

WORKING PAPERS IN

Early Childhood Development

56

## Continuity and respect for diversity:

Strengthening early transitions in Peru

By Patricia Ames, Vanessa Rojas and  
Tamia Portugal

STUDIES IN  
Early Childhood  
Transitions



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This working paper is part of a series on early transitions from *Young Lives*, a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Further information about *Young Lives* research is available on the website: [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

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## Executive summary

Starting school is a common experience for millions of children around the world, but it is not the same experience for children everywhere. Children have different experiences which are related to their own characteristics, their families and communities and the schools they attend. This paper explores such diversity through a series of longitudinal case studies of young children in Peru, gathered as part of the *Young Lives* project. Twenty-eight children from four contrasting communities were interviewed in 2007 and again in 2008, in order to determine their views and experiences during the process of transition from home or pre-school into the first grade of primary school. The project also involved their parents and teachers as well as their schools, homes and communities. The children in the sample were selected from a variety of communities in different areas of Peru, from urban and rural communities, with different poverty levels and different proportions of indigenous people. The impact of recent political violence on these communities was also considered. This collection of detailed case studies aims to highlight the common problems, perspectives and experiences that affect many young children in contemporary Peru.

The study described how the availability and access to services for young children (especially pre-school education) has greatly improved in recent years in Peru. However pre-school places are limited, with certain sectors of the population often excluded, particularly those

in greatest poverty, who live in rural areas and who speak an indigenous language. For these children, the availability of, and distance from, pre-school services, the hidden costs of pre-school attendance and the lack of intercultural bilingual education provision were obstacles to equitable access to educational services.

The case studies showed that there were several challenges faced by children in their transition from pre-school to primary school. Children reported discontinuities and contrasts between pre-school and first grade. Teachers reported a lack of coordination and communication between pre-schools and primary schools. Parents saw pre-school as a necessary step in preparing their children for school, but expected this to be a radical change. Another important finding is that young children often encountered physical punishment as part of their first contact with school - which far from helping children, worked against motivation and impacted negatively on their adaptation to primary school.

The study also found that Peru's education system barely acknowledged and did not integrate the country's rich cultural diversity. Children's ethnic and cultural identities remained marginalised and were not considered during the process of school transitions.

Finally, the paper highlighted the fact that young children commonly experienced a social as well as an educational transition. Young children

who were starting school often experienced changes in their roles and responsibilities within the home. They went from being ‘little children’ to more ‘grown up’ children. They gained more responsibility for domestic and productive activities, and in doing so, they developed skills that prepared them to be productive members of their households, especially in rural areas. But the skills and knowledge that children gained at home and in their communities were not recognised by the school system. It produced a particular image of what children can or cannot do at school, rather than a more positive holistic image, based on respect for who they are and what they know, in the broader context of their families and communities.

The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings on education policy and children’s well-being, and proposes four ways in which children’s early educational transitions can be enhanced. The first approach is to strengthen the continuity and collaboration between pre-school and primary school. Giving

priority to educational structures and policies, curriculum planning and pedagogy that help to foster better transitions from pre-school to school is a second approach. The third way of improving children’s early educational transitional experiences is by enhancing the theoretical and practical training of teachers who work with young children. Better communication in school-home relations and more information for parents and teachers on the many challenges young children face will foster more successful transitions. Respect for diversity is still a challenge and more work is needed at school level to respect and meet the needs of indigenous children and their families. Finally, issues of violence must be confronted, both inside and outside school, to ensure children’s rights are protected. In general, pre-schools and primary schools should be more aware of children’s rights and identities, and more proactive in helping their families to find ways to improve their support to children during transition from pre-school to primary school.

## Introduction

The first contact that young children have with any school setting is crucial to the quality of their school experience in later years (Woodhead and Moss 2007, Einarsdóttir 2007, Johansson 2002; Dunlop and Fabian 2002, Margetts 2000). However, little research has been dedicated to contexts beyond Europe, North America and Australasia, up to now. This paper is an attempt to examine this issue in more detail in Latin America, a region where more than 13 million children start first grade every year (UIS-UNESCO 2007). Increasing numbers of children in Latin America are attending school, but starting school is not the same experience for children everywhere on the continent.

Different experiences are determined not only by the individual characteristics of the children, their families and communities but also by the schools they attend. This paper explores such diversity through a series of in-depth, longitudinal case studies of young children in Peru, an Andean country characterised by cultural and geographical diversity. Twenty-eight children from four different and contrasting communities were visited in 2007 and again in 2008, in order to investigate if and how their lives had changed (and their views on and experiences of that change), during the process of transition from pre-school to primary school. The views of parents and teachers were included in order to facilitate better understanding of children's experiences and gain a multiple perspective approach (Griebel and Niesel 2002). Different factors which produce different childhood

experiences and trajectories, such as poverty, ethnicity, gender and location and which affect the quality of children's transitions are reflected in the children's own stories. It is hoped that this research will make a substantial contribution to our understanding of early childhood transitions in majority world contexts and the consequences for later educational trajectories.

The children participating in this research are part of a larger sample followed by *Young Lives*, a 15-year long longitudinal study of childhood poverty, conducted in Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. Two cohorts of children are being studied in detail in each country, comprising 2,000 children born in 2000/1 (the 'younger cohort') and 1,000 children born in 1994/5 (the 'older cohort'). These cohorts were first studied through surveys conducted in 2002, 2006/07, and 2009, with further rounds of data collection planned at regular intervals until 2015. In 2007 and 2008, a sub-sample of both cohorts was studied in qualitative research studies. Early educational transitions has been a particular focus for the *Young Lives* teams in three of the four countries: Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh) and Peru. This report is one of a series of working papers from *Young Lives* called 'Studies in Early Childhood Transitions', which includes a conceptual analysis and literature review (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead 2008), and an overview paper which considers equity and quality issues faced by three of the participating countries, Ethiopia,

India and Peru (Woodhead, Ames, Vennam, Abebe and Streuli 2009), both already published by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. This paper presents the educational and policy context in Peru and provides an in-depth analysis of children's transition experiences in rural and urban communities. The main source of data for this paper is from the younger cohort in Peru, which includes survey data from the first two rounds of the full sample (2002 and 2006/07), as well as qualitative data from the first two rounds of a sub-sample (2007 and 2008). This paper also follows on from a preliminary analysis of early transitions using data from the first round (Ames, Rojas and Portugal 2009).

### The policy context

In Peru, increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood, in the age range from 0–5 years, has led to a shift in priorities over the last few years, and several policy frameworks now acknowledge the key importance of this age group. These include the National Plan of Action for Childhood and Adolescence 2002–2010 (PNIA), the National Education Project 2006–2021 (PEN) and the current government's Anti-poverty Strategy (CRECER). The numbers of children who are accessing pre-school education has been rising steadily in recent years. Enrolment figures are in fact relatively high in Peru, a majority world country, although access to education is yet far from being either universal or equitable among different social groups.

Concern about the beginning of school life in Peru and Latin America was expressed first during the 1990s, when the highest repetition rates were found in the first grade (24 per cent). In 1995, in line with other Latin American countries, the Peruvian Ministry of Education banned repetition in the first grade and introduced automatic promotion. Repetition rates dropped to 5 per cent. However, there has been no assessment of how this has impacted on children's experiences in first grade and whether the quality of education in this grade has been affected. Moreover, repetition rates in the second and third grades increased slightly in subsequent years, indicating that rather than solving the problem, this measure could just be postponing it (Guadalupe et al. 2002).

Simultaneously, educational curriculum reform in the 1990s acknowledged the importance of early educational transitions by combining the last year of pre-school and the first two years of primary school into an integrated curriculum cycle, in order to strengthen curricular continuity and progression. This initiative, however, has not been put into practice in schools and classrooms.<sup>1</sup> However, the importance of first grade and the beginning of primary school has been highlighted again in the educational and policy agenda: the National Education Project (MED-CNE 2006) recommends some specific measures for this phase, such as special training for pre-school and first grade teachers, which acknowledges the importance of continuity and

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<sup>1</sup> Last National Curriculum design (launched in 2006 and then modified in 2008) discontinued this proposed integration, but included education from 0 to 2 years and from 3 to 5 as the first and second cycle, respectively, of basic education.

communication during these early years. Nevertheless, these measures have not yet been implemented, despite there being a current national programme of teacher training (*Programa Nacional de Formación y Capacitación Permanente* (PRONAFCAP). Our research aims to show how the beginning of school life is currently being experienced by children, their parents, teachers and schools, and what factors should be taken in account to improve these experiences.

### Theoretical framework

We approach research with children by viewing them as competent and powerful actors in their own narratives of life (James and Prout 1997, Pascal 2002). We also took into account the views of multiple actors, including the significant adults in these young children's lives, such as parents and teachers (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead 2009). Our framework for research is based on the concept of transitions. Although used in a variety of senses, one generic definition of transitions is 'key events and/or processes occurring at specific periods or turning points during the life course' (Vogler et al. 2008). According to this definition, transitions refer to diverse events, including, (but not solely confined to), educational events. In the field of early education, Dunlop and Fabian (2002:3) provide an overarching definition:

The word 'transition' is referred to as the process of change that is experienced when children (and their families) move from one setting to another. For example, when a child moves from home to pre-school, or from pre-

school to school. It includes the length of time it takes to make such a change, spanning the time between any pre-entry visit and settling-in, to when the child is more fully established as a member of the new setting. It is usually a time of intense and accelerated developmental demands that are socially regulated.

This definition provides temporal and physical boundaries that helped to structure the design and methodology of the study. However, the design was also informed by the ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner (1979), which enabled us to consider not only the setting of the school, but also the interconnected set of contexts or microsystems in which the child and school are located. Our perspective recognises that a transition entails multiple changes: in identity, roles, relations and settings (Griebel and Nielsen 2002, Keining 2002).

We were also aware that transition to primary school has often been associated with the concept of 'readiness', which was defined in terms of a set of predetermined physical, social and cognitive skills children had to possess to fulfil school requirements (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani and Merali. 2007; Woodhead and Moss 2007). Repetition of first grade was explained by inadequate preparation for school, which is affected by poverty, malnutrition, home learning environment and access to early childhood care and education (ECCE) services.

However, more recent research claims that schools must also be ready for children, by offering them a quality service that considers their

characteristics and rights (Myers and Landers 1989; Brostrom 2002; OECD 2006; Woodhead and Moss 2007). Thus, a more up-to-date concept of readiness stresses that it is best understood as ‘the match between the child and the institutions that serve the child’ and requires the participation of families, schools and communities (Woodhead and Moss 2007: 13).

Our main research questions were structured in the broadest terms and did not solely relate to the school environment. We asked for example: What are the key transitions in children’s lives? How are they experienced (particularly in relation to activities, relationships, identities, and well-being)? What influences these experiences? Progressively, we narrowed down the scope of these questions, focusing on the main educational transition that emerged from the research, which was the beginning of primary schooling. Then we inquired into the different perspectives each actor had about this transition, as well as the degree of communication, preparation and collaboration among actors and within settings, and the continuity from one setting to the next when doing the transition. Although we focused on the beginning of schooling, we also looked at the simultaneous changes which children experienced in terms of their roles and responsibilities within the home, through careful observation of home and community settings.

### Research sites, participants and methodology

The *Young Lives* sample is distributed across twenty sites throughout Peru. We selected four

contrasting sites for this study, including different areas of residence (rural/urban); geographical location (Coast, Andean Highlands, Amazon); poverty (poor and non-poor); presence or absence of indigenous population; and degree of impact of recent political violence (post-conflict areas). The communities (named after the province they belong to) are briefly described below:

- *Rioja* is a rural community in the Upper Amazon, in the region of San Martin, located in the north of the country. The village is ten minutes by car from the district capital, about one hour from the provincial capital and three to four hours from the regional capital. The *Carretera Marginal*, an important road connecting several provinces and regions, passes through the village. The village, like most of the region, is populated largely by Spanish-speaking Andean immigrants, and neighbouring villages are largely inhabited by the indigenous Awajun population. The village has 1,673 inhabitants, who work mainly in coffee production and cattle-raising. The village has piped water but no sewage system, and only received its electricity supply in August 2007. There is a pre-school, a primary school and a secondary school in the village as well as a health post. Two neighbouring villages were also visited in this district. One is located next to Rioja, about five minutes by car. It is smaller than Rioja, with about 183 households. It has a pre-school and a primary school, but no secondary school, and similar services: piped water and latrines; electricity was installed in August 2007. The other vil-

lage is even smaller (about 40 households) and 30 minutes from the road side on foot through the forest. There is no pre-school, but a PRONOEI (*Programa No Escolarizado de Educación Inicial* – a non-formal, community pre-school programme), and a multigrade school with two teachers for the six grades of primary school. There is no health service in the village, and no piped water, sewage or electricity.

- *Andahuaylas* is a farming community located in the southern highlands of Peru, at between 3,000 and 3,500 metres in altitude, in one of the poorest regions of the country, Apurímac. The distance by car to the village from the district capital is about 30 minutes by car and it is 45 minutes drive from the provincial capital. The road that connects the provincial capital with the regional capital passes through the village and the regional capital is eight hours in driving time away. The village is inhabited by the Quechua indigenous population. There are about 2,014 inhabitants grouped into 335 households. The population is dedicated mostly to agriculture, with potatoes and corn being main crops and cattle-raising a secondary activity. Houses are scattered amongst the hills, built to be close to the land they cultivate. Piped water and electricity are available, but latrines are limited to only forty households. The village has a pre-school, a primary school and a secondary school, as well as four community centres, providing day care for the youngest children (called *Wawa Wasi*), one PRONOEI and a public health post. This region can certainly be considered a post-conflict area as it has suffered seriously from the political violence in the country between 1980 and 1992.
- *San Román* is a city in the southern Andes, at about 4,000 (metres above sea level [masl]), in the region of Puno. It represents the economic and commercial centre of the region, with a population of over 216,000 people. The city is inhabited not only by Spanish-speaking people, but also by members of the two main indigenous groups in the Andes: Quechua and Aymara. Much of the population is of rural origin and the people keep their links with their birthplaces. Here we worked in four neighbourhoods, the biggest of which had about 3,000 households (15,000 inhabitants) and the smallest had just 143 households (715 inhabitants). The population is largely involved in trade, commerce and the textile industry. In addition to formal and informal trade, the city is also known for smuggling. As an urban settlement, there is electricity, piped water and sewage, as well as telephone and the internet in the four communities. However, only a few streets are paved, while most are not. There is a public pre-school and a public primary school in the main neighbourhood, as well as some private schools, a regional hospital and a recreational park. Secondary schools are available in other nearby neighbourhoods.
- *Lima 3* is also an urban settlement, located in the southern part of Lima, the national

capital. The main neighbourhood we visited had 1,118 households (7,825 people), but some children attend school in the adjacent neighbourhood, so we also included this in the study. Lima 3 is located in one of the districts founded through the illegal occupation of lands in the desert hills surrounding the city, which started back in the 1950s. Today, the district has about 378,000 inhabitants, making it one of the most populous in the capital city. The neighbourhoods are inhabited by people who come from all over the country and new generations born in Lima. Inhabitants are dedicated to a variety of economic activities, from informal trade to teaching. Because it is an urban settlement, there are electricity, piped water, sewage, as well as telephone and internet services. Most streets are paved, but some are not. There are several schools in these and the surrounding neighbourhoods, including public and

private pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools, as well as a community-based day care centre for children aged 6 months to 4 years old (*Wawa Wasi*), PRONOEIs, a vocational centre and an academy preparing students for university admission. There is also a health centre.

In each site we based our work mainly in one community, but in several cases we had to visit neighbouring communities, in order to identify sufficient case study children from within the *Young Lives* sample. Table 1 summarises the number of schools, classrooms and communities visited, that were attended by *Young Lives* case study children. As before, communities remain anonymous, but the name of the province they belong to is indicated.

In each site, we worked with a sub-sample drawn from the main *Young Lives* sample of

*Table 1. Schools, classrooms and communities visited in 2007 and 2008*<sup>2</sup>

Site	Number of communities	Number of schools	Number of pre-school classrooms	Number of 1 <sup>st</sup> grade classrooms	Number of 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms
Rioja	3	4	2	3	1
Andahuaylas	1	1	1	3	0
San Román	4	4	1	2	1
Lima 3	2	4	1	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>

<sup>2</sup> Since we visited more than one community per site in most cases, we also visited more than one school and classroom per site. Some communities had only one school but two classrooms of the same grade; others have more than one school and only one classroom of each grade. For this reason number of communities, schools and classrooms are not exactly the same.



about 2,000 children. The selected sub-sample included at the beginning six children from the Younger Cohort (aged 5–6) from each site, making a total of 24 children, half boys and half girls, half rural and half urban, 25 per cent indigenous and 75 per cent non-indigenous.<sup>3</sup> The children were randomly selected and we found that, of the 24, only six (25 per cent) were already six years old in 2007, while the rest were five years old. Thus we expected that about 75 per cent of the sub-sample would still be in pre-school (or at home), since the mandatory age for starting primary school is six years old.<sup>4</sup>

However, in 2007 ten children were already attending school (nine were in the first grade and one was in the second grade), twelve were in pre-school and two were at home waiting to start first grade the next year. Thus, all but two children in the sub-sample were enrolled in school. This is consistent with the overall sample, which shows an enrolment rate of 78 per cent.<sup>5</sup> The following year we were unable to include five of these children in the study (three had moved out of the place, one was sitting his exams and one girl's mother refused to continue participating). Therefore we included four more children as case studies, previously identified as back-ups.<sup>6</sup> Thus in 2008 we worked with 15

children in the first grade and seven in second grade plus one child in third grade, making a total of 23.

When we visited the children the first time in 2007, those who were in first grade or pre-school had been there for about six to nine months. The following year we visited them in the same period; thus first graders were about six to nine months from the start of school year, as were the second graders.

The educational trajectories identified among the twenty-eight case study children are summarised in Figure 1, which are arranged according to the type of institution they went through.

The trajectories which children followed through the school system depended on the opportunities and resources available to them. Thus in rural areas, families were mainly reliant on public services and usually had little choice of accessible school. In contrast, in urban settings there were several schools (both public and private) to choose from, of varying type and quality. The search for better educational opportunities has been identified one of the factors that encourages migration to the cities (Crivello 2009, Locley, Altamirano and Copestake 2008).

