

For more information, please see website <http://www.ferema.org/pag/publicaciones.asp> or contact Evelyn Rodriguez-Perez at erodriguez-perez@usaid.gov.

From page 3, Jordan

the ECE component as of April 1, 2005 are:

- Renovated and equipped four public kindergarten classrooms in underprivileged areas in Amman.
- Taught 29 ministry educators in using Jordan's first national kindergarten curriculum.
- Prepared all 258 ECE teachers to use the national kindergarten curriculum.
- Educated the Ministry's 11 ECE supervisors.
- Helped design the organizational structure for the Ministry's new ECE Directorate.
- Started assessing the new national ECE curriculum with the Ministry of Education.

For more information, please see website <http://www.esp-jordan.org> or contact Maha Al-Shaer at mal-shaer@usaid.gov.

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