Early Childhood Matters

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The Effectiveness Initiative:
creating an environment for learning

Cover: Nigeria: *Practicing buying and selling with sand*
Community Child Education & Development (COMED)
photo: O Idowu

Inside front cover: Honduras Community of La Huerta:
Gloria and her brother
Christian Children's Fund
photo: Leonardo Yánez

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The Effectiveness Initiative

The Effectiveness Initiative (EI) is an in-depth, qualitative look at what makes ECD programmes work for the people who take part in them, and for the communities and cultures that are intended to be enriched by them. Its specific objectives are:

- to stimulate cross-site and inter-agency dialogue about effectiveness and the challenges of early childhood development (ECD) programming;
- to understand more fully the interplay between a programme's processes, activities and outcomes; and
- to map the contours of effectiveness, defining what makes a programme effective, under what conditions; what supports and what hinders a programme within a given context; and what these contours tell us about effective programming more generally.

To do this, we are exploring ten ECD programmes that represent a diversity of settings and of approaches to early childhood programming. We are engaging people from the ten sites, together with staff from international NGOs, to work in cross-site, cross-cultural teams to carry out the study; and we are using and creating tools that allow a fuller understanding of the complexities of the experiences of these programmes.

Overall, the EI is attempting to enrich an on-going dialogue about ECD programming. It is also attempting to test the application of qualitative research methods to the field of ECD, thereby giving us a better under-standing of what we see, hear, feel and understand about the nature of effective programmes. There is no normative blueprint or prescribed set of methods that are applied at each of the participating sites. Our hope was that by allowing each site to develop its own

set of investigative processes and resources (approaches, methodologies and tools) we would greatly enhance the possibility of gaining deep insights and understandings about each programme. However, we also hoped to be able to identify patterns across sites. To help in this, we are developing the 'EI tool kit' that includes a range of approaches, methodologies and tools. Each site can use any of these or none; and it can modify them and add others according to locally determined needs.

Our platforms for sharing and learning

Among the most valuable tools that we have are the face-to-face meetings – often workshops – that are held periodically with members of the site teams that are working in the participating programmes. These meetings enable site team members to talk about the processes that they are going through and share their learning.

They also provide a platform for the programmes and site teams to exchange the lessons learnt at the individual sites, to share strengths and challenges, and to plan the way forward in relation to the EI's set objectives.

The first such meeting took the form of a workshop in June 1999, in The Hague. It included members from each of the ten site teams. They learned more about the goals and purposes of the EI, and about who was involved. They also shared what they hoped to be able to do within the EI and what they anticipated getting out of it. At the end of the workshop they produced action plans that detailed their specific activities for the remainder of the year.

The second such meeting was for the site team members from Latin America programmes. It was held in Guatemala and hosted by Redd Barna. The purpose was to provide an update of EI activities

India: *Engrossed*
photo: Liana Gertsch

within the programmes in Peru, Colombia and Honduras, share the tools used at different sites, share experience to date, make plans for the future, and define the nature of activities to be presented at an EI conference in November 1999.

This EI conference was held in The Hague and formed part of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's 50th anniversary celebrations. This conference allowed 15 members of the 10 EI site teams to share their experiences to date with a carefully selected target audience: 25 early childhood policy-makers and planners from universities, foundations, and donor and government agencies.

This year, the implementation of the EI has continued across the 10 sites and, in parallel, dissemination has begun. The first major collective activity was a workshop in Porto, Portugal. This was an opportunity for all the site teams to share ideas and experiences on qualitative tools and methods for data gathering and analysis; to learn about different/creative forms of communication in order to present their findings effectively to different audiences; and to develop concrete ways to apply what they are learning from the EI to programmes.

One of the direct outcomes of the workshop in Portugal is planning for very focused meetings to consolidate what is being learnt at the different sites, and the lessons that can be drawn across the sites. The nature of these meetings is described in detail on page 14. In harness with this, innovative communication strategies are being introduced or developed for the creation of products and activities that share the EI's insights and learning with all of its audiences. At the same time, a methodology of learning is also being developed to define processes for the integration of qualitative research into ECD programming.

This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* features articles about many aspects of the first 18 months of the operation of the EI. However, none of them should be read in isolation: each of them reflects the ethos of the EI, and the nature of the processes that the EI is continuously developing. The first article is by Babeth Lefur and provides an overview of what has been experienced and achieved, with an analysis of some areas that have proved to be especially significant (page 5). She follows this with an example of how differing viewpoints can be organised and considered so that they reveal such tangibles as implications for programming (page 14). Leonardo Yánez then offers his reflections about the dynamics, realities and processes of the EI so far, and also discusses some of the EI's initial findings (page 17). Next Tom Lent offers a thorough exploration of facilitating participative workshops. This is more than a technical review of such workshops, it is also a review of the participative processes themselves that highlights their centrality to the EI (page 27). Finally, Angela Ernst shows why and how photographs and other graphic media (tools being used in the EI to tell the projects' stories) can successfully convey ideas and information that cannot otherwise be readily communicated (page 38).