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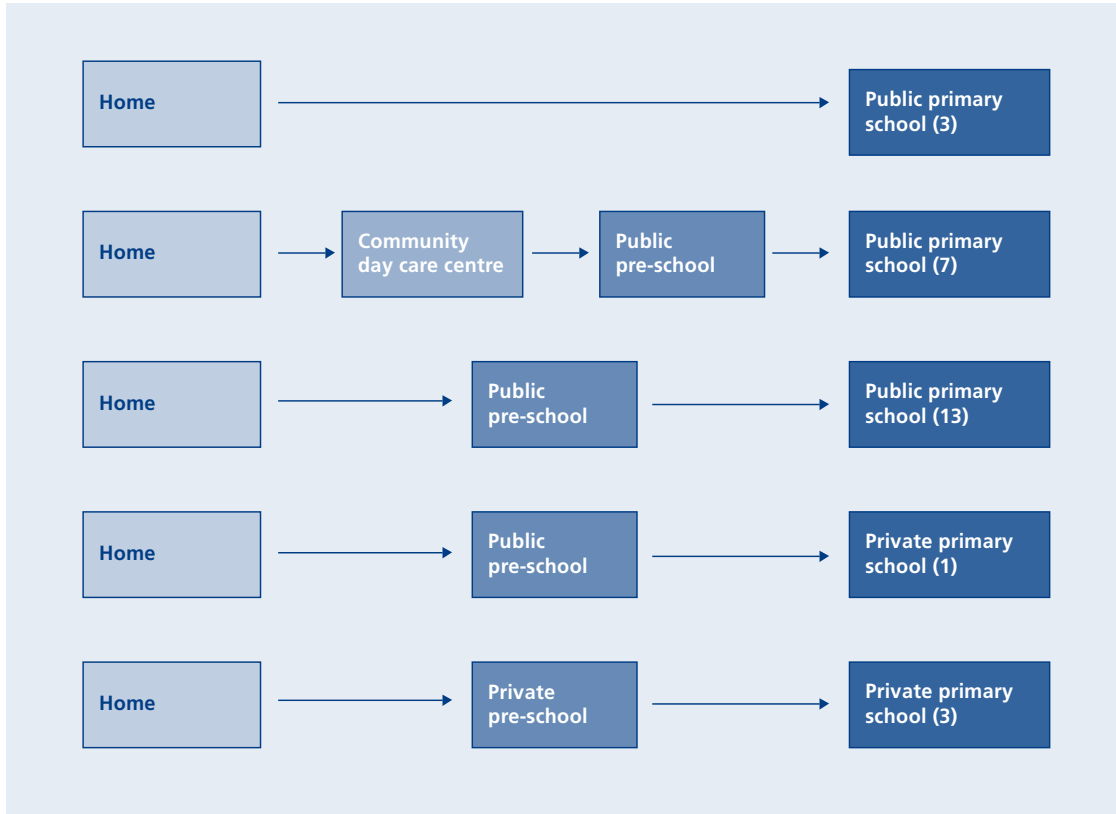
<sup>3</sup> Here ethnicity is defined narrowly, taking into account mother tongue as declared in the household survey.

<sup>4</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> birthday should be before June 30 of the school year in which the child is enrolled in first grade. Children referred here as having 5 were turning 6 after that date or the following year.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the age of the Younger Cohort children at the time of the survey (four to five years old), most of them were still in pre-school but were already enrolled in primary school at the time of our visit, a year later, and thus this percentage may be higher at that time.

<sup>6</sup> There was no back up children in one of the villages where one girl was missing. However we hope to track her again in our future visits.

Figure 1. Trajectories among case study children



Thus, we plan to monitor whether or not these children remain in the same school trajectories (notably public versus private school) over time. Urban parents may decide to move their children from a private school to a public one for financial reasons. Parents may move their children from public schools to private ones if they are perceived as being better, and if financial resources allow for it. For rural children this may also involve migration to a larger town. At the time of the second survey, few parents of the younger cohort moved from private to public education (0.5%), or from public to private schools (1.4%). However, their children were still

very young, and these changes may increase in the future as they progress through the educational system.

We use a mixed method approach (Clark and Moss 2001, Dockett and Perry 2005, Crivello et al 2009) in our research work with the children, their caregivers and parents. This paper is based on interviews with parents (28), teachers (17) and children (28), participatory discussions with children, and classroom observations at pre-school (five classrooms) and primary levels (eleven first grade and three second grade classrooms). Data from two previous surveys of the

broader sample of *Young Lives* children (in 2002 and 2006/7) was also used to complement the analysis and provide contextual information.

Qualitative data was analysed using two different and complementary strategies. On the one hand, we used a set of thematic codes based on literature about educational transitions in the early years and the factors that affect them. Then we analysed all the data collected in each round using Atlas ti (specialist software for analysing qualitative data), establishing trends, similarities and differences within and across sites – and termed it a horizontal reading.

On the other hand we developed extended profiles of the case study children by putting together all the information we had for a particular child (his or her own interview, interviews with the child's parents and teacher, and home, community and classroom observation for that particular child) – and termed it a vertical reading. This allowed us to build a mosaic with different types of data, triangulate the information and construct rich pictures of children lives and transitions.

In this paper we report on what we found among all the children participating in this research. Although each child is unique, they also share common challenges, perspectives and experiences and so there are similar issues appearing in different contexts. There are also differences from context to context that were identified and analysed. We highlight some of the most important issues that emerged in the study through detailed case studies of nine of our case study

children, because they illustrate major themes that emerged from the whole group and represent the diversity of situations we found.

## Structure of the paper

In Chapter 1 we briefly introduce the educational context in Peru, the changes observed in recent years, and how they reflect a more positive attitude towards early childhood service provision. Despite these generally positive trends, we acknowledge that access to pre-school services is not universal and far from equitable, especially when focusing on particular sectors of the population. The second part of Chapter 1 focuses on the lack of access to pre-school for particular groups of children through a series of case study examples, and the implications for their educational trajectories.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the majority of children in our sample who do have access to pre-school and primary education. In this chapter we highlight the main challenges posed by the current educational system, including the lack of continuity between different phases, limited levels of communication among parents and teachers in this transition, and the lack of preparation at institutional and individual levels to cope with early childhood transitions. We use detailed case studies of several children to demonstrate a fragmented and uncoordinated educational system which pays little attention to ensuring continuity during the first years of school.

Chapter 3 looks at the educational system in Peru from the perspective of cultural and lan-

guage diversity. Case studies from a Quechua indigenous community show us an education system that is unable to accommodate the many different childhoods in Peru, in terms of ethnic, cultural and language identity. These case studies also show us different (and longer) early childhood transitions than those observed in the previous chapter, since children in this community attend a community-based day care centre (known as *Wawa Wasi*) from the very earliest months of life.

Chapter 4 sets the study of educational transitions in a broader context. It focuses on the changes in roles and responsibilities that children experience in the context of their families and communities, and shows that other transitions are taking place in parallel with the beginning of their school life which may be impacting on it. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses our main findings and the implications they have for policy and research.

## Chapter 1: Who goes to pre-school... and who does not?

### An overview of early childhood education in Peru

In Peru, although enrolment for primary education is almost universal (94 per cent), this is not the case for pre-school and secondary school (64 per cent and 75 per cent, respectively), although both are also considered to be part of a basic education (MED 2009). The education system offers basic education from 0 to 16 years old (although pre-school is only compulsory at five years old). Table 2 shows some key features of the structure of the education system.

Currently, basic education includes provision for children under two years old by the Ministry of Education in a variety of programmes. There is also an important Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme run by the Ministry of Women and Social Devel-

opment, called *Wawa Wasi*, which operates in community-based day care centres for children from six months to four years old. However, the degree of access that young children have to ECCE services is still very limited. Only 4.9 per cent of children up to two years old have access to educational services offered by Ministry of Education (MED 2009). As for the *Wawa Wasi* programme, it caters for 4.2 per cent of their target population (Cueto et al 2009).

Pre-school education for children age three to five years is offered mainly through formal pre-schools (similar to kindergartens) and non-formal, community-based programmes, called PRONOEI.<sup>7</sup> The main difference between these two services is the administrative arrangements and the degree of community emphasis. Pre-schools have a certified pre-school teacher whereas PRONOEIs have an ‘animator’, usually a

Table 2. Data on the structure of and enrolment in the Peruvian educational system

Educational level	Normative age	Number of compulsory years	Enrolment	% girls in relation to absolute enrolment	% enrolment in private education against total enrolment
Pre-school	0-2	0	no data	no data	no data
	3-5	1	1,114,885	49	21
Primary	6-11	6	4,077,361	49	16
Secondary	12-16	5	2,691,311	50	22

Source: Global Education Digest 2007. UNESCO-UIS

<sup>7</sup> Programa No Escolarizado de Educación Inicial (Non schooled programme of preschool education).

woman from the community who is trained by a pre-school teacher. The community provides the building and furniture for this programme. PRONOEIs are located in poor rural and urban areas and are a cheaper alternative to formal pre-schools. The cost per student in a PRONOEI is less than half than the cost per student in a formal pre-school (Uccelli 2009). Coverage for pre-school, either formal or non-formal, is not yet universal; currently just 64 per cent of children aged three to five have access to pre-school education (MED 2009).<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, availability of, and access to, educational services, have improved greatly in recent years in Peru, especially for pre-school education. Indeed, between 1998 and 2007, the number of pre-schools (both formal and non-formal) has increased by 22 per cent, although the population of children from 3 to 5 years old –the age range to attend pre-school- have decreased both in absolute and relative terms (-4 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 appear in the

2007 national census versus the 1993 census).<sup>9</sup> Formal pre-schools show a higher growth rate (30 per cent) than non-formal ones (15 per cent), whilst primary schools only grew by 10 per cent (Table 3) but have shown almost universal enrolment since the end of the 1990s (MED 2009).<sup>10</sup>

This expansion allowed for greater access, and enrolment in pre-school has been rising steadily, as shown in Figure 2. There has been a significant growth in the last two decades. In 1985 only 24 per cent of children between three and five years old were enrolled in pre-school but twenty-two years later this figure rose to 64 per cent.

In all but two of the communities being studied pre-school, primary and secondary education was available for children living in the village within a short walking distance of their homes. The two communities which did not have a secondary school were rural (next to Rioja), and were located about 30 minutes walk from

*Table 3. Increase in the number of schools 1998-2007 by type*

School	1998	2007	% increase
<b>Pre-school</b>	31140	38077	22
Formal pre-school	14812	19373	30
Non-formal pre-school	16328	18704	15
<b>Primary school</b>	32,734	36,006	10

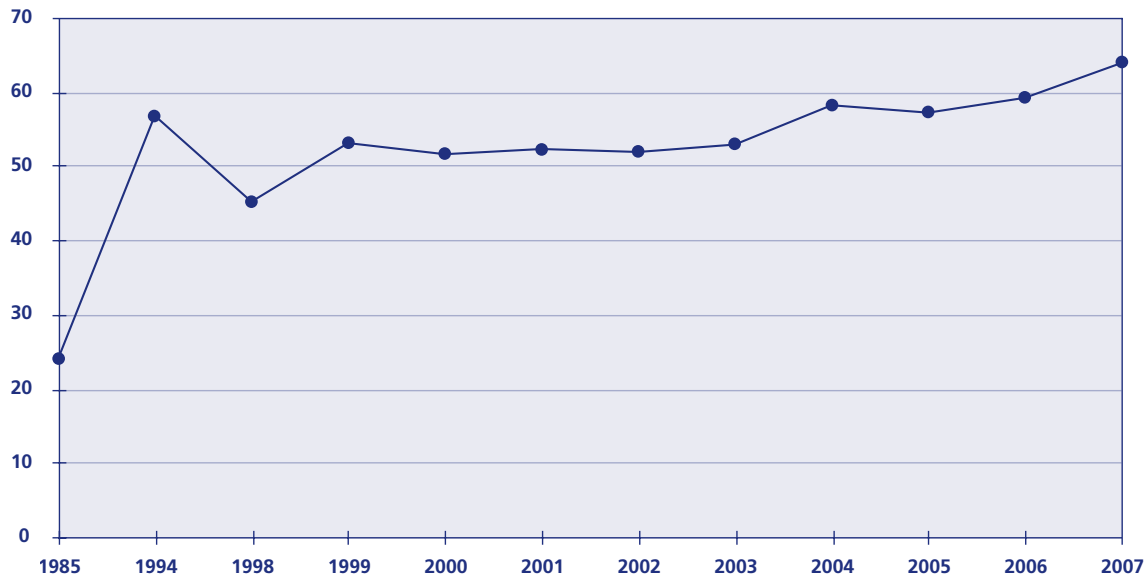
Source: ESCALE – Estadística de la Calidad Educativa. Cifras de la educación en el Perú 1998–2008

<sup>8</sup> Net enrolment rate.

<sup>9</sup> Calculation based in the data from the National Statistics Institute (INEI).

<sup>10</sup> Children's population from 6 to 11 years old –the age range for attendance at primary school-, increased by 2% from 1993 to 2007.

Figure 2. Evolution of pre-school enrolment (%) among children 3-5 years old 1985-2007



Source: ESCALE – Estadística de la Calidad Educativa. Indicadores de la Educación en el Perú 1998-2007

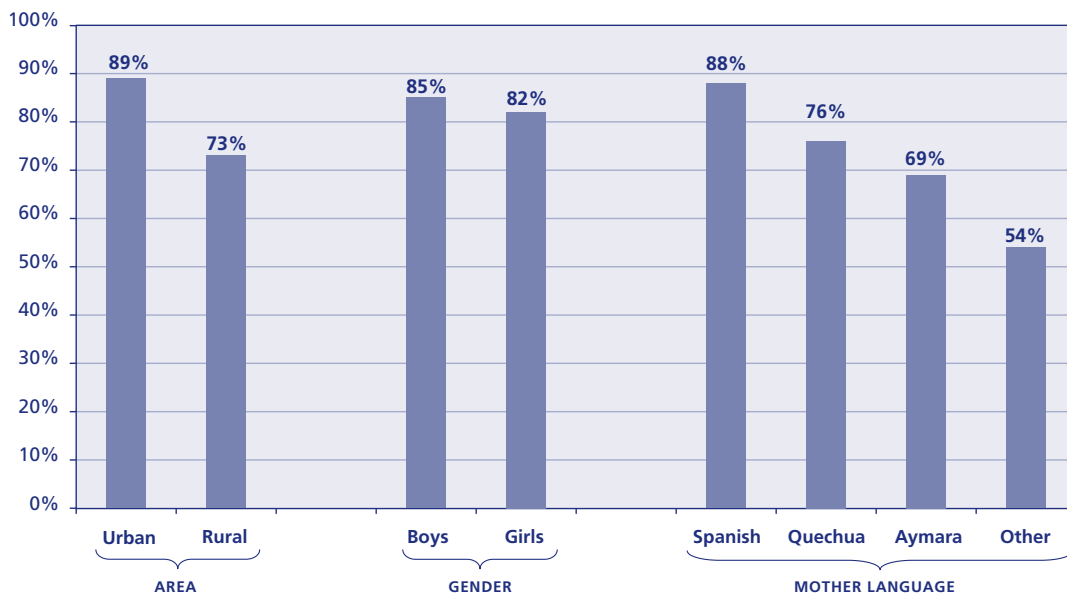
a village that had one. One of these two communities had a PRONOEI instead of a formal pre-school. In the urban areas visited, access to education was relatively good. Although not all levels of education were always available in the same neighbourhood, they were accessible in a nearby neighbourhood within walking distance.

Although there was a pre-school service in every community within our sub-sample, not all communities in the whole sample have such services. In contrast to primary school education which is available in 93 per cent of the communities in the whole sample (and is located nearby for a further five per cent), formal pre-school is available in just 76 per cent of them, and is located nearby for another 13 per cent. However, as we will see later, 'nearby' may be not near

enough for young children to be able to attend. Non-formal pre-school education (PRONOEI) is available in 50 per cent of the communities within the full sample, and may be located in the same area as formal pre-schools, especially in urban areas. These figures show that the availability of pre-school services is still lower than that of primary education services.

Access to pre-school services is far from equal and varies according to social groups. Figure 3 shows the variations of pre-school enrolment among the population, in the full *Young Lives* sample of nearly 2000 children. This figure shows that pre-school enrolment, although high in general for the full sample (81 per cent), is higher in urban than rural areas. In the latter, patterns of residence are dispersed and settlements are

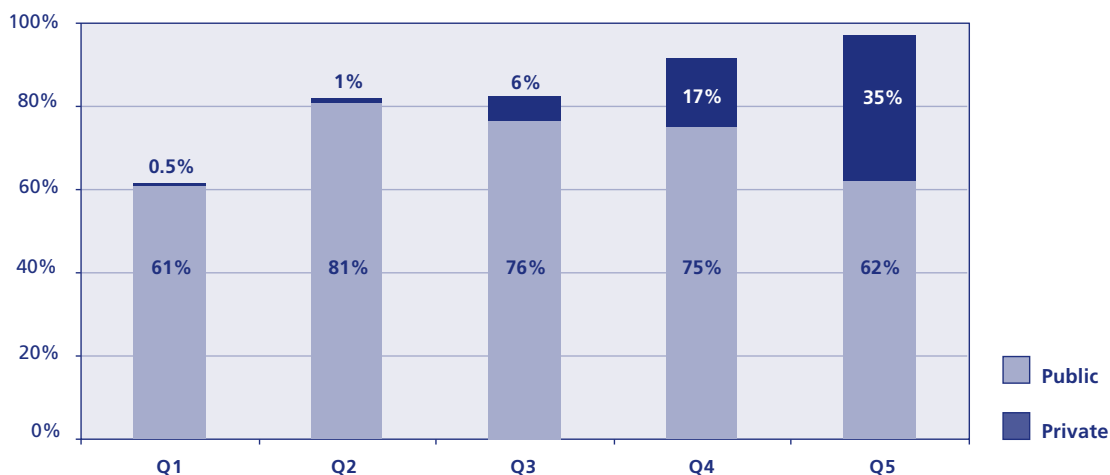
Figure 3. Pre-school enrolment according to area of residence, gender and mother tongue



\* Estimates do not account for sample design

Source: Escobar et al 2008 *Young Lives* Second Round Data, Peru Country Analysis Report

Figure 4. Enrolment in public and private pre-schools according to wealth quintiles (Q)



Source: *Young Lives* Second Round Data, Peru



smaller, factors that, taken together with lower provision, help to explain a lower enrolment rate. Pre-school enrolment is also higher among Spanish-speaking children in contrast with indigenous children. Gender differences appear to be small overall but, as we will see later, they are significant when they are considered along with other factors. This is consistent with trends in national statistics.

Furthermore, poverty strongly influences access to pre-school, as shown in Figure 4. Once we examine the YL sample according to poverty quintiles (five groups of the same size), the inequity in access is evident.<sup>11</sup> The poorest quintile of the population (Q1) shows an enrolment rate 36% lower than the less poor group (Q5), where access is almost universal. It is also clear that one-third of children are enrolled in private pre-schools in the more economically advantaged quintile (Q5) - a situation that is extremely rare for the poorest quintiles (Q1 and Q2).

The three most important factors which influence children's access to pre-school are poverty levels, ethnicity and location, as we will see in more detail in this paper. The issues surrounding inequity in early schooling and differences in the quality of education services are also explored in more depth in another paper in this series (Woodhead et al 2009).

In summary, despite the evidence of the increasing importance of pre-school education in Peru, about one-third of children between three and five years old are not attending pre-school.

Our research shows that pre-school enrolment is subject to several factors, which are related to availability and access to pre-school services, the hidden costs associated with pre-school enrolment, and the perceived need (or not) for an earlier and more continuous educational experience. The rest of this chapter addresses these issues through the case studies of two girls, Carmen and Cecilia, who are the same age, but live in contrasting settings and face different kinds of obstacles in accessing pre-school education.

### **Barriers to pre-school access – case studies in rural and urban sites**

Three of the households we visited as part of this study included children (all girls) who have not had any pre-school experience. Two are from a rural village in Rioja and one is from a major city in the Andes, San Román. Although few, these cases clearly revealed the different type of obstacles children and their families living in poverty must face in order to gain access to pre-school education. We selected one case in each setting to show the different factors that produced the lack of enrolment at pre-school level.

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<sup>11</sup> Poverty is measured here through a composite index which combines three different variables: a) household materials, b) home basic services -electricity, drinking water, cooking fuel, and c) durable goods.