Together, these articles give a strong sense of what the EI is trying to achieve, show how it is working in practice, and – in terms of investigative processes and resources – reveal some of its first findings. We conceived the EI as open and transparent, sharing assumptions, confusions and findings as we moved along, and we are doing this. We expected to make mistakes and we expected to be surprised, and our expectations have been proved correct. We also stated early on that we were open to changes in direction, and we have indeed made changes.

The EI Coordinating Team

The processes of generating knowledge

Babeth Ngọc Hân Lefur
Member of the EI Coordinating Team

As the introduction to this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* makes clear, the Effectiveness Initiative (EI) is about enabling each of the participating projects to examine themselves, in the ways that they find appropriate within the framework of the EI. The point is to discover what has contributed to success in their work, and what has hindered success. In practice this means:

1. That there is a team working on site with each project that directs investigations, carries them out, and does the internal analysis of both the processes used in the investigations, and the outcomes. This team is made up partly of people from within the project, and partly of outsiders.
2. That each project and its site team determine what will be investigated.
3. That, partly drawing on a body of tools and processes identified or developed for the EI, and partly discovering or inventing new tools and processes, each project and its site team determine how investigations are carried out.
4. That each project and its site team discuss, analyse and document both the processes and the outcomes of the investigations.
5. That everything is shared, analysed and discussed with all the other participating projects and site teams.
6. That lessons are being learned across sites that have implications for ECD programming and policy development.

The whole of the EI is given coherence and kept on track by a Coordinating Team (CT); by regular participative workshops (as described in the introduction) involving the site teams and the CT; by interactions with an Advisory Committee (see page 11); and by direct communications that circulate among all those involved.

This article is about what has come out of the first 18 months of the EI. So far, much of our learning is following two parallel tracks: 1) learning about the processes within site teams, across the sites, and between the sites and the coordinating team; and 2) learning about the ethics and practicalities of doing participatory action research within an international ECD context. This article focuses on the first of these tracks and is organised in three sections: the EI research process so far; the communication challenge: enabling dialogues; and reflections and next steps. This second track is covered in the article on page 17.

The EI research process so far

We have known from the beginning that we are unlikely to arrive at a single definition or understanding of effectiveness. After all, projects are devised, developed and operated by more or less fluid groups of human beings, with and for other human beings, over many years, in a wide variety of evolving and shifting contexts and circumstances. This reality determines many operational aspects of the EI. For example, in order to bring multiple perspectives to the EI, there are 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in each site team. To maximise the diversity, there is a great deal of analysis of, and discussion about, the information and experiences that are interchanged between sites. To represent the multiple realities that we expected to uncover, in ways that showed their dynamism, we

India: *Concentration*
photo: Liana Gertsch

avoided using a prescribed set of tools and procedures uniformly across all of the sites. Instead, each project and its site team chose research tools that were relevant to the context, added more as necessary, and frequently developed or invented new ones.

The advantage of starting without a normative blueprint is the flexibility that the site teams have in carrying out their investigations: they can adapt what they are doing; their procedures can evolve hand in hand with the research focus; and they can bring in new tools. This open approach has resulted in the adoption or development of a wide range of tools and methodologies, from the conventional to the most creative and innovative. The graphic alongside offers a selection.

Gathering data

the river analogy

During an early exercise, a river analogy was used to graphically represent the course of a project's development. Like a stream, a project has a course or direction, and it is influenced by many things as it flows from what was its source – the original idea – to the ocean – its final expression. It impacts on the people, circumstances and events that it encounters along the way, and it is affected by those people, circumstances and events as well. The river is also greatly influenced by the time and contexts through which it flows.

This analogy has become a tool for site teams to map the influences on their project over time, in a very visual and creative way. The use of this tool varies according to the way people want to tell their story. Sometimes individual stories are expressed as separate rivers and are then compared in order to draw together a broader picture. Sometimes a consensus is sought and one river is mapped to tell the story of the whole project.

In all instances the act of creating the river has stimulated lively discussion about key events and the major influences on and outcomes of the projects. It has helped those working with the projects to gain a much deeper level of understanding about the dynamics within their projects, and has stimulated discussions that would not have arisen if more standardised instruments such as interviews and questionnaires had been applied.