*'I don't want to have her walking alone': Carmen and the little girls in rural areas*

Two girls in the rural village did not attend pre-school for the same reason - physical access – which is a common problem in rural areas. This and the availability of services are important issues for pre-school education, especially considering the age of the children and the legitimate concerns their parents may have about their safety. In the previous section we showed that for the full sample, availability of pre-school services was still lower than that of primary education services. In rural areas, the presence of a pre-school in the village and strategies to guarantee access are even more critical because of geographical characteristics and settlement patterns characterised by dispersion. If we check enrolment rates, we see that whilst 89 per cent of urban children in the overall sample are enrolled in pre-school, only 73 per cent of rural children are enrolled.<sup>12</sup> Within the full *Young Lives* sample, gender disparities were not wide overall. However, if considering gender along with location of residence, we find that it is rural girls who show the lowest enrolment rate of all groups, at 69.9 per cent, a trend also

identified in national statistics, where rural girls show even a lower figure (52 per cent).

In our sub-sample, all the children with no pre-school experience are girls.<sup>13</sup> Rural girls' educational trajectories are especially prone to delays and issues of age, as several studies have shown (Montero 1995; Oliart 2004; Ames 2005; Montero 2006). Rural girls who experience delays in their school trajectories (such as late entry to first grade or repetition during primary years) are more at risk of dropping out of primary school early, or of completing primary education only. This is expressed in a popular saying, 'the age overcomes them', which means that they have already reached an age and maturity status that conflicts with school demands.<sup>14</sup> If more rural girls than any other group are entering school without pre-school experience, which may cause delays or repetitions in their school trajectories, this will have significant consequences for their ability to finish their primary education and go on to attend secondary school.<sup>15</sup>

The case of Carmen, who lives in a rural village in the Upper Amazon, shows there are indeed strong reasons for not sending her to pre-school,

<sup>12</sup> Gaps of enrolment in pre-school in urban and rural areas are wider in national statistics: 72 per cent vs. 53 per cent net enrolment rate for urban and rural children respectively (MED 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Although two are rural girls and one is urban, the latter is from a family with a rural background.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as we have seen when researching the older cohort, older girls are in charge of several important domestic activities, from caring for siblings to cooking and cleaning. In addition, they participate more intensively in economic activities, such as herding the flock, sowing and harvesting, and even selling of agricultural products. Demands from home compete with school time, but also create a contrasting status, as they are grown-up in one scenario and little girls in the other.

<sup>15</sup> Despite the outstanding figures of almost universal primary school enrolment, a large proportion of rural girls and teenagers remain excluded from the educational system and risk becoming functional illiterates. An expression of recognition of this problem is Law 27558 for the Promotion of Rural Girls' and (Female) Teenagers' Education, approved in 2001.

but demonstrates nicely the ways the family tries to compensate for this.

When we visited her for the first time in 2007, Carmen was five years old and spent her time at home, eagerly waiting to attend school the following year. She lived with her parents and teenage sister. Her house is about 20 minutes walk along the main road from home to pre-school. Carmen's mother considered this to be too dangerous for a little girl walking alone and preferred her to stay at home until first grade. When we interviewed her mother in 2007, she had a positive attitude towards pre-school education but was concerned about the risks to her daughter in getting there. She (or her husband) was unable to take Carmen to school as they had to go early to work on their land. Her older sister was unable to take her either as she started secondary school two hours earlier. The mother therefore tried to give her some basic instruction at home, such as letters and numbers, and gave her 'homework' so Carmen would get more familiar with school routines.

Carmen's mother thus made a significant effort to compensate for her daughter's lack of pre-school experience and to prepare her for first grade through school-like activities. When we visited them for the second time in 2008, we found Carmen already attending first grade in the public school at her village, walking there in the company of other children who live close to her house. Carmen's mother reflected on the reasons for her decision the previous year as well as her strategy for dealing with the situation, acknowledging that 'more learning' was taking place in the school setting:

"I did not send her to pre-school because of fear of the cars, to have her walking alone (along the main road). Since I could not send her to pre-school, I had to teach her myself (...) her name, the vowels, she learned the alphabet, she also learned to read a bit. But she did not know what she knows now: now she knows more, she is going to school and the teacher teaches her." (Carmen's mother, Rural Rioja)

Although her mother was the main person who helped her with preparing for primary school, Carmen was helped by her entire family. Her sister set her homework assignments and her father supervised her work and asked her not to paint beyond the line (a sign of neat work, highly valued in school). Carmen's parents have limited education, her mother attended school up to the fourth grade and her father completed primary school but did not go on to secondary education. Her sister is the most highly educated in the family as she attends secondary school. Despite these limitations and their inability to grant access formal preschool education, Carmen's family played an important role in preparing her for her transition to primary school.

The decision of rural parents to send their children to pre-school is usually influenced by ease of access to this particular service (i.e. distance) and by their attitudes towards pre-school. As we will see in the next chapter, a growing number of parents consider attendance at pre-school to be important for their children. In some cases, the issue receives priority and actually influences family decisions. For example, a caregiver from the older cohort in Carmen's village explained

to us that she and her husband were living in a remote farming area when their two children were little, far from the village. However, when the children were three and four years old, they moved to a village so that both children could attend pre-school. In this case, the value assigned to pre-school strongly influenced parental decisions, despite geographical limitations. This contrasts with the case of Carmen, where difficulties of geographical access, and lack of resources to overcome it, outweighed the importance of pre-school education.

However, it must be said that Carmen also played her part. She was highly motivated to go to school, as it was clear from our first conversations with her in 2007:

“INTERVIEWER – How do you think first grade will be? How do you imagine it?

CARMEN – Nice (...) I am going to paint, to draw, to do homework.

INTERVIEWER – What else are you going to do in first grade?

CARMEN – They will give us milk (...), bread.

INTERVIEWER – What would happen if someone tells you are not going to go to school?

CARMEN – I would cry.

INTERVIEWER – Would you be sad if you were not going to school?

CARMEN – Yes.”

During our first visit, Carmen participated in a child-led tour of the first grade classroom by two girls attending it (organised by the research team). From this visit she got to know more about the school and she appeared to like it very

much. In fact Carmen actively looked for information about the school, by asking neighbouring children, who were already attending first grade, as her mother told us the following year, when she reflected on Carmen’s feelings about starting school:

“She couldn’t wait to go to school, she was very happy, she asked her friends what they do (...) they told her what they do and she asked what they (the school) asks for (...) and then she told me ‘Mum, you should buy me this and this, they are going to ask, my clothes, my books’, then we have to buy for her, she was very happy.” (Carmen’s mother, Rural Rioja)

This positive attitude, the support of her family, the enthusiasm she showed about starting school and her personality all converged to produce a positive transition for Carmen, as we observed in 2008 when we visited her again. From the start she performed very well at school. She found the school work easy to do. She liked her teachers. Carmen had three teachers during the first six months of her first year of primary education, due to maternity leave, appointing replacement and absenteeism.

The frequent change of teachers could be disturbing for Carmen and her classmates, who were relating to a new adult outside of their family for the first time. In that sense, the school should try to avoid such changes for the benefit of children and their adaptation to a particular teacher, an issue we will explore more in depth in next chapter. Fortunately for Carmen, she

got on well with all of her teachers. She is a well-behaved girl and does her homework, and thus she was never punished by her teachers - in contrast with other classmates, whose stories will be examined in the next chapter. Although she did not get punished, Carmen was aware of what happened in her classroom:

“INTERVIEWER – What happens if you don’t do homework?”

CARMEN – The teacher hits us... with the ruler... on your hand

INTERVIEWER – Did the teacher hit you?

CARMEN – No... because I do the homework

INTERVIEWER – Do you think it is good the teacher hits your classmates?

CARMEN – No... sometimes they don’t do homework, they get hit, they don’t do it nicely, they get hit, they do it wrong, they get hit.”

Despite not having attended pre-school, Carmen managed to adapt well to first grade, thanks to the support from her family, school preparation at home, and not only her positive attitude but also her behaviour, which matched the teachers’ expectations (obedience, order, responsibility, etc.) Teacher David, her last teacher, speaks highly about her and highlights all these qualities:

“If I had to describe that little girl, I would say she is very good, excellent, complete. She can compete with any child in first grade... academically, in any sense, in all aspects, she is a complete girl. This girl is excellent, in her academic performance, she works very rapidly, (she is) very intelligent, she under-

stands quickly. (She is) responsible, organised, punctual.” (David, first grade teacher, Rural Rioja)

Carmen’s story seems to be one of a successful transition, in the sense that she adapted to school well, and her teachers valued her and her abilities to learn and to do school work. She managed to overcome her lack of pre-school experience, which could have been a handicap as we will see next, through the different resources she had at hand. Nevertheless, this may not be always the case for those children without pre-school experience, and Carmen may be an example of those very few special cases that another teacher refers to:

“There are some children (without pre-school) who are very smart and they get easily and quickly to the same level [of children with pre-school], but sadly there are others who can’t do that and you know that in primary school you do a little bit of preparation [aprestamiento] for about two months, no more, and those two months are not enough for a child who hasn’t been in pre-school (...)” (Pia, second grade teacher, Urban, San Román)

Indeed, Carmen seems to be more the exception than the rule. When we interviewed teachers, we found that most of them echoed what teacher Pia said - lack of pre-school experience was a problem for a child’s adaptation to school. In general, teachers considered that pre-school was a necessary and fundamental step to attending primary school, since it enabled children

to acquire the motor and cognitive skills, and the knowledge and social skills that would help them to adapt to first grade. If they didn't attend pre-school, they didn't even know 'how to hold a pencil', an example repeatedly used by teachers. Teacher Pia again provided us a clear explanation for this:

“[Pre-school] is where they learn the colours, the numbers, the vowels, they distinguish sizes, shapes; that will be helpful for them when entering first grade. Imagine they enter like void, zero; obviously that child cannot work in the same way that as the other child and then it is a problem. (...) (Also) when a child has no pre-school, in a way, he makes the teacher fall behind, because you cannot go ahead (with school work) if the child is falling behind (the group).” (Pia, second grade teacher, Urban, San Román)

This teacher also raised the issue of how lack of pre-school education affects the teacher's own progress: having a mixed group, with children prepared unevenly (with and without pre-school experience) forces the teacher to slow down, so the ones with less preparation can 'catch up' with the rest. Nevertheless, there is limited time in the school year to do that (and no organised support or materials). As a result some children will remain behind. This situation also reveals how first grade teachers are not

necessarily prepared for diversity, although it is highly likely a first grade class would be a diverse group in terms of abilities and development.

Research evidence has shown that lack of pre-school education affects educational achievement. Cueto and Díaz (1999) found that children with pre-school experience perform better than children with no pre-school experience. Also Díaz (2007) indicates that the length of pre-school experience is also related to learning outcomes, as only children with at least two years of pre-school experience achieve better than their peers. More recently, the National Student Examination (ECE) conducted in 2008 among second graders includes for the first time the pre-school background of students, and its results suggest that those children who had pre-school experience outperform those who had not. For example, almost half (47 per cent) of children with no pre-school score below the basic level in language tests, and only 22 per cent of children with pre-school experience score below the basic level in the same tests. Also, whilst 21 per cent of children with pre-school experience achieve the learning outcomes set for second grade in language (level 2), only 7 per cent of children with no pre-school reach that level (UMC 2009).<sup>16</sup> Although these results are far from being ideal (in terms of levels of achievement), they show that pre-school education can make a significant difference to children's school

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<sup>16</sup> The ECE covered 80% of schools and 71% of students in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. It was not applied in bilingual schools. It included tests in language and mathematics and was applied at the end (November) of the school year. Results are reported by achievement levels, which are 3: Level 2 means achievement of the learning outcomes set for second grade; level 1 means the learning outcomes set for second grade are in process to be achieved; below level 1 means level 1 learning outcomes are not achieved yet.

outcomes. These results at national level echo what international research shows: that high-quality pre-school education can improve children's school readiness and school performance, especially for low-income children (Barnett 1995, 2001, Laosa 2005, Arnold et al 2007, Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead 2009)

Although Carmen seems well adjusted in her first grade, and her home preparation has contributed to this, her lack of pre-school education may have an impact on her future educational trajectory. Studies such as the well-known work by Shirley Brice Heath (1983) have shown that although some children may perform well at the beginning of their school career because of basic familiarity with school demands, the lack of development of specific ways to use language and thought may affect them in the higher grades, when more complex tasks are required. Whether or not this happens is something we will have the chance to examine because of the longitudinal nature of our study and the visits we will carry out in the coming years.

Finally, another dimension to consider in relation to the lack of pre-school education, as an urban teacher reminds us, is the social and emotional side of the situation faced by children without pre-school experience and the bigger effort the teacher needs to make:

“Children who have not gone through pre-school are the ones that face more problems, because they have to learn to socialise with other children ... children who come from pre-school are already friends ... they know,

they have an idea about how to work, they have some knowledge, for them it is easy to adapt. For children who have never left home: there is the problem. Because it is going to be a time they will spend apart from the mother. For them, you have to know, you have to be very patient... they start to cry, don't they? They cry and want to go soon, or get nervous and don't want to eat.” (Maria, first grade teacher, Urban, Lima 3)

To address the difficulties this lack of preparation may entail, and also the diversity of ways in which children with no pre-school experience cope with the beginning of first grade, we turn now to the case of Cecilia, who had a different home experience and a different perspective on school before she started attending it.

### **The case of Cecilia: Hidden costs**

Cecilia is the youngest of eight siblings in an Aymara family of rural origin that lives in the Andean City of San Román. Like her older siblings, she has not attended pre-school. When we first visited her in 2007 she was five years old, and we were told by her parents that she would be enrolled next year in first grade. In 2008 we visited her again to find that, indeed, she was attending first grade. In 2007 her mother explained to us that it was too costly for her to send all her children to pre-school, but she wanted them to attend primary school. Besides, at that time she thought her little girl was too young for pre-school, since the correct age to go to school was six, to start first grade. Cecilia was afraid of school because of what she had heard

about it from her older sisters. Her mother was aware of this but had decided that she would attend first grade in the next school year, whether she liked it or not. And so it happened.

In the case of Cecilia, geographical access was not an issue as there is a public pre-school very close to her house, just a short walking distance away. However, her mother raised economic reasons for not sending her child to school, which can be justified in an impoverished family economy of ten people. Although pre-school education in Peru is free in public schools, there are several 'hidden costs', such as uniforms, school materials, contributions to parents' associations, contributions to school lunches, and other expenses, which may be monetary or involve voluntary work such as cooking or cleaning. Teachers often complain about the lack of educational materials which they require (but the government does not provide) and the difficulties of getting parents to buy these supplies, especially in rural and poor urban areas:

"The building is OK, but our classroom needs improvement, a lot, because to work with learning corners requires a lot of materials. For example, for a reading corner, a library, with good books, newspapers, magazines, a comfortable place for them to sit, cushions or something like that, you know? For mathematics there should be games, puzzles. But we cannot do that because of economics. If we ask parents, they hardly give anything for enrolment. If we ask for something else, they protest against it. And we just try to do things. [...] The Ministry [of Education] does not provide anything. I

heard they provide some learning materials for primary schools but for pre-school they don't. I see private [pre-schools] with books, children paint, look, recognise, do, it eases the job [to have materials] and the child is more into it, right? But we have to do with what we have [...] Asking the state does not work, it does not support us, and it has to come from the institution [school]. [...] Here we do not have much income, so we can't [provide enough materials]; we need to calculate all the things we need." (Verónica, pre-school teacher, Rural, Rioja)

Teachers also report that parents complain that pre-school materials are usually very expensive, even more so than in primary school. This may affect their decision on how many years they send their children to pre-school, an issue we will address in the next chapter.

Furthermore, more studies should also consider how economic constraints interact with attitudes and values. Thus, for example, if pre-school is seen as not important or necessary, it is not worth investing so much in it. Another caregiver from the same city of San Román explained that she only enrolled her son in pre-school because of her older children, who insisted on it, and because of the certificate, which would mean that he would not have trouble gaining access to primary school. This statement makes it clear that she did not see pre-school education as valuable in itself. This happened also in the case of Cecilia's mother, who has very limited schooling (two years) and had never attended pre-school. When we visited her for the second time, in 2008, Cecilia's



mother reflected back and acknowledged that in the previous year her daughter was ‘more of a baby’. This helps to understand her reluctance to send Cecilia to pre-school, since she considered her too young to start studying. In contrast, at the time of our second visit, when the girl was already attending first grade, Cecilia’s mother saw her daughter as ‘bigger’ than last year, and her relationship with her had changed, since the girl was spending more time with her sisters and less time with her mother.

Within this scenario of economic constraints, parents had different perceptions about the right time for a child to start school, and some of them attributed limited value to preschool education. Cecilia approached the beginning of primary school with fear and concern. It is not that she lacked information about school, quite the contrary - her siblings had told her about their experiences, and this was precisely the source of her concern:

“INTERVIEWER – What have you heard about the school? Is it nice? What are the teachers like with students?

CECILIA – Some are bad

INTERVIEWER – What they do to children?

CECILIA – They hit you [...]

INTERVIEWER – Don’t you want to go to school?

CECILIA – No

INTERVIEWER – But you are going anyway?

CECILIA – Yes, but by force

INTERVIEWER – Will you be forced? And what would you do?

CECILIA – I will cry.”

In 2007 Cecilia was afraid of the school but she was also aware she had to go, and her mother also made it clear she would go even if she didn’t want to. When we visited Cecilia the following year, she had already started first grade, in the same school as her sisters. Her mother considered she had adapted well, and the company of her sisters was good for her, so she wouldn’t go to school feeling ‘sad’ or crying. They walked together to school and accompanied each other. Nevertheless, when we asked about her first day at the school, and whether she liked it or not, she shook her head, saying it was because ‘*I didn’t know anyone*’.

Several months later however Cecilia looked less concerned and said she liked going to school and learning; she liked drawing and she learned some reading. She didn’t like her teacher very much, though, because he sometimes punished them and kept them in at break time. Her fears were not completely misplaced, and Cecilia seems not to quite understand all the reasons for punishment at school:

“INTERVIEWER –What is your teacher like?

CECILIA – He is mean [...] he does not make us run [play] [...] [if] we don’t finish homework, nobody gets school break [...] he punishes you when you don’t do homework [...] with *san martín* [local name for whip] on your leg

INTERVIEWER – Did he hit you with *san martín*?

CECILIA – Yes [...] I did my homework

INTERVIEWER – Then why he punished you?

CECILIA – I don’t know.”

Cecilia wasn't as lucky as Carmen, and she did report being hit by her teacher. Her mother could not support her, as Carmen's mother did, either before or during the transition to first grade, given her limited educational experience (two years of schooling). But her sisters (ten and eight years old) were an important support, accompanying her to, and in, the school. One of her older sisters (15) is her main help with homework, as in Carmen's case. But in contrast with Carmen, Cecilia's older sister did not continue her education after finishing primary school. Another important contrast is that Cecilia's experience of language at school is different from at home. Spanish is the language spoken at school. Although her parents declared that Cecilia's mother tongue was Spanish, both parents are native speakers of Aymara, and thus Cecilia's contact with Spanish was probably limited. Her indigenous identity is usually ignored by the school, which is aimed at mestizo, urban, Spanish-speaking children (Chapter 3 will look at the significance of language at school for indigenous children in more depth). She will have to adjust to these expectations of school. Consequently, for Cecilia, starting school was an experience she anticipated with fear, and although she and her mother reported she has overcome most of it, and embraced the joy of learning, there are still difficult issues for her to face, such as the physical and symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) she is encountering everyday.<sup>17</sup>

This chapter has shown, in the first part, the rapid increase in supply and enrolment in pre-school education in Peru in the last decades and more recent efforts to highlight and promote programmes and services for early childhood education. However, we have also shown that issues of equity and quality affect access to this particular service, especially for vulnerable sectors of the population. In the second part, the case studies of Carmen and Cecilia have highlighted different factors which prevent families from enrolling their children in pre-school. In Carmen's case, the main barrier was distance and the dangers associated with it. In other cases there were also basic access issues, with pre-schools not yet available in many rural villages. Although these barriers are common in rural areas, and although rural girls are the group that shows the lowest enrolment rates, they are not the only ones to face exclusion. The case of Cecilia reminds us that in urban settings, there are also different types of barriers that are related to the hidden costs of education and the lack of resources to meet them. Both cases also raise the issue of the attitudes and values that may influence parents' decisions about whether to enrol their young children in pre-school, and also in the ways children themselves cope with transitions. However, it seems that most parents are overcoming the kind of barriers examined in this chapter. Chapter 2 will analyse the experience of children who do have access to pre-school before entering primary school. Even so, the

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<sup>17</sup> *Symbolic violence refers to forms of violence not exerted directly through physical force. Instead, it refers to "every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 4).*

transition to school for these children still poses several challenges, and these are examined next.

## Summary

- Availability of, and access to, educational services have improved rapidly in recent years in Peru, especially in relation to pre-school education. However, universal enrolment in pre-school is yet to be achieved.
- Despite the increasing importance which pre-school education is gaining in Peru, about one-third of children between three and five years old are not attending pre-school.
- In contrast to primary school education, which is available in 93 per cent of the communities in the whole *Young Lives* sample (and is located nearby for a further 5 per cent), formal pre-school is available in just 76 per cent of them, (and is located nearby for another 13 per cent).
- Access to pre-school services is far from equal - different social groups have varying access to pre-school services. Pre-school enrolment, although high for the full sample (81 per cent), is higher in urban than in rural areas. Pre-school enrolment is also higher among Spanish-speaking children, in contrast with indigenous children. Rural girls show lower enrolment in pre-school (69 per cent) than all others.
- Inequity in access is evident in relation to poverty levels, since the poorest quintile of the population shows an enrolment rate 36% lower than the less poor groups, where access is almost universal.
- Our research shows that pre-school enrolment is subject to a number of factors, such as the availability and access to pre-school services, the hidden costs associated with pre-school enrolment and the perceived need (or not) for an earlier and more continuous educational experience.
- Carmen's case shows that access and availability to pre-school are critical factors for rural children. These were an important consideration in the decision to keep her away from pre-school.
- Economic constraints were a key factor in the decision to keep Cecilia at home until primary school. Although pre-school education in Peru is free in public schools, there are several hidden costs that prevent parents enrolling their children.
- Both case studies also raise the issue of the attitudes and values that play a role in parents' decisions about whether or not to enrol their young children in pre-school, and also in the ways children themselves cope with the transitions.
- The interaction of economic constraints and attitudes and values should be better understood. For example, if pre-school is seen as not so important or necessary, in a context of economic constraint, it may be not worth investing so much in it.
- Therefore, clear and timely information for parents on the importance of pre-school education, as well as affordable good quality alternatives for the most vulnerable sectors are necessary to improve pre-school enrolment and assistance.



## Chapter 2: Towards successful transitions

The compelling stories of Cecilia and Carmen in the previous chapter remind us that there are still a significant number of children who don't have access to pre-school, despite the overall growth in these services in recent decades. However, while the availability of pre-school and primary school provision in Peru has improved in general, there are still major challenges to be confronted at policy level, to ensure institutional coordination and collaboration, and continuity of experience for children, as they progress from one phase of schooling to the next. This chapter focuses on issues of continuity, collaboration, and communication between pre-school and primary school through the case studies of three children. We start with the case study of Hugo, which highlights the importance of teacher-child relationships at this early stage in the school trajectory and their impact on learning and transitions. Then we will approach the issue of continuity from pre-school to primary school through the views of children, adding two more case studies from an urban site (Lupe and Eva). Parents' perspectives on the issue of continuity and the importance of pre-school education for this particular transition are considered next, using mostly the case studies already presented in this chapter. Finally teachers' perspectives and school practices are examined to complete the overall picture on the processes and mechanisms in place during the transition from pre-school to first grade.

### **Hugo: the importance of the first grade teacher**

We met Hugo for the first time in 2007 when he was five years old and was attending a public pre-school in his rural village in the Upper Amazon (Rioja). Hugo was a very sociable and energetic boy, and he spent most of his time playing, usually in the street or at his friends' houses. He attended pre-school from the age of three, but when he was four years old he dropped out in the middle of the school year, after a fight in which another boy threw a stone at him, which cut his head. He became fearful of the pre-school and refused to go. Without an alternative pre-school in the village, he remained at home. The following year however he attended pre-school for the full year. In 2008 he entered first grade, into the same class as Carmen.

Having met Hugo, and studied the school he was going to, we wondered, when first reflecting on transitions, if the responsibilities and requirement for good behaviour (including less play) that he would face would prove to be too difficult for him to cope with. When we visited him the following year, in 2008, we found they had indeed been a challenge for him, especially with regard to how teachers related to him. As we explained when looking at the case of Carmen in the previous chapter, Hugo had three teachers in the first six months of the school year.

What happened to Hugo and his class with teachers' turnover is not an uncommon event. However, first grade is a crucial phase, one in which children are adapting to school and the teacher, and this frequent change of teachers should be avoided if possible. What we found in our research, nevertheless, was that little care was devoted in schools to thinking about the needs and challenges of teaching first grade. Assigning the teacher for first grade is usually the decision of the head teacher, but different schools have different arrangements in place. The most common arrangement we found is that one teacher was assigned a class at first grade which she or he continues to instruct through all primary grades until the sixth grade, when students graduated from primary school. After that, the teacher started again with a new group of first graders. Literature suggests that one way to build continuity through the first grades of education is to maintain the same teacher for the first two or three years of schooling, so that the children are familiar with him or her (Dunlop and Fabian 2002). In contrast, the idea of having the same teacher all through primary school has its own problems - if the teacher has spent the last few years of his or her career working with older children, it can be difficult for him or her to return to first grade and work with small children. Others think this arrangement is not so useful and advocate more specialisation, with designated teachers working with the lower grades (first and second) on a permanent basis, with others working with intermediate (third and fourth) and upper grades (fifth and sixth):

“Children are with me from first grade. All sixth grade classrooms (A, B, C) are like that, with the same teacher. It is the first group to be managed like this. Before, there was a teacher in charge of every phase: one teacher took first and second grade, and then she went back to first grade. Another teacher taught third and fourth and I used to teach in fifth and sixth. But then the school changed to this scheme [...] I do think it is better by phases, because you have to be aware of different things and it is better if you specialise in one phase, for example fifth grade, and keep repeating that. You can give more because you gain experience year after year. But if you go from sixth to first grade it is very different, you have to get used to new things. It is like a rupture because you have to teach reading and writing and you have to read new stuff.” (Carla, Sixth grade teacher, Urban, Lima 3)

Organisation by phases, as this teacher advocates, was not found in any of the schools we visited, but is known to be used in other schools. The curriculum contents are also organised by phases (cycles) so this option makes sense in terms of curricular organisation. The National Educational Project also states that primary education must be composed of three separate phases and that the first one in particular requires special training. Schools, however, seem to be working to a different logic. Teaching first grade is a ‘turn’ everybody has to go through, and no special abilities or training are required to be appointed to this grade. In some cases,

it is the newest teacher who is assigned to first grade.<sup>18</sup> No teachers at any school visited mentioned special criteria for selecting first grade teachers.

However, as Hugo's case will show us, the teacher at first grade is a key factor in ensuring successful transitions and promoting learning among students.<sup>19</sup> Hugo had three teachers within his first year at school: he began the school year with teacher Marly, but after three months she took maternity leave. Then teacher David, the replacement teacher, arrived and took over the class for three more months. However, when teacher David left, it was Juan, the janitor, who became a temporary teacher for a few weeks since teacher Marly did not come back. Teacher David was asked to return to cover for her. With this experience, Hugo is able to draw comparisons among his teachers:

“INTERVIEWER – You don't like teacher Juan [the janitor, because he punish children]... If teacher Marly comes back, are you going to school?

HUGO – She is mean too (...)

INTERVIEWER – Does she punish you? How?

HUGO – Very, very strong [*Fuertesísimo*] [...]

INTERVIEWER – You cry, then, you want another teacher, not teacher Marly, not teacher Juan, you don't want anybody, someone new.

HUGO – Yes, teacher David I want.”

Hugo's experience with his first teacher wasn't good. He did not like her because she punished him physically. However Carmen liked her. They were both in the same class but they had different experiences: Hugo is a very active child, and does not always behave as the teacher wants, and so he was punished by his teacher, in contrast to Carmen, who is well-behaved and does her homework. The differing experiences of Hugo and Carmen may be based on their personalities, but also on gender considerations - comments made by children during our group activities indicated that boys tended to be punished more than girls.

The janitor who took care of the class was equally strict according to Hugo. However, the replacement teacher (David) was different. Hugo's mother confirmed what her son said, that his relation with the teacher (Marly) was not good and that he did not want to go to school because of this. She is also aware the different feelings he has about the other teacher (David):

<sup>18</sup> This is the case of, for example, a new teacher in Lima. Also, in the multigrade school at Rioja, in previous years, the head teacher always took the upper grades and assigned the lower grades, including first, to the new teacher. From last year, and because her own daughter was in first grade, the head teacher took the lower grades for the first time. The practice to assign the less experienced teacher to first grade can be found in other Latin American countries, such as Chile, as Schiefelbein points out (Muñoz 2009).

<sup>19</sup> The importance of first grade teacher and the need to put the best teacher in first grade has been also highlighted from the perspective of its cost-effectiveness. See Schiefelbein, Wolff and Schiefelbein 1999, Schiefelbein 2006, 2008.

“INTERVIEWER – How is Hugo doing at first grade?

HUGO’S MOTHER – Good [...] It was only his [female] teacher, but now his teacher David is coming back, he says, he is very happy.

INTERVIEWER – How was he getting along with teacher Marly?

HUGO’S MOTHER – Teacher Marly beat him, he says.

INTERVIEWER – And did you know she beat him?

HUGO’S MOTHER – Yes, my son told me once and I went to ask her and she said it was because he was bad-mannered, he did not obey, that is why she punished him.

INTERVIEWER – And what did you say to her?

HUGO’S MOTHER – Well, he might be a bit bad-mannered but one has to advise the little ones.

INTERVIEWER – Mmm, and Hugo did not want to go?

HUGO’S MOTHER – He didn’t want to go (to the school). He used to say, ‘I am not going any more.’”

It is noticeable that Hugo’s mother did not try to stop the teacher from beating her son (she timidly suggested she could talk to him about his behaviour instead of beating him). She may have felt she did not have enough authority to challenge the teacher, but also she may have found the way the teacher disciplined her boy to be legitimate. In fact she also uses physical punishment when her son misbehaves.

Hugo was having a bad time in first grade then, but things changed for the better, at least tempo-

rarily with the arrival of the replacement teacher David. He really liked the replacement teacher, so much that he considered him to be what he liked most about school. His leaving however was clearly interpreted as a problem by Hugo:

“INTERVIEWER – What is it you like the most at school, Hugo?

HUGO – Teacher David.

INTERVIEWER – David, but he is gone, and now?

HUGO – I’m screwed! (*‘Estoy jodido!’*)”

Hugo’s expressive utterance shows his concern not only about the present time but also about his immediate future in the school. If teachers like the ones he had before are his future, he clearly feels his chances at the school are limited. Only with teacher David did he find himself learning and engaged with school work. Why it is that Hugo feels so differently about this teacher? The account of the teacher himself helps us to understand what was at stake:

“Hugo is an outspoken boy, when I arrived, he didn’t know how to read or write [...] the [previous] teacher had divided the class up: on one side those who don’t know and he was in the corner of those who don’t know, because he was naughty, he had a bad temper, he screamed, he fought, he was careless, he was terrible [...] Then I arrived and met his mother, she asked me to take care of him [...] I got close to him, I gave him confidence, put him to work, he started to work and step by step he got out [...] I realised that boy liked to compete, didn’t like to be defeated,



I started to make him compete, let's see who wins, and he started to work, now he makes an effort [...] Now he is much better off, he improved a lot, he wants to do everything, he wants to volunteer in everything, he wants to do whatever I ask for." (David, first grade teacher, Rural Rioja)

Hugo had a bad relationship with his first teacher, was being beaten by her, and was falling behind with his learning. However, this new teacher paid attention to him, discovered what motivated the boy, set challenges for him and got him interested. The boy started to learn and his attitude changed completely.

Hugo's case shows the key importance of the first grade teacher, as someone that can help a child to engage enthusiastically with learning, or reject schooling as a frustrating and painful enterprise. Being a first grade teacher therefore is not something just anybody can do. It requires special skills and attitudes, as well as adequate training.

All the teachers we interviewed and observed were professionally trained (five years of university or teacher training college education). However, none of them had received any special training for teaching first grade. For some, this was the first time they had taught this grade, and for others they taught first grade after several years of working with older children. The problem is one of both supply and demand.

Special training to teach in first grade is neither requested nor provided by the educational

system. Only one (rural) teacher reported she received a three-day course on reading comprehension, which was very useful for her. The course this teacher did was general and was not specifically directed towards first grade teachers. In the case of pre-school teachers, only the PRONOEI animator reported special training to facilitate the transition from home to pre-school. Teachers did not report any special training to help five-year-old children prepare for their transition to school.

On the other hand, teachers seemed to be unaware of the need for further training for teaching of first grade. The exception was one teacher, in Andahuaylas, who described a self-help group she belonged to with first grade teachers from other schools, who met together to plan lessons and prepare materials. This kind of scenario is more likely to happen in situations in which the teacher lives in the city during the week, as was the case with this teacher. This demonstrates that teachers can initiate novel ways of working and supporting each other, but we found only one example, which may be the result of situations which are not necessarily available to all (good social networks, residence in cities, etc.).

### **Continuity between pre-school and primary school: Children's perceptions**

INTERVIEWER – What was your pre-school classroom like?

HUGO – Cool.

INTERVIEWER – What did it have?

HUGO – Games.

INTERVIEWER – And now, what is your first

grade classroom like? Is it nice or ugly?

HUGO – It is ugly.

[...]

INTERVIEWER – Hugo, look, Alejandro says first grade classroom does not have any drawings.

HUGO – No.

INTERVIEWER – And does the pre-school classroom have some?

HUGO – Yes.

INTERVIEWER – Was it nicer?

HUGO – Yes.”

Children clearly perceive several differences between pre-school and primary school. The interview extract above shows how Hugo was aware that the physical learning environment and the learning resources available to him had radically changed in his transition from pre-school to primary school. Almost all children we interviewed were very conscious of this.



*Hugo's pre-school classroom*



*Hugo's first grade classroom*

A more important aspect of discontinuity children identify between pre-school and primary school, however, is around the axis of play/work, partially present in Hugo's interview as well. Children acknowledge that there are more opportunities for play in pre-school than in first grade. Accordingly, there is more time for work in first grade and less in pre-school. There are also more resources for play at pre-school, as represented by the presence of toys and games, as Hugo points out, and also more time for playing. This is also reflected in the cases of Lupe and Eva, two girls living in a very different environment from that of Hugo, whose cases will add weight to this argument.

### **Lupe and Eva: transitions in urban settings**

Lupe and Eva live in the same neighbourhood in the outskirts of the capital city, Lima 3, an urban setting, within a district with more than 350,000

inhabitants. Although their neighbourhood, located in the desert hills surrounding the city, was founded out of illegal occupation of land, nowadays it has all the basic services an urban settlement enjoys, such as sanitation, running water, electricity, telephone, internet, etc. Lupe and Eva were both attending first grade when we first met them, in 2007, but in different schools: Lupe was going to a public school whilst Eva was going to a private one.

Despite Lupe and Eva attending different schools and living in a very different situation from Hugo, the three of them agreed on the very different learning environments they found when making the transition from pre-school to first grade, as these interview extracts clearly show:

“LUPE – I liked that school better, there were toys... we had two breaks...there were also things for playing house.

INTERVIEWER – Was it pre-school?

LUPE –Yes.

INTERVIEWER – And you liked it more?

LUPE –Yes, here it is not like pre-school, it is like an assembly, there are not so many toys. I would like it if there were more toys here.”

•••

“INTERVIEWER – What differences do you see between pre-school and primary school? Are they alike or different?

EVA – They are different...first grade classroom does not have toys, just a few.

INTERVIEWER – Are lessons the same?

EVA – No.”

The case of Lupe is particularly telling in that she attended both pre-school and first grade in the same school building. However, her experience of the two stages was as contrasting as those of Hugo and Eva, who were enrolled in different school institutions for pre-school and first grade. Discontinuities therefore seem to lie deeper than the mere distance that separates one school from the other.

Like Hugo, Lupe and Eva, most of the children we interviewed pointed out there was more play and drawing in pre-school, and also that there were more toys, balls, puzzles and other things to play with. Learning corners were usually more attractive in pre-school and children were allowed to play in them for longer periods.



*Lupe's pre-school playground*



*Lupe's primary school playground*

In the courtyard there may be games equipment such as slides and swings. In first grade there are no such toys and games or, if there are, there are not many. Also, the time to play with them is limited and is confined to breaks, rather than being part of classroom time.

Differences between pre-school and primary school are also expressed in terms of teachers, activities, spaces, practices or behaviour. Children notice differences between teachers - pre-school teachers are perceived as 'better' and more supportive, whilst first grade teachers do things faster, often leave, and do not have enough time to attend to the children individually. Eva clearly expressed this when comparing her teachers from the last two years:

“INTERVIEWER – Who was better? The first grade or pre-school teacher?”

EVA – The pre-school teacher was better [...] because she helped us [...] [The first grade teacher] only does her job, and then she leaves us because she has to go to another school.”

Children seem very perceptive (in their own terms) of the different pedagogical approaches teachers follow (a more individualised treatment vs. a more 'whole-class approach' style of teaching). Many first grade classrooms also, as in Hugo's case, have more children than pre-school classrooms, limiting therefore the amount of time the teacher can provide for each child. Another difference children report is that in primary school they work more and do more homework, as Hugo and Eva exemplify:

“INTERVIEWER – What don't you like at school Hugo?”

HUGO – The homework.

INTERVIEWER – Why don't you like to do homework?

HUGO – My hand gets tired.”

•••

“INTERVIEWER – How was it in pre-school?”

EVA – In pre-school they gave me... [materials] to draw.

INTERVIEWER – And, in primary school?

EVA – In 1st grade they give me sums.”

In general, primary school will mean more homework and responsibilities and less play, as we have seen. However, when children are asked which they prefer, most chose the primary school, because they expect to learn more, to read and write and to study. This shows children are keen to learn the kind of skills the school offers and have been told about their importance by their

parents. They may also feel they are growing up because they are studying more than playing.

However, when unpleasant experiences arise, some children may miss the friendlier environment of pre-school. That is partly the case with Hugo:

“INTERVIEWER – Do you go to school or pre-school?”

HUGO – I want to go to pre-school.

INTERVIEWER – Why would you like to go to pre-school

HUGO – Because.

INTERVIEWER – Don’t you like school?

HUGO – No.

INTERVIEWER – Why don’t you like the school, Hugo?

HUGO – Because I get hit.

INTERVIEWER – Who hits you? The teacher?

HUGO – My friends.”

Hugo not only faces punishment by his teachers, but also bullying by his peers and this makes his first grade experience harder. He is not the only one in our sample to report this, and he is fortunate to have his older sister, who defends him whenever she can. Other children may be alone in school, without older siblings to take care of them and with classmates who they don’t know. Ricardo, for example, is a six-year-old boy in the city in San Roman, who started first grade in a big school without the company of any of his pre-school classmates. Violence at school involved not only bullying by other children but also physical punishment by teachers – a hard experience for most children who start school.

Indeed, corporal punishment was present in all the schools we visited. Even if children understand the logic of this type of punishment, they clearly prefer not to be punished. Considering the sensitive moment the transition to primary school involves, one question that arises is: should children be experiencing this stress at this particular moment? Or, more broadly, is it really necessary as part of their school experience? As Ana, whose case we will be examining later (see Chapter 3), puts it, punishment is something else that can appear as a contrast between pre-school and primary school:

“INTERVIEWER – Who do you like most, your pre-school or first grade teacher?”

ANA – Pre-school.

INTERVIEWER – Why?

ANA – There is no hitting [with whip]. (No *se latiga*)”

When reflecting on the discontinuities between pre-school and primary school and the difficulties these entail, the contrasting cases of Hugo and Carmen, who share the same classroom, raise another important issue. Having had a previous educational experience at pre-school, Hugo is aware that other ways of teaching and learning are possible, and this may affect his ability to adapt (or to resign himself) to the new situation. Carmen in contrast only knows the educational situation she is currently in, and her family preparation was oriented to the type of classroom and tasks she was going to encounter. In fact, although teachers in general consider a lack of pre-school education a problem for children in terms of academic performance, one

first grade teacher in the same school seemed to view it as having some advantage in terms of (quiet) behaviour:

“Children are *‘pochochitos’* [local expression indicating children are active and energetic] children when they come from pre-school aren’t they? They stick to you to be here, there, (to do) this and that. They only want to be outside running, to there and there, it is their world, for them. Those who come from pre-school are like that, whilst the others (children), no: they are quiet thinking. Very quiet thinking: ‘Where am I?’ ‘What is this?’” (Irma, first grade teacher, Rural, Rioja)

From a perspective that values a quiet classroom and quiet children, the activity-oriented, play-based and child-centred approach pre-schools are using may be counter-productive. They are producing children who are too active to manage in the classroom environment. In contrast, timid, scared children without pre-school experience seem easier to work with. The key issue here however should not be about what kind of previous experience make life easier for the school and the teachers at the expense of children (a school-centred perspective). Instead the issue should be about what is best for the children and how to ensure that schools are ready for the children they receive and can offer pedagogies that respect their development, and previous experiences (a child-centred perspective).

However, it is also clear that despite the many differences children identify between pre-school and primary school, they also see some continu-

ity between activities conducted in pre-school and primary school, such as writing from the blackboard, learning and drawing. Continuities highlighted by children may reflect what some authors have called the ‘schoolification’ of pre-school services (Woodhead and Moss 2007), since the activities reported are most common at school. Indeed, the pre-schools we visited placed great importance on play as a natural activity and learning strategy for children. But they also introduced school-like activities such as word and number recognition, copying and dictation, as teachers know their children would be required to be familiar with this type of knowledge and practice. Parents also expected them to do so, as we will see next, when exploring parents’ perceptions of their children’s transitions and of the relationship between pre-school and primary school.

### Parents’ perspectives of transitions and discontinuities

Parents’ decisions and support regarding their children’s education and transitions are central to the trajectories children experience. One key goal for this study was to discover parents’ views on pre-school and its relationship to primary school. We asked the following questions:

- In what ways do they see pre-school experience contributing to children’s transition into first grade?
- What are their attitudes towards this transition?
- What similarities and differences do they recognise between pre-school and primary school?

- How long do they think children should go to pre-school?
- What type of pre-school (public vs. private) should their children attend?

We address these issues along this section to better understand the context in which children make the transition to first grade and the type of support available to them in their homes.

### ***The growing importance of pre-school education***

Pre-school education is a relatively new concept in Peru,<sup>20</sup> and given its recent expansion (summarised in Chapter one), it is likely that there will be mixed views among parents about it. However, we found a much more widespread recognition of the importance of pre-school than we anticipated. This was the case across both rural and urban areas. The first sign of this was the extent of access and enrolment within our sub-sample: 25 out of 28 households sent their children to pre-school before first grade, making this trajectory the most common among our sub-sample.

We also found that most caregivers expressed a positive view of pre-school and saw it as an important experience for their children. Caregivers stressed its value especially as a way of facilitating children's adaptation to first grade and primary school, and as a way of smoothing the transition from home to school.

“She totally changed when she started pre-school. It is not like if she stays at home. The pre-school is really a help, she learns things; for example to do puzzles, vowels, and they teach how to behave progressively.” (Lupe's mother, Urban, Lima 3)

“When they go to pre-school, they learn vowels, the alphabet. Their hand becomes more adapted to writing, and they don't suffer so much at school. They can already write at least their name [...] They are also less shy, as they become used to their teacher and their classmates.” (Hugo's mother, Rural, Rioja)

Both Hugo's and Lupe's mothers, despite living in such different environments, valued the pre-school experience in similar ways. Like many other parents we interviewed, they said that children were not only introduced to the knowledge and skill sets they would need when entering primary education (vowels, numbers, the alphabet, writing, etc.), but they also learned appropriate behaviour and how to relate to other children and adults (extraversion, social skills, good manners, etc.).

Hugo's mother used an expression we heard from many parents - they considered that if children didn't attend pre-school, they might 'suffer' more when starting school. They meant that children would be more likely to have difficulty adapting to first grade, to perform poorly

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<sup>20</sup> *Formal pre-school education was introduced in the 1970s, much later than primary school, which was in place from end of the nineteenth century. It was introduced firstly in major cities and towns, and later in rural areas.*

and even to show some delay in relation to their peers who had the benefit of pre-school experience. They might repeat a year or drop out or they might feel intimidated when entering school or be scared of teachers.

Pre-school was seen as a place where children can acquire knowledge (such as letters and numbers and skills necessary for writing and counting) that will be further developed at primary school. In this sense, expectations of primary education are being taken as a reference point, and pre-school is seen as a 'preparation for'. This reflects the power imbalance between these two education services, where primary is seen as dominant in the view of parents and as the benchmark to which to adapt (Woodhead and Moss 2007), even if this involves 'suffering'.

However, pre-school is also seen as a place to learn social skills, such as interpersonal communication, independence, how to establish relations with other children, make friends, defend oneself, and become less shy – abilities that will help in first grade but are much broader in nature. Here parents show their interest in the holistic development of their children and it is clear they place value on pre-school in itself and not just in relation to primary school.

Although most parents valued pre-school education, not all parents had the same opinion about pre-school. In Chapter 1 we reviewed the opinions of two caregivers in the Andean city

of San Roman, including Cecilia's mother, who were not convinced about the potential benefits of pre-school. These views contrast with the much stronger consensus we found in the capital city, in Lima 3, where all caregivers considered pre-school education to be important. The contrast between the two urban sites we studied indicates the importance of the cultural background and the educational experiences of mothers, since their socioeconomic level was very similar. Whilst Cecilia's mother was educated up to the second grade of primary school, Lupe's and Eva's mothers had completed secondary education. Also, although the three of them share a similar economic situation<sup>21</sup> and live in a city, Lupe and Eva's mothers were raised there, but Cecilia's mother is of rural origin, her mother tongue is indigenous (Aymara) and she speaks little Spanish. The attitudes of these women towards pre-school education seemed to be influenced by their education, culture and identity. In Chapter 3 we will see also another critical view of pre-school expressed by mothers living in a rural indigenous community.

### ***Two different worlds: Expecting discontinuity***

From the views expressed so far, it is clear that parents expected, or were accustomed to finding more changes than continuities between pre-school and primary school. Thus, although they understood the relationship between pre-school and primary school and how primary school was a progression from pre-school, they expected their children to experience different

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<sup>21</sup> *The three families are located in the least poor quintile of our sample.*



environments. They knew children were moving to bigger institutions in social and physical terms, and they raised some concerns about it, as Lupe's mother expressed:

“Well the thing is, it's like she's on her own, not like in pre-school, it's completely different, ...different. In pre-school they also took care of her, they looked after her. Here [primary school] they don't, here the teacher stays in the classroom, she looks at them for a while but then all the children are together in the school yard. Then she (Lupe) could tumble and fall, she might be pushed and hit... (...) so many things can happen during the break time.” (Lupe's mother, Urban, Lima 3)

Pre-school was seen as a safe environment where care accompanied learning, whilst in primary school the teachers' primary focus is on teaching, and care does not appear to be a primary concern. Also the pre-school seemed more child-friendly in the sense that the needs of the child were taken into account more, whilst in primary school there are general regulations that children must follow, despite their needs or wants. Hugo's mother for example anticipated the difference her child was likely to experience:

“INTERVIEWER – Do you think pre-school is going to be different?

HUGO'S MOTHER – Oh, yes, it is going to be different (...) Because in primary school they don't let them play, or eat (..) in pre-school children eat when they want, they are small, they are hungry, and the [pre-school]

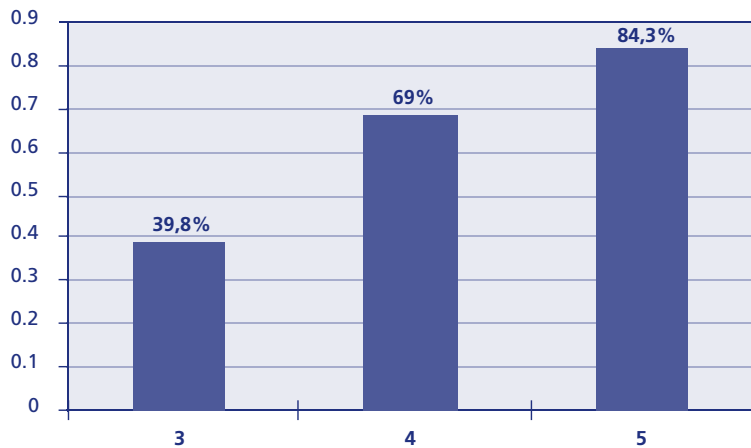
teacher won't forbid them, will she? ... [in primary school] they eat [only] at school break time, not in the classroom (...) In primary school, they don't let them play, like, in break time, they don't let them go like in pre-school (...) in pre-school they play, go outside, in primary school they don't, (if the child wants to run away, they close the door on him. They do their lessons.”

Like Hugo's and Lupe's mothers, most parents were aware that their children would experience a different environment and this worried them, since it required some degree of adaptation. However they considered school to be good for their children and thus they were keen for their children to attend and they wanted to provide all the support they could. In this sense, parents understood that pre-school offered the kind of educational experiences and social skills that children need. Parents value, therefore, the pre-school as a better preparation for their children's schooling.

### ***Pre-school length and attitudes towards transition***

Although pre-school was considered by most parents to be an important step in preparing their children for first grade, caregivers did not necessarily agree about the time required for this preparation. Although the Peruvian educational system defines pre-school education as three years (from three to five years old), not all children who attend pre-school do so for the full period. Only in Lima did we find four children who had three years of pre-school education. Almost half of the children (thirteen of the

Figure 5. Enrolment rates by age for pre-schoolers, 2006



Source: Estadística de la Calidad Educativa (Ministerio de Educación 2009)

twenty-eight) had two years of pre-school, eight had only one year and three did not receive any. This is also consistent with national statistics, which show the lowest enrolment rates for three-year-old children, a higher rate for four-year-olds, and the highest enrolment rate in pre-school for five-year-old children (see Figure 5). Parents agreed that pre-school was important, and most children go to pre-school at five years old (the only mandatory age); however, there was disagreement in some sites about the need for an earlier and longer enrolment. This may have important implications for children since, as one *Young Lives* study suggests, children with pre-school experience may perform better in school than their peers with no pre-school experience, but this effect is only noticeable for those who had attended at least two years of pre-school (Diaz 2007).

What factors could be affecting shorter enrolment in pre-school? In Lima, where attendance

at pre-school tends to be longer, we found that mothers had received more education (ten years on average, with most having completed secondary education), and were less poor on average. In contrast, in both rural communities, which are poorer, mothers had had little schooling - seven years on average in the Amazon (although half of the mothers only had some primary school education), and two years in the indigenous Andean village, with the half of the mothers having no formal education at all. The Andean city, despite being urban, is populated by people of rural and indigenous origin whose average length of education is eight years, though only half the mothers have completed secondary education and half have not completed primary education.

Caregivers in Lima were the only group who displayed some knowledge of the importance of the transition their children were experiencing in starting first grade. They also showed more

awareness of their role in supporting the early years of schooling. The mothers of Lupe and Eva were, for example, very clear in this respect:

“INTERVIEWER – Do you think this stage [transition from pre-school to first grade] is important?”

LUPE’S MOTHER – Oh, yes. I know my girl needs good foundations in first and second grade, after that they go on their own, but first and second grade are very important. I do not have any problems with my daughter, because that is very important for me; it is the foundation to learn well later. The teacher always advises us, and asks us to make her study a couple of hours at home. Her sister supports us, they always study together.

EVA’S MOTHER – Yes, I agree. First and second grade are important because if they don’t do them well, they don’t do well later. But parents have to help at home too; we should not leave everything to the school.”

Despite this informed and positive attitude, parents in Lima also acknowledged that the conditions of their work (which meant that they were away from home for most of the day) prevented them from providing more support for their children. Some children stayed at home with other relatives, for example Eva and Lupe, who are cared for by their grandmothers.

In contrast, caregivers in the rural sites and in the Andean city saw their role as support in more general terms - sending their children to school, feeding them well and giving them their school materials. Teachers sometimes interpreted

this as parental apathy, but these parents did express a strong interest in education. However, they varied in their view of the support they were supposed to provide (see also Ames 2004). Hugo’s mother for example framed her support in broader terms when we first asked about it:

“[They may suffer when starting school] because they get homework they don’t understand... but I will support him: ‘You know, son, you do it like this’... The homework we know, don’t we? Up to a point I understand it, sometimes we don’t understand [...] [Also] in sending him early to school, clean, dressed, because they check the children [...] He will need to be fed properly too, won’t he? For the child to go to school he must be well fed. Sometimes there is not enough, is there? [...] Clothes for my boy, all of that.” (Hugo’s mother, Rural, Rioja)

A year later her answer points in the same direction:

“INTERVIEWER – And how you are supporting him now?”

HUGO’S MOTHER – Well, in any way, going to buy his school materials, his clothes.”

Hugo’s mother was willing to help him with his homework, but viewed her role as mainly one of supporting her son’s schooling in more general terms. She helped him to be on time, prepared, clean, well-dressed and fed, and with the appropriate school materials and uniform. Many other rural mothers viewed their support in these broader terms. This kind of support may

be taken for granted for urban and middle-class parents and can be seen as less ‘academically oriented’. But it is nonetheless an important kind of support poor parents can offer their children with limited resources and often under difficult circumstances. Also many rural mothers, such as Hugo’s mother, acknowledged that they wanted to help their children with homework, but were unable to, given their limited schooling. Hugo’s mother, for example, in the quotation above, is sincere in acknowledging she sometimes doesn’t understand his homework. When we visited her the following year, she recognised again that sometimes she was not able to help Hugo with homework, and thus looked for other people to do it: *‘sometimes we beg other people who know’*. Hugo’s mother only completed primary education. However, many other rural mothers have even less schooling or are non-literate, and thus they feel unable to support their children in academic terms. Nevertheless they have many other ways of supporting their children’s schooling and transition to first grade that should be valued.

Indeed, it is clear from our case studies that the caregivers in our sample were committed to providing a basic education for their children. Although there was no solid agreement on whether pre-school should be started at three, four or five years old, or even if it is necessary at all, as we saw in the previous chapter, all caregiv-

ers agreed that primary school is a must and that children should attend.

Moreover, all our case study children were enrolled in primary school at the mandatory age (six years old) or earlier, which has not always been the case in the past. In the Andes some children used to start when they were older than six, when their parents felt they were big or mature enough.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, there is such a strong commitment to primary education that it is believed children should attend even if they don’t want to:

“INTERVIEWER – What do you say, how do you prepare children to go to pre-school, how do you explain to them?

HUGO’S MOTHER – The first day you stay here with the teacher, she cares for him, makes him play. And they [children] stay until noon and then he goes home.

INTERVIEWER – And what if he says, ‘I don’t want to go any more’?

(Mothers laugh a bit.)

HUGO’S MOTHER – Then we should punish them.

(Some laugh.)

INTERVIEWER – He has to go forcibly?”

(They laugh again.) (Collective interview with caregivers, Rural, Rioja)

As in this quotation, we have collected several other testimonies from parents, teachers and

<sup>22</sup> In Rioja, one of the first grade classrooms we visited had a 11-year-old girl enrolled for the first time in the school. It seems she came from a more isolated village with no school. Thus, the situation of late enrolment in rural areas is not entirely in the past.

children themselves explaining that if a child was reluctant to go to school because the teacher punished him for whatever reason, the parents hit the child and forced him or her to return to school, even if it was against his/her will. 'It is for their own good', parents say, and children reiterate this when they are older. However, we wonder if a smoother mechanism for transition may ease the process and transform the experience into a much more gratifying one.

### ***What type of pre-school?***

Finally, we consider briefly the type of schooling children have access to, whether it is private or public and how parents consider these two options. In rural areas there is not much room for choice, since there are often no private schools available. It is in the urban spaces where there is a choice and where the number of private schools is growing rapidly. The cases of Lupe and Eva, who live in the same neighbourhood in the capital city but attend different types of schools, provide an entry point. Lupe went from pre-school to primary school in the same public school, close to her home. Eva, on the other hand, went to a public pre-school, where her aunt used to teach, so she could take her every day. However, for first grade, she was transferred to a private primary school closer to her home, since her mother considered this to be better for her. Both women assessed their daughters' schools in positive terms:

"Frankly, my children have good teachers, very good, very kind. For me, public education is good. Besides, the school is close and I can go at any time and talk with the teacher

if I have any queries." (Lupe's mother, Urban, Lima 3)

"My daughter is in a private school and they teach well. There is communication with my daughters, they play, and they study. My daughter is happy. I go there regularly, each time I have a break I go to talk with the teacher and ask her about my daughter, if she is doing fine, and she says 'yes'" (Eva's mother, Urban, Lima 3)

In this case both mothers were happy with the service they got, whether public or private, and they stressed mainly the quality of the teachers. Proximity also seemed to be important as a selection criterion for school, as found also in the study by Ansión, Rodríguez and Lazarte (1998). However, the view that considers private education as better than public provision is popular with parents in the city and some other parents stress this point:

"I chose this (private) pre-school because there are few students. The teacher performs better with fewer students. I studied in a public school and there were many students and sometimes the teacher didn't pay attention, or got annoyed, but here there are only a few children." (Cesar's mother, Urban, Lima 3)

"I wanted to put her into a private school because it is better, because, since you pay, they treat her with care and caress. But it will depend on my (economic) situation." (Esmeralda's mother, Urban, Lima 3)

Criticism of public schools was mainly in the areas of infrastructure (buildings and basic services are not well maintained); staff (there are good but also bad teachers); confidence in public services (there is no trust in the state capacity to improve education); attendance (too many strikes); and management (parents need to become more involved in the school to ensure it functions properly). Meanwhile, private schools were perceived as offering better quality education, parents are able to demand more as a result of the fees they pay, there are fewer students per classroom, and children have more courses to choose from and progress better in their studies than in public schools.

Nonetheless, some parents acknowledged that this may vary from school to school. Quality is variable among private schools too, and access to them depends upon availability of economic resources. There are also prestigious public schools which are considered to be better than private schools, especially in the Andean city, where there was a contrast between public schools in the city centre (better) and public schools in the surrounding neighbourhoods (not so good). For this study we visited both public and private schools and found diverse quality within and among them.

Although parents seem to be unconcerned about the discontinuities and contrasts between pre-school and primary school, both in public or private institutions, previous research suggests that one way to help the transition of first graders (and the task of first grade teachers) is to foster continuity between one level and the

next (Neuman 2002, OECD 2001). Children highlighted more changes than continuities across the two different settings and these changes were accepted by parents. Now we examine the arrangements by teachers to promote continuity between pre-school and primary school.

### **Co-ordination and collaboration among teachers**

Our study focused on the ways the school responded to children's transitions when they were starting primary school and how schools and teachers addressed the needs of this transition. We inquire on teachers' views of this transition, the activities they organised for first graders or pre-school leavers and their parents, the kind of communication they established across pre-school and primary school, and the type of information that circulated among pre-school teachers, primary teachers and parents on the transition to primary school.

We found very weak coordination between teachers in one setting and the next. Thus, in most cases, pre-school teachers were not aware of who would be teaching their children the following year. Similarly, first grade teachers did not know the children who would be their students the following year. In the case of Hugo for example, even when his pre-school was just a couple of blocks away from his primary school, teachers at both schools (which were administratively independent) never met to talk about the children who were about to start (or had already started) first grade.

We found only one case, in a small and remote rural community, where this situation was different - the community teacher in charge of pre-school (PRONOEI) worked closely with the first grade teacher, and the latter got to know her future students. This did not happen in all the other schools and classrooms we visited. The separation (physical and symbolic) between pre-school and primary school did not allow for informal meetings and exchanges, and no formal meetings were organised between the teachers from these two institutions. Some communication between pre-school and primary teachers was also reported in three integrated urban schools (one public, two private), in which the pre-school shared the building with the primary school. However, this communication consisted mainly of an informal exchange of information between teachers about the progress of their children and did not involve any kind of coordination over instructional or other types of activities. The case of Lupe (discussed above), who attended pre-school and primary school in the same school institution, was very telling in showing that contrasts were as stark as if they were in different buildings and blocks apart.

We inquired then into the different ways in which information may circulate from one place to the next. In doing so we found that the only documentation that is exchanged between pre-school and primary school is an enrolment card, with basic general data (such as name, date of birth, parents' names, etc), mostly for administrative purposes. No pedagogical or other relevant information about the children's

abilities, personalities or needs was passed from pre-school to first grade. For this reason, even the informal exchange of information reported above is important. It is intriguing that such communication does not happen in more schools, especially given the fact that teachers thought this type of communication to be useful:

“I think perhaps it should be mandatory, that exchange with the first grade teacher, so we know how our children are doing, how they are progressing. And also they [first grade teachers] get to know how [the children] were [at pre-school]. We can tell them about the children, what they are like.” (Lucia, Pre-school teacher, Rural, Andahuaylas)

“It is a basic thing we have to do, to work in co-ordination. I mean, pre-school, first and second grade – we need to co-ordinate our work. A work of transition is a way of putting it, isn't it? [...] We are not working in co-ordination with the pre-school at the moment, but we should, shouldn't we? We should visit them, they should visit us; I don't know. We should manage some capacities (i.e. skills considered in the curriculum) together, because they also manage strategy, don't they? It is a sudden change for them [children] and it should not be like that.” (Norma, First grade teacher, Rural, Andahuaylas)

It is possible that the lack of institutional arrangements for fostering this type of communication actually prevents many teachers from, for example, promoting regular meetings

with other teachers where this is possible (i.e. in rural villages or integrated schools) to discuss transitions or particular issues regarding children who are undergoing this process. It is also possible that the autonomy of each school keeps teachers apart. In urban areas there is also the issue of physical distance, the difficulty of knowing beforehand which school each family is going to choose and the fact that first graders may come from different pre-schools in the area.

There are also different beliefs and discourses about teaching and learning, as well as different statuses for teachers at each level, which may prevent a more collaborative approach:

“[We] pre-school teachers are looked down on, because they [primary teachers] don’t think that children learn effectively through play. They think that we play because we are lazy. But it is not like that, play is important for children. They develop physically and psychologically, they feel good, forget their problems and try to feel joy.” (Lucia, Pre-school teacher, Rural, Andahuaylas)

This last quotation shows that there are perceptions of internal status hierarchies within the school system (where pre-school may be seen as less important than primary school) that may hinder collaboration between teachers. The teacher also referred to different approaches that are present at different levels of pre-school and primary school - the importance of play and a child-centred approach is highlighted in pre-school, whilst a more teacher-directed and subject-based approach is more common in

primary school, despite efforts to introduce a more child-centred approach. One teacher aptly points out the need for continuity from pre-school to primary school, and how this was integrated into the curriculum reform of the 1990s:

“Some time ago there was a lot of talk about linkage between pre-school and primary school, but it is not happening: pre-school goes one way and primary school goes another. It would be good to do some teamwork with teachers from pre-school and first grade teachers from primary school, don’t you think?” (Sara, Pre-school teacher, Urban, San Román)

Thus, there has for many years been a basic legal framework that promoted linkage and collaboration between teachers at different levels of schooling. There is also some agreement on this among teachers. However, in practice, this linkage, communication and exchange process happens rarely. There are no institutional arrangements that foster a deliberate process of transition between pre-school and first grade, much less between home and first grade. Surprisingly, it is only in the non-formal pre-school (PRONOEI) that the community facilitator was aware of the need to work to smooth the transition from home to pre-school and to try to liaise with the first grade teacher so that she and the children got to know each other before the start of the school year. In all the other schools we visited, there were no institutional arrangements to promote transition explicitly, such as visits from pre-school children to first grade class-



rooms, welcome activities during the first week of first grade, or meetings with parents to advise on the transition process, etc. This last activity, which could be of great help to children starting school (Margetts 1999), exemplifies the need for communication between teachers and parents in the transition process.

The level of communication between teachers and parents varied greatly among schools, but we have found in most cases that there was some level of interaction, either at individual level, during informal encounters or at formal meetings. The main topics covered in this communication were about children's individual performance or behaviour problems. Specific dialogue about transitions (characteristics, demands and ways of facing them) was not reported. Other topics may arise, such as specific guidance on hygiene and health, positive feedback, the importance of sending children to pre-school or the broadening of educational aspirations. Topics varied according to situations but rarely covered the transition process and the changes children were experiencing when going from pre-school to primary school. However, parents were indeed aware of these processes and showed a great deal of interest in supporting their children as we have seen already. They are likely to appreciate further guidance and information from schools but the schools failed to play such a role. This may have been because teachers themselves lacked this type of information, and schools were unable to build a truly collaborative relationship with children's families, one that goes beyond asking them to buy school materials or to do mainte-

nance work. Some of the main factors that keep schools and families apart are cultural and language differences, a topic that will be addressed in next chapter, as it also greatly influences children's transitions.

## Summary

- While the availability of pre-school and primary school provision in Peru has improved in general, and most children now attend pre-school education, there are still major challenges to be confronted at policy level.
- This chapter shows the need to ensure institutional coordination and collaboration, and continuity of experience for children as they progress from one phase of schooling to the next.
- Children clearly perceive several differences and discontinuities between pre-school and primary school, the most salient of which is the balance of play and school work. In general, primary school will mean more homework and responsibilities and less play.
- Parents are also aware of the discontinuities between pre-school to primary school, and the different levels of care and dedication their children get from teachers.
- There is a widespread recognition among parents of the importance of pre-school to better prepare their children for primary school and for their general development in general, both in rural and urban areas.
- Urban and more educated parents showed more awareness of their role in supporting the early years of schooling. In contrast, caregivers in the rural sites and in the

Andean city were less explicit about this particular transition but strongly supported children schooling in general.

- Children's families were generally keen to provide pre-school education for their children although the length of pre-school education varied in rural and urban areas and according to the mothers' level of education.
- Communication and coordination between pre-school and primary teachers and between institutions were weak or non-existent. There were no common activities or strategies in place to ease the transition to first grade.
- Pre-school and primary teachers were aware of the lack of communication among them, but they were supportive of the need of further collaboration.
- The different and even hierarchical ways in which pre-school and primary schools and teachers perceive each other may be an obstacle to further collaboration.
- Hugo's case study, as well as other research and policy documents, shows that the first grade teacher is of key importance and requires special skills and attitudes, as well as adequate training.
- The primary school teachers we interviewed and observed had professional training, but none of them had special training for teaching first grade, despite the recommendations of the national education project in this respect.
- Schools did not provide appropriate guidance for teachers or for parents to orient them through the transition their children experienced in passing from pre-school to first grade.
- Despite the overall situation of limited support from parents, teachers and schools, children show a positive attitude and abilities to cope with the beginning of primary school.
- Children also faced some stress during this transition - the most evident was the violence present in schools from the very beginning of school life. There was bullying among peers and physical punishment by teachers. This made the experience of transition for most children in all the schools we visited much harder.

## Chapter 3: Language, culture and identity: A neglected challenge

Improved continuity and collaboration are indeed necessary to facilitate the transition of young children to primary school, but other issues must also be considered to ensure positive school transitions. These issues are language, culture and identity, which are especially important in a diverse cultural context such as Peru and many other Latin American countries and usually remain invisible or unacknowledged. In this chapter we focus on the ethnic identity of children and the place it has in various out-of-home settings they have encountered in their young lives so far. We have seen already, how, in the case of Cecilia, in Chapter 2, her Aymara identity and background seemed invisible to the school system in the city. It could be argued that it is reasonable for schools to assume that most students would be able to speak Spanish (which won't necessarily be true) in a city where there is a diverse population. However this argument is harder to impose on a rural village where all of the inhabitants speak Quechua as their mother tongue. Thus, although issues of language, culture, and identity are relevant to many children throughout Peru, this chapter focuses on case studies from one Quechua community in the rural highlands, where these issues are especially significant in shaping children's educational experiences and prospects.

This village also provides an interesting setting in that, in a context where education services for children under three are still scarce (see Chapter 1), all our case study children had access to a community-based day care programme dedicated to small children: the *Wawa Wasi* (which means 'House of Babies' in Quechua).<sup>23</sup> Our case study children in this community therefore have a longer and more varied history of educational experiences than those from the other communities we visited. We will start by giving some background information on the *Wawa Wasi* and explaining the contrast between this and other educational settings before addressing two case studies from this community.

The *Wawa Wasi* is a public, community-based day care programme for children aged from 6 months to four years run by the Ministry of Women and Social Development. The programme promotes children's overall development and is aimed at those living in conditions of poverty. A woman from the community takes care of up to eight children during weekdays, in her own home, but in an environment that has been deemed adequate for this. Women in charge of *Wawa Wasis* are trained and supervised in doing their job and are given resources to provide meals for children during the day (Cueto et al 2009).

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<sup>23</sup> In the urban sites the service may be available but case study children did not attend and in the other rural site there was no service whatsoever for under 3 years old.

The *Wawa Wasi* was a very popular programme among the caregivers of our case study children. During our group interviews with them, caregivers reported it as the best service available for children in the village (taking into account all others such as formal pre-school, primary and secondary school, health centre and a Municipal Ombudsman Office for Children and Adolescents - DEMUNA).

When we arrived in the village for the first time, our children were no longer at the *Wawa Wasi*, since they were five or six years old and were attending pre-school or first grade. Therefore the *Wawa Wasi* was not observed as part of this study, although we consider it an important first step in children's educational trajectories. The *Wawa Wasi* (WW) was however part of another YL study in this and other communities (Cueto et al 2009), which found that WW children appeared more communicative and extraverted than non WW children, although both groups have similar indicators in gross motor, language and fine motor development and have spent similar time at a pre-school. The study also found a positive perception of the programme from local people. WVs were seen as places where children are kept safe and fed nutritious meals, allowing their mothers to go to work or study without worries.

A formal pre-school center (CEI) was also available to children in the community, for those aged 3 to 5 years old, run by the Ministry of Education. However, in contrast with the overall positive opinion of the *Wawa Wasi*, the pre-school service (CEI) was severely criticised by

caregivers, and language was one of the main concerns:

“Both mothers say children don't learn anything (at pre-school), that they only go to play, the teachers don't teach well, and are frequently absent. Also children are asked to learn in Spanish, and children know but only in Quechua. Ana's mother says the (pre-school) head teacher is a bad person, who keeps busy with gossips and has bad relationships with the (other pre-school) teachers.” (Group interview, younger cohort caregivers, Rural, Andahuaylas)

This complaint about pre-school teachers, who have conflicts among themselves and are perceived as poor quality teachers, may have given rise to negative views of pre-school more generally. There are other elements that may account for this view such as quality of education, and the language and cultural relevance of instruction. Indeed the quotation above rightly stresses the issue of the use of Spanish as a language of instruction in the CEI and the young children's limited command of this language. This is in contrast with the *Wawa Wasi* programme outlined above, where the women in charge belong to the community, speak in Quechua and communicate in this language with the children. The reported preference for *Wawa Wasi* is confirmed also by the decision of most parents to send their children to it up to the age of four, although pre-school is available to children from the age of three. Pre-school teachers are against it, and claim parents should send their children to pre-school from the age

of three. But the educational service they have to offer seems less competitive in quality than what is offered by the *Wawa Wasi* programme, as parents actions have shown.

In Chapter 2, we found an overall positive attitude towards pre-school education across all sites and among most parents. Nevertheless, a few parents were not convinced about the value of pre-school experience, although they did value primary education. In Chapter 1, we saw the case of Cecilia's mother, and another caregiver in the same neighbourhood in the Andean city of San Roman, both with an indigenous background. Also, in this Quechua rural community in Andahuaylas, half of the caregivers we interviewed agree that pre-school education was important and half did not. We will examine the elements of this less positive view of pre-school among (some) indigenous caregivers through the case study of Ana.

### **Ana: Indigenous children and early childhood education**

Ana was five years old when we visited her for the first time in 2007. She was the second of three girls and lived with them and both parents. Her parents are farmers and have limited education with both attending only primary school. Ana was sent to the *Wawa Wasi* from the age of 6 months to four years old, and then went to the CEI pre-school. In 2008 she started first grade. During our first visit in 2007 we observed how she helped her grandmother with the cattle, walked alone from home to pre-school, helped with the cooking, laundry and cleaning, fed her

hens and guinea pigs and joined her mother in grazing the flock of sheep and cows. Her mother did not consider the CEI pre-school to be useful for her daughter, and thus would have preferred her to stay at home, but still Ana attended pre-school. One can see however that staying at home also involved learning for this little girl - learning skills quite different from those she would learn at school, but which were nonetheless useful for becoming a full member of her family, community and culture.

The case of Ana points to the fact that, in this indigenous community, children are part of everyday activities from a very young age, in a way that helps them to develop both their individual and collective identities. Children's caregivers may be afraid of losing the time and space for teaching these abilities and knowledge, especially when they are faced with an education system that does not take account of either their language or their culture in the learning process offered to their young children. Indeed, intercultural bilingual education is limited to a few pilot projects at pre-school level and is really only available at primary level in Peru. This is not the case in Ana's community where both pre-school and primary school are schools with Spanish as the official medium of instruction. Nevertheless, the teachers have to speak in Quechua if they want their children to understand, although they try to reduce their use of Quechua more and more as children grow up.

The tension between school and home concerning space and time for learning may be at the root of some indigenous parents' resistance

to pre-school education, although they have accepted the need for primary education and ultimately agree to send their children to pre-school. The gross enrolment rate in pre-school for the indigenous population is lower than the national average (70 per cent). Quechua people have a relatively high enrolment rate for an indigenous group, with 45.6 per cent, whilst other Amazonian indigenous groups such as Ashaninkas and Aguarunas have an enrolment rate of 28 per cent (MED 2009). These figures can be interpreted as a warning signal in terms of the quality of pre-school education for this sector of the population. We need to determine the type of pre-school service which is most suitable for indigenous groups, and also how it is presented and explained to parents. Ana's mother's views of pre-school and primary school is illuminating:

“[In first grade] [she] is going to study, [she] is going to change, to speak words, she is going to learn. In school she is going to learn, she will say ‘I have homework’. (I: Doesn't this happen in pre-school?) No, it is not like that, she does not know anything; my other daughter went for two years for nothing.”  
(Ana's mother, Rural, Andahuaylas)

Here we can see the perspective underlying Ana's mother's negative opinion of pre-school education (apart from the quality of the teachers) - pre-school is not seen as a place for learning. Another caregiver in Andahuaylas stated that pre-school was mostly ‘play’ and that children did not learn there. Ana's mother also seemed to suggest that ‘true’ learning happens

at primary school, not in pre-school. The following year her views did not change when her daughter did not perform well at the beginning of first grade. She attributed this to the lack of preparation she received at pre-school, and said ‘*she did not do anything at pre-school, (...) only doodles*’. However, it seems the pre-school teacher herself contributed to these particular views about play and learning when explaining to parents about the type of work they did. Ana's mother showed some scepticism when reporting this:

ANA'S MOTHER – Is it true, Miss, that in pre-school they should not teach the five vowels?

INTERVIEWER – What does the teacher say?

ANA'S MOTHER – ‘I did not allow them the five vowels’ she says ‘No, we only have to play (games)’ she says. ‘She only has to play, we have to teach them more play (games), more colours only’, many mothers have requested (that) children learn at least the five vowels that they do some drawing at least. But no, not even the five vowels (...) ‘No’ the teacher says to us, ‘we don't allow that’. They paint with crayons, when they draw anything, only that, miss.

INTERVIEWER – Uhum, they do not teach any more?

ANA'S MOTHER – Ajá Misses, they do not teach any more.”

Ana's mother's comments were also shared by several others in her village. They seem to suggest that learning at pre-school level was not well understood by caregivers. The longer presence of primary school in Andean communities

has shaped their conceptions of formal education in ways that are quite different from the way pre-school pedagogy works. Several studies have pointed out, just as in the quotation above, that primary education is strongly associated with the learning of literacy and the Spanish language, knowledge which is important for self-preservation in a literate, Spanish-speaking society, and for progressing in life; for becoming someone (Zavala 2002; Ames 2002; Montoya 1990; Crivello 2009). This is what legitimates school, even if it fails to be a friendly environment as we will see next. But what legitimates pre-school seems yet to be explained. This greater legitimacy for schools may also reflect the power imbalance between primary school and pre-school, as discussed before. Also, we should consider that the (comparatively) new presence of pre-school, with its different approach to learning, may mean that greater support and orientation should be offered to families to understand its characteristics, purpose and advantages.

Communication between parents and teachers needs to improve, as we saw earlier in Chapter 2. Ana's mother's case is a good example of this: it seems play is excluded from her understanding of school learning. The teacher's explanation stressed the use of play but did not explain how children *learn through play*. Besides, although pre-school teachers stressed the importance of play for children's learning, they were not always capable of connecting this play with specific learning objectives or using it to achieve cognitive development in specific areas. We do not imply here that all play should lead to learning

objectives, but we noticed that sometimes teachers consider play to be highly valuable but did not have the methodological tools and skills to make the most of it. This may be the reason for the rather confusing explanation (quoted above) that Ana's mother received from the teacher regarding learning and play in pre-school. If this relationship was clearer in theoretical and practical ways for the teacher herself, she might have found it easier to explain it to caregivers.

Indeed, in Andean cultures, children learn a good deal through playing, participating, observing and imitating (Ortiz and Yamamoto 1994, Bolin 2006, Anderson 1994). Play is therefore not a strange way of learning for Andean people. Even adults exhibit a playful culture, by sometimes devising competitive games when working in groups. However, play for its own sake can be seen as wasting time, as we will see in the case study of Felipe, and thus a careful balance needs to be struck between play, learning and work. If this cultural context could be used more wisely by teachers, newer approaches to learning such as using play and child-centred pedagogies could be better understood by parents. However, as we will see next, the cultural background and identity of indigenous children are seldom addressed in school.

Despite Ana's experience in educational institutions, she experienced difficulties in adapting to first grade. Her mother blames this on a poor quality pre-school (CEI) experience. The teacher confirms Ana had problems in adapting to the class, fought with her classmates and got distracted easily. Later she adapted better but

her school work was only average. He thinks that this was due to lack of family support with homework. But how was Ana herself experiencing school? As we have seen before (see Chapter 3), one of the discontinuities she experienced in this transition was the presence of physical punishment when students did not learn as expected:

“INTERVIEWER – What happens when you don’t do the sums, or the writing?

ANA – Hitting, Miss.

INTERVIEWER – Who hits?

ANA – My teacher.

INTERVIEWER – With what does he punish?

ANA – With a whip, Miss.

INTERVIEWER – Do you think that is all right or not?

ANA – No, Miss.

INTERVIEWER – Why?

ANA – They cry miss, my classmates.”

Although Ana liked school, has friends there to play with, and would choose first grade over pre-school, it was not easy for her to adjust to being physically punished, and this also seems to affect her learning. Thus, when asked what she liked at school, she indicated reading, but when asked about what she did not like, she said writing ‘*because I can’t*’. Knowing what happened when students didn’t write, as explained in the quotation above; it is easy to understand her dislike of writing and the tension she might feel about learning to write. It is also surprising that the teacher blamed Ana’s home environment so easily and did not examine his own practice of physically punishing children when they made

mistakes. Something similar happens in the case of Felipe, whose adaptation was even more difficult.

### **Felipe: Multiple identities in transition**

Felipe was in his last year of pre-school when we visited him for the first time, in 2007, at the age of five. The next year, when we came back, he was attending first grade. Felipe lives with his parents and four siblings in a Quechua indigenous community in the southern Andes, although during our second visit his father had migrated temporarily to the Amazon to work in cash crop agriculture. Felipe speaks mostly Quechua and uses Spanish only if required, but was very shy when doing so. He had attended two years of pre-school and, before that, the *Wawa Wasi*. He was in the same class as Ana both in pre-school and in first grade.

Felipe spent most of his free time outside school playing. He just loved playing. His mother and his teacher confirmed this. Felipe himself showed how much he likes playing. One fascinating quality he has is the way he manages to use everything around him to do that.

“He goes to the mountain to walk, for the sake of it (...) He makes kites, he plays with seeds, with wool (...) he wants to make parachutes (...) aeroplanes, helicopters (...) he wants to make a car (...) with mud (...) he goes away with those little girls to play, they play with pencils, they make holes in the corn, they get lid (...) they go to the swings, to hang from the rope (...) with hanging little sticks he



plays (...) he brings together little sticks and counts (...) he brings potatoes and counts.”  
(Felipe’s mother, Rural, Andahuaylas)

Although his mother seems to think that so much play was a waste of time, it is evident from her account that Felipe was also using his play to learn, to count, to practice, to be creative, to be with others and to take care of them. It was indeed noticeable when we spent time with him, even for a short period, how he managed to use almost everything he had at hand as a toy or to invent a game, such as a plastic bottle he could fill with dirt and blow into the wind; or even used empty cans he filled with sand and used as moulds. He climbed into the trees, walked in the garden with a stick, or played with his older sister, running, falling, and running again to catch her or to be caught. Both also played with a baby lamb, as if it were a doll, or tickled their younger sister. When doing this it seems he is aware he is doing other things too.

“INTERVIEWER – Do you take care of your younger siblings?

FELIPE – Yes.

INTERVIEWER – How do you do it? What do you do with them?

FELIPE – I play.

INTERVIEWER – You play and that is the way you take care of them?

FELIPE – Yes.”

Play was central to Felipe’s life, as for many other children of his age. It is a vehicle for joy, entertaining, learning, care, nurturing, socialising, and exploration of the world. However,

this is not always evident to the adults around him, such as his mother or even his teacher. But Felipe’s life was not all play. He joined his mother to graze the flock or to work on the farmland, helped with cooking, washing, feeding the animals, and bringing water and wood. He combined play and work when doing this, and when possible, he avoided the work and tried just to play. But his mother punished him if he did that, because she thought play is a waste of time and he should be helping her.

During our second visit, in 2008, when Felipe was in first grade, his mother said he was old enough to help her with more domestic chores and he did help her, but mostly because she disciplined him to do so. She planned to give him more and more responsibilities over time, including his own animals to look after. She also expected him to work as a farm worker when he was old enough (around 12 years old), in order to contribute to the family income. All of this will happen alongside his schooling, not instead of it. Felipe therefore had a very active life, a passion for playing and several learning opportunities and spaces beyond school. This is important in understanding how he experienced his transition to the first grade.

Felipe’s teacher considered him to be a low achiever and a problem child, since he missed some classes and hung around the village. When his mother found him, she took him by force to the school. The teacher blamed the home environment for his behaviour (because the mother punishes him and the father is away). However, the teacher also used physical punishment when

children misbehaved or made mistakes, and other children also hit Felipe:

“INTERVIEWER – What don’t you like at school?

FELIPE – The teacher (...) he hits, with the whip (...) he is mean (...)

INTERVIEWER – What happens if you don’t do your homework?

FELIPE – He hits me.

INTERVIEWER – Who?

FELIPE – My class’s monitor.”

The school environment is hard for Felipe, a boy who is used to walking through the fields and mountains and playing with his siblings. It is not that he is unfamiliar with care and educational institutions, since he has attended both the *Wawa Wasi* and pre-school. But the contrast between pre-school and first grade seemed to be very severe for him, and also different to what he had expected. Indeed, when we visited him in 2007, we asked him about going to school. He said it would be nice, there would be more and nicer toys; he was going to study and do homework and he would learn to write. He seemed excited about all this. However, primary school turned out to be a different place, one with less colour on the walls and fewer toys (according to Felipe), without the swing he liked the most at pre-school, and with much less space for playing as we have seen already. For a boy who loved to play, that could definitely be difficult:

“INTERVIEWER – How do you explain it [Felipe’s poor performance]? Does he have trouble concentrating?

TEACHER – No, he likes to play, he says he likes to play, why does he likes to play?

‘Because I like to play, teacher. In pre-school we played’ (...) he entered [first grade] with all his [pre-school] classmates, he wanted to be with them, to go out, to play... the kid was very motivated at the beginning, but now he is inhibited, he does not want to come to school.”

Both his mother and his teacher highlighted his preference for play, and neither of them suggested problems with his learning abilities or intelligence. When looking at the ways in which he played, both from his mother’s account above and from observing him, it is evident Felipe also loved to learn through playing. So, if he was a poor achiever just because he preferred to play than go to school, should we ask what is wrong with Felipe or should we ask what is wrong with the school? Felipe’s case points to a still unresolved issue in early childhood education, which is how much the culture, identity, and personalities of young children are indeed addressed through school pedagogies, and how much they still have to be put aside ‘for the sake of schooling’. This question is relevant for many children in Peru and in many other countries and leads to a second one, how much does the school address, respect, and value the indigenous identity of children?

At the beginning of this chapter we stressed the need to consider the indigenous identity of the children in this village in order to better understand their transitions. Indeed, the place cultural identity has in the different educational settings

children go through may have a significant effect on how they adapt, or not, to that educational setting. We will examine again the case of Felipe, who shows obvious signs of not adapting well to first grade, since he ran away from school when he could. We have explored how the reduction of time, space and objects to play with has affected Felipe negatively. Primary school has proved to be different to what he had expected. The teacher punishes him and his classmates physically and authorises other children ('class monitors') also to use physical punishment. His mother was keen to provide her son with an education, but also punished him when he ran away from school and made him to go back by force if necessary. To complicate things, Felipe was starting school in a language and a culture that was not familiar to him.

We should remember the different educational institutions Felipe has gone through. In the *Wawa Wasi*, a local woman took care of him. This woman had Quechua as her mother tongue, and this is the language she used to communicate with babies and young children. She probably dressed like Felipe's mother, shared their culture and was familiar with the way young children were brought up in the village, as well as parents' expectations in terms of respect, behaviour and learning. She was also trained to promote children's overall development. In sharp contrast, in pre-school, the official language of instruction is Spanish, the teacher is from the city and shares neither the general culture, nor the understanding of the educational expectations of parents. As we have seen in the case of Ana, this can lead to miscom-

munication with both parents and children. Indeed Felipe was considered shy and 'slow' at pre-school, but as caregivers stated in the quotation above '*children know, but only in Quechua*', which reflects the fact that the use of Spanish in pre-school does not help the children to show what they actually know. Primary school reinforces this trend, with Spanish as the medium of instruction, and teachers also from the city and who do not share the culture of the village. Moreover, indigenous culture seems to be forbidden in the school, as if it were only a place for 'modern' habits:

“INTERVIEWER – Children nowadays don't use *chumpis* [indigenous belts] at school, do they? Why do they forbid it?

FELIPE'S MOTHER – They say: 'Madam, you send your children as if [they were] in the Indian highlands', when we send them like that (...) They say things like that to us, Madam.

INTERVIEWER – And what do you think about that?

FELIPE'S MOTHER – When they say that, we say 'I would have to buy a new belt', that's what we say, Madam.

INTERVIEWER – Do you ask other people if you want to send them with *chumpis*?

FELIPE'S MOTHER – Not any more Madam, I don't want to any more. The other children also tease him when he wears a *chumpi*.”

This interview extract reveals a hostile attitude from teachers to parents, in which they undervalue indigenous dress codes as if they were not appropriate for a place like school. Clothes, as

a visible marker of indigenous identity, are one of the first things to be suppressed. Indigenous dressing is not allowed in school, it is used only at home, in the community, after school hours. And like *chumpis*, the woven shawls the women and girls use in the village (*llicllas*) are only seen on girls after school hours. This is just one of the most visible examples of a widely used practice - the exclusion of indigenous culture from formal schooling. It is not only language, a powerful vehicle for learning, but also indigenous knowledge, practices, and ways of learning that are completely ignored by the school. Parents are very aware of that, as the quotation above shows, but feel forced to accept it since it is not only teachers but also fellow classmates who will enforce the required dress code through mocking if it is not followed. Parents also accept the situation with the expectation that the school will teach their children to speak Spanish, to read and write, as well as urban manners, and thus will enable their children to interact better in cities, continue with education, perhaps access higher education and get better jobs. The underlying expectation is that these children will 'become somebody in life', but that might come at the price of sacrificing part of their indigenous identity (Ames 2002). Although all of this may be clear to adults – but nonetheless experienced with ambiguity and stress – for children like Felipe and Ana it may be harder to understand and may be one of the factors that make their transition to first grade so difficult.

The trajectory that Felipe, Ana and other children in their village go through shows several paradoxes. They have a longer experience of

transitions from care and education institutions but this does not seem to have helped to smooth the stressful transition process they experienced when we visited them. On the contrary, several contrasts, discontinuities, and differences between one service and the next made the transitions harder. Their parents' attitudes towards each one of these early childhood services were also clearly contrasting: whilst the *Wawa Wasi* was seen in a very positive light, the pre-school was considered bad and the primary school got neither criticism nor praise. Criticism of pre-school could be interpreted as resistance to allow young children leave the family home. However, the widespread use of the *Wawa Wasi* seems to contradict this interpretation. Parents preferred the *Wawa Wasi* to pre-school because of the quality of the service provided and primary school was seen as necessary anyway, regardless of its good or bad characteristics. Also, each of these institutional settings encourages a progressive detachment from indigenous culture and this affects children as they go through the successive transitions.

## Summary

- Issues of language, culture, and identity are especially important in a diverse cultural context such as Peru. However they usually remain invisible or unacknowledged by the educational system.
- Indigenous parents were concerned about pre-school services that neither considered the language and culture of their young children nor taught them basic literacy and numeracy skills. Pre-school services there-

fore need to be more culturally sensitive and explain better the different pedagogical approach they use and how this contributes to children cognitive development.

- Ana's case shows that in her indigenous community, children are part of everyday activities from a very young age, in a way that helps them to develop both their individual and collective identities.
- The cases of Ana and Felipe show that indigenous knowledge, practices, and ways of learning are usually ignored by the school. Indigenous culture is undervalued and excluded from formal schooling in several

ways, as if school were only a place for 'modern' habits.

- Felipe also confronts the current educational practices with his very identity as a young child: the need to move around, play, experiment, and learn is clearly not addressed by primary school.
- The undervaluing and exclusion of indigenous and young children's identities from school represents another dimension of stress and aggression for children. The school needs to confront these issues to help children and teachers to build more successful transitions and to offer better quality education.



## Chapter 4: Early transitions outside school: Growing up as a responsible person

At the beginning of this paper we pointed out that early transitions include, but are not confined to, educational transitions. With an open definition of transitions in general, we were able to identify other social transitions children were experiencing at the same time they went through the transition to first grade. This was especially true for rural children, who showed a progressive mastering of tasks that contributed to the domestic and productive lives of their families. We will consider this transition in the current chapter, including the ways it impacted on transition to school, drawing on the case studies presented earlier.

Visiting children for two consecutive years at this particular and critical time of their lives allowed us to confirm how they were experiencing changes in their roles and responsibilities within their homes, going from being ‘little children’ to more ‘grown up’ children. They were assuming progressively more responsibility for domestic and productive activities and developing skills that prepared them to be productive members of their households. Hugo was a clear example of this progressive and subtle change:

During our first visit, **Hugo** was five years old and lived with his parents and his older sister. Being the youngest in a small family, he was still very much cared for by his

mother and sister. Most of the help with domestic activities was carried out by his seven-year-old sister. At that time, Hugo did not like going with his mother into the fields while she was working. He got tired and bored and his mother had to carry him for a while, so she preferred not to bring him along so often. The following year however, he was not only taking more care of himself (dressing alone and taking care of his school materials) but also he was helping with more domestic tasks, such as feeding the animals, carrying water, doing errands, and going to the store for small amounts of shopping. Moreover, he joined his parents in the fields more frequently and helped clear the garden with his *machete*.

At the same time as Hugo entered first grade, he was also acquiring more responsibilities at home. Gradually, Hugo was starting to perform a series of domestic and productive activities that would increase in quantity and complexity over time. His mother was aware of these changes and viewed it as a natural process towards increasing autonomy:

“INTERVIEWER – In comparison to last year, does he help more, less or the same at home?  
HUGO’S MOTHER – More... he helps doing errands, small amounts of shopping... [at the beginning] we sent him with my daughter at first, later he went alone... [at the

beginning] you sent him to buy something and he came back with another thing.

INTERVIEWER – And when did he learn?

HUGO'S MOTHER – Just very recently, now he already buys (...) now he already takes care of his things, he knows they belong to him, that he has to put his things in their place (...) now he changes his clothes by himself (...) he does not give (me) so much work.”

However Hugo's responsibilities were still few compared with other children in his village. Indeed, gender, family structure and the mother's educational background affect the experience of children of the same age even in the same village. Thus for example, being a girl, Carmen helped more at home with cleaning and the laundry, fetched water and wood for cooking, and laid the table. She has been helping her mother on their farm since she was little, and during the year between our visits, she learned to help with the harvest and to clear the garden with a *machete*. However, as she is the youngest, just like Hugo, she has no younger siblings to take care of. This contrasts with the case of Gabriela, that we present below:

**Gabriela** was five years old and was attending first grade when we first met her. She belongs to a large family of ten, and was the sixth of eight siblings. When we saw her at the school grounds, she seemed very tiny and shy. However, when we joined her at her home, she transformed herself into a much more 'grown up' girl. For example, although she was very small and thin, she was strong enough to carry her baby brother, aged 18

months, and to feed and clean him. She used to change his clothes without anyone asking her to do so. Gabriela also helped her mother by carrying water and wood for cooking, peeling vegetables, cooking rice and feeding the chickens. She said she liked going with her mother and siblings to the fields, especially at weekends, and once we went with her. Whilst her older siblings milked the cows and grazed the flock with her mother, she took care of the younger ones, drank some milk her mother gave her, ate fruit her brother gathered from the trees and played around. On the way back she might carry some milk or wood. The following year the family grew: a new baby was born. Gabriela, now aged six, helped to bath him, and she also carried him on her back. She continues taking care of her younger siblings (aged five and two years old plus the four-months-old baby), going into the fields, helping with harvesting and carrying produce and things. She is learning to cook already and according to her mother she helps 'a lot'.

Gabriela's family is different from that of Hugo or Carmen. There are younger children to take care of and a family dynamic that allows or promotes greater participation in home and farming activities. Because of this, Gabriela's involvement in these activities happened earlier than Hugo's for example, and keeps growing and expanding.

Like Hugo, Carmen, and Gabriela, most of the rural children we visited were participating more and more in a great variety of everyday



activities. They took care of themselves (through activities such as cleaning and dressing themselves, brushing their teeth, combing their hair, etc.), and they fed themselves, but they also took care of others, particularly younger siblings, by feeding or cleaning them.

Young children in rural areas also helped their mothers with domestic activities, such as cooking, (e.g., by peeling vegetables), cleaning the house, washing the dishes, making beds, running errands, undertaking light shopping, fetching water and wood for cooking, helping with laundry, collecting grass or grinding corn for feeding and taking care of domestic animals. When inquiring about collective and shared views at community level, we found that parents expected progressive participation in these activities from an early age (about four years old) in a way that allowed almost full participation at about seven or eight years old, although some tasks (usually those involving more physical force and dexterity) had to wait until the age of ten or eleven years old. Young children were very aware that these activities were necessary for family daily life and they seem to enjoy being part of it, although some showed some resistance when more of their time was required to be dedicated to these tasks that they expected.

Rural children were not only intensively involved in domestic activities but also in productive activities such as agriculture and cattle-raising. As we have seen in the cases above, children joined their parents working in their gardens and fields, and help to perform some activities (feeding the animals, clearing the crops, scaring

birds away, digging holes in the land for sowing, grazing the flock, etc.), whilst learning other skills progressively by observing older siblings or adults undertaking them (milking the cows, collecting honey, moving the animals around pastures, sowing and harvesting, etc.). This learning also involved play when conducting most of these activities, which allows children to mimic, practice and also explore a wide range of activities and tasks.

Thus, for example, when we visited Ana for the first time, even when she was very young (five years old), we observed her helping her grandmother with the cattle, and both she and her mother reported how Ana regularly joined her mother in grazing the flock, a typically female activity in her village. Ana also helped with cooking, laundry and cleaning and feeding her hens and guinea pigs. In our visit the following year, her mother acknowledged the changes Ana was going through over time and indicated new activities:

“ANA’S MOTHER – Last year she was not very aware of some things, because she was little (...) [now we say] bring water, anything. When we say, she goes; she goes to do light shopping. She is changing, Madam. (...)

INTERVIEWER – Does she do anything to earn money?

ANA’S MOTHER – To earn money we grow vegetables. She sells them in the [local] market for herself (...) Ana, with my Ofelia (...) here in the village market (...) They do that, they want to sell, (...) for this Friday they are preparing themselves, to sell on

Saturday (...)

INTERVIEWER – Is she playing more or less than last year?

ANA'S MOTHER – Now she likes to sell.”

Like Ana's mother, other parents acknowledged their children were playing less and doing other types of activities more. One of the repeatedly mentioned activities was studying. However, we shall remember children not only played at 'play time' but usually mixed play and work when doing their chores, such as when going to the gardens, going to fetch water or grazing the animals. Doing more domestic and economically productive activities was seen as being related to maturation where there is more time for study and less for play, according to some parents, as Felipe's mother conveys:

“Last year, in pre-school, I took care of him more (...) now that he is going to school I leave him (to look after himself) (...) He is more grown up now (...) [before] I said the car may hit my son [referring to the highway] (...) not any more, now I left him (to go alone) he already knows where to walk (...) [in pre-school] he played in the mud, in the water, now he has changed since he was in first grade (...) I used to say 'he will play the same', but he does not play any more, he comes back home clean.” (Felipe's mother, Rural, Andahuaylas)

Felipe's mother is again drawing an implicit contrast between pre-school and primary school, but in this quotation she is reflecting on how her child is changing over time. One

thing that we found difficult was to know which maturational changes parents were aware of. Although they referred to the activities children perform at home, there are many references to the beginning of their school life as a social marker of this maturation, as in the quotation from Felipe's mother. Despite our efforts to find evidence of other, endogenous social transitions and rites of passage in early childhood, the picture that emerges is that educational transitions are seen as markers for other social changes children are experiencing in their roles and responsibilities. Perhaps the widespread presence of schooling is becoming fused with an ongoing process of progressive autonomy children experience in rural areas, and educational transitions serve as markers of this otherwise less visible and progressive learning of skills and abilities that starts very early in their lives.

In the case of young urban children, we observed that they also help their mothers with many domestic activities, although the range of such activities was narrower than in rural areas. Urban children and their mothers reported that they helped with cooking, cleaning the house, washing the dishes, making beds, doing errands, and doing light shopping. However these activities were seen more as the first attempts of children to help, and thus were considered not so much as duties (as they are in rural areas), but as useful ways of learning. Also in urban areas, children were not expected to start helping with these sorts of activities until they were around five or six years old (versus four years old in rural areas) and were expected to be more responsible for some of them at an older age (11 or 12 years old).

Urban children do not have flocks to graze but they do care about animals - they usually have pets and they make clear their animals are very special to them. However, in contrast with rural areas, in urban areas it is caregivers, not children, who take responsibility for the care of animals, for example by feeding them.

In urban areas we found a mixed situation in relation to children's involvement in the economically productive activities of their parents. In the capital city, Lima 3, young children did not perform any kind of commercial activity. Their parents worked in places where children could not go, and they usually remained there most of the day. Children remain at home with relatives such as grandparents or aunts if the mother worked. As in many Western cities, work conditions in Lima 3 separate children from their parent's work and prevented children's participation in such activities. Cultural conceptions reinforce such practices as well - children's main activities are considered to be to study and play, and some help with domestic chores, as already explained.

In contrast, in the Andean city, some young children are involved in their parents' economic activities:

**Ricardo** was six years old in 2007 and the last of four siblings, aged 14, 17 and 20. He was attending first grade, but in his out-of-school time he joins his mother at the market to sell. She is a street vendor and she prefers to have him with her than to leave him at home alone. Ricardo likes to go with his mother

to the market and he helps her by calling potential clients to buy her products. Over time he may start to sell with her as well, in the same way as Sergio – a boy from the older cohort in the same city – does.

Urban families in the Andean city are of rural origin and therefore they are probably following the same principle of early participation of children in a range of economic activities. Also, most of these families are involved in small-scale trading and cloth-making, activities conducted in the streets or in home-based factories. These allow for more participation by children, since they are conducted in places where children have access. Once again, cultural conceptions may be more permissive in this sense to allow such participation.

Both rural and urban children acquired progressively more autonomy as part of their growing up process. The main difference between them is that rural children also acquired more 'responsibilities' over time and not mere 'chores'. As time went by, these activities stopped being 'optional'. However, children did not necessarily feel obliged; the activities they participated in were 'duties' they had to perform for the collective well-being of their families, and children seemed to be aware of this and were proud to contribute.

As rural children started this process of participation and responsibility very early, they may feel competent in many of the activities they carry out at home or on the farm, but incompetent in the skills taught at school (reading,

writing, counting, etc.). Going back to the case of Ana for example, who is a very skilful six-year-old girl who participates in domestic, productive, and commercial activities; we have seen that her adaptation to school hasn't been very successful, despite a relatively long educational trajectory. We have seen also that the things she least likes at school are those she can't do (writing), and we know she is very likely to get punished when she does not perform as expected. Thus, the school is giving her an image of herself based on the things she can't do, but hardly recognises all the (many) things she can do. Far from building on her strengths, the school seems to point out her weaknesses. This strategy, found in most schools, may be counterproductive for children's motivation and for their future performance at school. Perhaps the school would help the children's learning process more if it recognised what children already knew, and that certainly the school is not the only place where they learn.

### Summary

- Young children who participated in this study experienced other social transitions at the same time they went through the transition to first grade.
- Young children in rural areas helped their mothers with domestic and productive activities from an early age. Participation in family activities involved learning and play, allowing children to mimic, practice and also explore a wide range of activities and tasks.
- Young urban children helped their mothers with many domestic activities, although the range of such activities was narrower than in rural areas. Their attempts are considered as ways of participating and helping, and not so much as duties, as they are seen for children in rural areas. However, the participation of children in work activities varies according to the city.
- Both rural and urban children, as part of their growing up process, are progressively acquiring more autonomy. Rural children acquired more 'responsibilities' over time and not mere 'chores' and as time went by these activities stopped being 'optional'. At the same time young children seemed to be proud to contribute to the well-being of their families through their actions.
- The children's learning process would have been enhanced if the school recognised what children were going through, what do they already knew, and that there were other spaces for them to learn beyond school.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusions

This paper has focused on the educational transitions children experienced in their early years, particularly in the transition from home or pre-school to the first grade of their school life. We have examined issues of access to pre-school services, continuity and communication for children at home, pre-school and primary school as well as between parents and teachers, through different case studies. We have also examined the quality of the service, exploring issues such as motivation, punishment, language use, etc. Issues of gender, language, culture, and identity have been central to our analysis, as they have greatly influenced the experiences of children in their transitions from one setting to the next. With a broad understanding of the concept of transition and looking beyond the school system, we have also been able to identify other social transitions that children, especially rural ones, experience as they cease to be little children and become more grown-up and participate more in their families' domestic and productive activities.

The vast majority of children in this study had attended pre-school and this is in line with trends in the overall *Young Lives* sample of 2000 children. Only a few children had gone to school directly from home. The children all had different experiences. Issues, such as family support, school environment, personal characteristics, ethnic identity and the language of instruction were important factors in influencing children's experience. A minority of the children studied

had attended day care centres before attending pre-school and school, which meant they had experienced a longer care and education trajectory and earlier transitions.

In this final chapter we will consider our results in the light of recent academic and policy debates about how to enhance children's educational experience and well-being. When addressing the context of early childhood education in Peru, at the beginning of this paper, we pointed to the increased recognition of the importance of continuity and communication during the early years. Indeed, international literature on the subject highlights the importance of continuity from pre-school to primary school to smooth the transition process, as well as the pivotal role of communication between institutions at these two levels and among different actors such as parents and teachers (Brostöm 2002). However, when examining the case studies presented here, we have found evidence pointing to the contrary: children highlighted discontinuities and contrasts between pre-school and first grade, teachers reported a lack of coordination and communication between pre-school and primary schools, and parents saw pre-school as a necessary step for preparing their children for school but expected this to be a radical change. There is therefore a need to review the current processes and procedures underlying these transition experiences in order to ensure that children benefit from greater continuity and collaboration among settings and people.

Continuity however may be understood in different ways. There is a legitimate concern that the call for continuity and collaboration may result in the primary school putting pressure on the pre-school, leading to a ‘schoolification’ of pre-school and a narrow focus on literacy and numeracy (Woodhead and Moss 2007, Neuman 2002). This way of understanding continuity focuses on aligning early childhood education with the aims, requirements and practices of primary school, and is referred to as the pre-primary approach to early education (OECD 2006, UNESCO 2008). This approach is usually found in French and some English speaking countries (UNESCO 2008).

There is another way to understand the need for continuity and collaboration, called the social pedagogy tradition, most commonly found in Nordic countries. This tradition acknowledges that some of the strengths of early childhood practice, such as the holistic approach to child development, including attention to health and well-being, respect for the natural learning strategies of the child (such as learning through play, active and experiential learning and personal investigation), and use of the outdoor environment as a pedagogical tool, should be reflected at least in the first years of primary school (OECD 2006, UNESCO 2008, Neuman 2002).

Our research experience suggests that primary schools can learn a lot from pre-schools’ practice, where a child-centred approach has been more established than in primary education, despite efforts in the 1990s to orient the whole education system in that direction. Certainly a

teacher-centred approach in pre-school would prepare the child for the type of behaviour school demands better and thus facilitate the transition in behavioural terms. However, children’s natural learning strategies promote cognitive development and this has implications for future school performance through solid cognitive foundations, which are the basis of school learning. Formal pre-schools may also learn from the more flexible model of non-formal pre-schools and from childcare day centres, which provide care and education based on a holistic view of child development that is highly valued by families.

The continuity and collaboration between childcare programmes, pre-school and primary education should be based on the relative strengths of each and regarding all as equal partners (Woodhead and Moss 2007, UNESCO 2008). As Broström (2002) suggests, it is necessary to develop, on one hand, curriculum and instructional practices that meet children’s interest (making the school ready for children); and, on the other hand, an educational culture that helps children to be ready for school. The importance of ensuring continuity and progression between sectors, based also on good collaboration between teachers and parents has long been internationally recognised (Woodhead, 1979). There are numerous activities to foster transitions from pre-school to school currently in practice in many countries (Brostrom 2002, Save the Children 2007, Margetts 1999). However, our research has identified a school system that appears to have hardly considered any of them. The many challenges children,

families and teachers face within the education system of Peru have been highlighted by the case studies in this paper, which taken together, suggest the need for urgent attention in terms of educational structures and policies, curriculum planning and pedagogy.

Our case studies also show the urgent need to enhance the theoretical and practical training of teachers working with young children. The importance of first grade and pre-school teachers cannot be overemphasised. A more specialised training programme, rather than a generic one, would benefit teachers and children alike in their early years of schooling. A literature review published by Save the Children (2007) has pointed to several important changes children experience in this period of their lives, according to research evidence. These include the development of memory, learning capacities, and cognitive processes (Varnhagen et al 1994); concrete forms of thought (Piaget 1978); new elements to understanding language, reorganisation in the use of words and reconstruction of theories about language use (Ferreiro and Teberosky 1999); self consciousness, interest in friendship relations, capacity for moral judgment, individual learning, more complex physical abilities and the acceptance of separation from parents for longer periods (Love and Yelton, 1989), among others.

Neither parents nor teachers seem to be fully aware of all the changes that are going on during the course of the transition. They seem more aware though of the external and observable changes children go through. Entwisle

and Alexandre (1998) have pointed to some of them, such as experiencing a new form of social organisation, meeting an unknown adult, spending several hours and days outside the home, acquiring a new social role as a student, meeting and socialising with other children, entering a system of accumulative evaluation and a mandatory system with limited room for control, as well as curricular discontinuity. But even many of these more observable changes seemed to be unacknowledged by teachers and it was difficult for many to understand the significance that changes like these may have for children.

Along with a more specific and in-depth teacher training, there is a need for more serious reflective and decisive action regarding the presence of violence in the life of young children, both inside and outside school. Young children starting school encounter physical punishment as part of their first contact with school. There seems to be a gender bias unfavorable to boys, although more research is needed to confirm this. We are aware that physical punishment is a complex issue which interacts with local customs and understandings, and any action regarding this issue shouldn't depart from that fact. However, we are also sympathetic with the results of the National Commission of Truth and Reconciliation in Peru, which investigated the human rights violations during the internal conflict in Peru from 1980 to 2000, and highlighted the importance of schools in this process. The Commission recommended that schools should be "forbidding and drastically sanctioning any type of physical punishment or humiliation against children as a way of disci-

pline and use of violence” (CVR 2003: 100), as part of a broader strategy to improve the quality of education and the dignity of the student.

When we visited children participating in this research the first time in 2007, physical punishment was evident and widely present. But when we revisited them one year later, when all children were already in primary school, the issue was more prevalent in almost every case. Perhaps the children we visited and worked with whilst still in pre-school had become more confident with us and could therefore explain the physical punishment they faced at school better and express how much they disliked it. In any case, this is a persistent reality in children’s lives which has proved to be a negative influence on learning, as it leads to anxiety and fear, just as Cecilia clearly expressed in Chapter 1. As Borstrom (2002) points out, anxiety can inhibit the child from mobilising her or his existing skills and talents when entering school.

Indeed, academic literature indicates that a positive emotional attitude on the part of the child towards the school setting is crucial to successful adjustment (Kienig 2002). Among the cases we have reviewed here, Carmen exemplifies this most clearly, and in her case her parents’ support, her own motivation and a lack of physical punishment have contributed to a successful transition. But as we have seen, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

The children we have followed are largely responsible for making successful transitions to

school. In many cases the adults around them can only support them in limited ways, because of a lack of information, a lack of education or both. The school does not provide parents and families with the necessary information to support this transition better, perhaps because the teachers themselves lack this information and the deeper theoretical knowledge on which it is based.

Better home–school communication however is one of the key ways of facilitating better transitions between educational settings (Brostrom 2002, Save the Children 2007), as well as providing a welcoming environment for families and children. However, we have found only limited communication between parents and teachers, and some evidence of miscommunication.

We have also found a hostile attitude towards children and families that do not share the dominant culture, and thus are asked to deny their own identities in the process of being schooled. Although Western school systems have historically marginalised non-dominant cultures, recent demands from social movements, indigenous groups and international agencies for recognition of diversity and cultural rights, and questioning of the monocultural model of school education have led to a more intercultural approach as a goal, especially in multicultural contexts such as Peru.

Thus for example, the General Law of Education in Peru states that one of the main principles of education is interculturality,<sup>24</sup> because it

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<sup>24</sup> See Law No. 28044, article 8



contributes to the recognition and valuing of the country's cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. The National Curriculum Design (DCN) currently in place also considers that the inclusion of the intercultural approach in the three levels of education (pre-school, primary and secondary) is very important in order to truly achieve equity and high quality education. The national curriculum encourages knowledge and respect for diverse cultures in the country (*Ministerio de Educación* 2009a: 9). The Ministry of Education, in the general guidelines for the school year, also stresses that the intercultural approach should be integrated in pedagogic, institutional and administrative management; which should consider the incorporation of local knowledge and local norms of organisation (*Ministerio de Educación* 2009b: 8). Despite this policy framework, our evidence suggests that current practice is still far from achieving these goals, and more work is needed at school level to meet children as they are and respect who they are.

The challenges are indeed formidable, but there are several strategies that can be worked out in order to improve children's experience during school transitions, and specialised literature provides plenty of examples. The case study children we have followed have shown us how resourceful, strong and active they have been in going through this transition and in their strong motivation to learn and to grow up. We can optimise this energy and motivation to learn if we offer them a less stressful experience and a better quality education. In summary, these strategies would improve:

### **Continuity and collaboration between pre-school services and primary school**

- Despite the importance of continuity from pre-school to primary school to smooth the transition from one level to the next, this study shows evidence pointing to the contrary:
  - Children highlighted discontinuities and contrasts between pre-school and first grade.
  - Teachers reported the lack of coordination and communication between pre-school and primary schools.
  - Parents saw pre-school as a necessary step for preparing their children for school but expected this to be a radical change.
- The case studies developed in this paper suggest better educational structures and policies, curriculum planning and pedagogy that help to foster transitions from pre-school to school.
- The theoretical and practical training of teachers working with young children must be a priority. The importance of first grade and pre-school teachers on children's lives cannot be overemphasised.
- Primary schools may learn from pre-schools' practice, where a child-centred approach has been more established than in primary education.
- Formal pre-schools may learn also from other childcare programmes which provide care and education based on a holistic view of child development that is highly valued by families.

### **Communication, diversity and school-home relations**

- Strong home–school communication is necessary to foster successful transitions.
- We have found only limited communication between parents and teachers, and some evidence of miscommunication.
- Parents and teachers were largely unaware of many of the changes children experienced during the course of their transition to primary school. The need for information and training is therefore clear.
- Current school practice is still far from achieving national goals relating to interculturality, and more work is needed at school level to meet indigenous children and their families as they are and respect who they are.

### **Support and respect for children's rights and transitions**

- We require decisive action on the presence of physical punishment in the life of young children, both inside and outside school. The violence it entails makes transitions much more difficult for children and inhibits them to fully develop their skills and abilities.
- Currently, children are largely responsible for making successful transitions to school. But they should not be alone in this.
- Pre-school and primary schools should strengthen their role to ensure successful transitions, considering children rights and identities, and to help families to find ways to better support these transitions.

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#### About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The Foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the sale of Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer N.V., bequeathed to the Foundation by Dutch industrialist and philanthropist Bernard van Leer (1883 to 1958).

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equal opportunities and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by local partners. These include public, private and community-based organisations. Working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

We also aim to leverage our impact by working with influential allies to advocate for young children. Our free publications share lessons we have learned from our own grantmaking activities and feature agenda-setting contributions from outside experts. Through our publications and advocacy, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice not only in the countries where we operate, but globally.

In our current strategic plan, we are pursuing three programme goals: reducing violence in young children's lives, taking quality early education to scale, and improving young children's physical environments. We are pursuing these goals in eight countries – Brazil, India, Israel, Tanzania, the Netherlands, Turkey, Peru and Uganda – as well as undertaking a regional approach within the European Union.

In addition, until 2012 we will continue to work in Mexico, the Caribbean and South Africa on strengthening the care environment, transitions from home to school and respect for diversity.

#### Information on the series

*Working Papers in Early Childhood Development* is a 'work in progress' series that presents relevant findings and reflection on issues relating to early childhood care and development. This working paper is part of a series of 'Studies in Early Childhood Transitions' from *Young Lives*, a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Further information about *Young Lives* is available on the website: [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

The findings, interpretations, conclusions and opinions expressed in this series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.