Using PLA tools

The EI site teams are using some tools that are associated with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). PLA evolved from a methodology that began in the 1970s called RA (Rapid Appraisal). This

listening to children
observations
testing children

visuals/photos
Dramas
Stories/timelines

formal questionnaires
workshops with parents
interviews
return meetings/workshops
anecdote gathering

formative evaluations
analysing programme documentation
longitudinal studies
case studies

training
workshops for problem analysis
an EI website as a research tool
team meetings

surveys
PLA tools
projective tools

drew on participatory research, applied anthropology and field research and was a way of gaining a timely, relevant and cost effective assessment of conditions within a community to help the design of rural development projects. Later forms were known as RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) and, while local communities could take part, the technique was really for the use of outsiders who came and gathered information, then took it away to design what they saw as an appropriate project.

Over time, more and more control of the process was shifted to the community and it then became known as PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). More recently, as there has been a shift from simply using the technique as a diagnostic tool, to using it in actually developing projects with community participation, it has become known as PLA (Participatory Learning and Action). When it is done well, those from outside the community come as learners, convenors, catalysts, and facilitators of the community's definition of needs. Then they work with the community to design a plan of action to meet those needs.

Within PLA, various methods are used to assist communities in telling their own story. These methods come primarily from social anthropology. They include a mapping of the community (housing, health facilities, schools, religious centres, water sources, etc), focus groups, semi-structured interviews, diagrams and pictures, timelines (local history, seasonal diagramming), matrices, ranking of variables, as well as direct observation. The time frame for carrying out these activities varies, but the process is most commonly carried out in one to three weeks. The best results are achieved when a multi-disciplinary team is created, with each individual bringing a different perspective to the study.

A key to successful use of the technique is the personal behaviour and attitudes of the team members. This includes the ability to be self-critical and to learn from mistakes. It requires respecting the people one is working with, and having confidence in their ability to undertake the task. It involves sitting with and listening to others, not lecturing. It involves 'handing over the stick' to community members who become the main teachers and analysts. The

ultimate goal is to set out the insider's perspective on the community and to understand the community as a whole. The process can be enjoyable for all involved, and it can yield useful information.

PLA also contains the overarching idea that the research will lead to action. What this means is that, at the community level, the learning process needs to lead to an action plan. This requires follow up processes by the researchers: they have a responsibility *vis-à-vis* the local participants.

Within the Effectiveness Initiative, the site team in the Philippines is using the following PLA tools as it focuses on parent-child interaction and childrearing practices, within communities affected by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.

A time-use chart and journal
Because many people within the community have not had the opportunity to develop literacy skills, it is easier for them to talk about their experiences and represent them through drawings and symbols. For example, community members created

time-use charts, filling them in with pictures or symbols. The patterns in these daily time-use charts, and information from journals, documentation of individual interviews and focus group discussions, were analysed with the people from whom the data had been collected. The findings that emerged were discussed during parent group workshops. The time-use tools were also used to look into gender socialisation of children and roles of mothers and fathers as caregivers; and they are often complemented by interviews with individual parents and children in their homes, and focus group discussions within the home-based, parent education programme.

Timelines – drawings and interviews with the children and community leaders
Two distinct groups are involved: the elder people and the older children. The initial focus was to place the people's experience of resettlement on a timeline. In doing so, the elders and the older children could recall life before the eruption and compare that with the early years of life in the resettlement areas. This allowed the site team to

document the events (which essentially serve as a part of documentation of the history of the communities' 'new' villages) from the point of view of adults and from the point of view of the children who were much younger when the volcano erupted. Eventually the timelines will also be used to delve deeper into the differentiated responses and changes in the interaction between the children and adults in the community. The site team will also refer to the anecdotal records from the initial years of the project, and these can be compared with the more recent discussions and timelines.

Family books
Interviews, photos, drawings by children and parents are the materials that will go into a book that describes their day to day lives. This activity also reveals details about childrearing practices and gender socialisation. In the coming two years, the plan is to work on books with as many of the participating families as possible. In the end, the different communities will have a collection of family books they can also share with each other and which, in effect, will serve as a community library about their lives as families.

The above examples – including those specific to PLA – illustrate only a few of the multiple tools, strategies and methodologies that are used by each site team to map effectiveness. What is striking in this is that sites have begun by using their own tools, methods, capacities and processes. Subsequently they interacted with other site teams to inform, improve and open the path to new, invented or reinvented processes. And, very interestingly, what we have discovered as this has been happening, is that the process of investigating effectiveness is actually making people more aware of what they are doing within their programme and challenging them to do things in different ways.

Organising and making sense of data

Gathering data is, of course, just one step. Handling that data in ways that do justice to its contexts and acknowledge its potential richness is a more complex task. For example, in Colombia, the PROMESA site team is mapping the perspectives of different groups of people about effectiveness, using interviews to gather the data. The study team interviewed 26 people about their

perceptions of what made the project effective, and about the processes and conditions that promote or work against effectiveness. This produced a mass of data that reveals the wide variety of perceptions that people have about the topic of effectiveness. It also produced a wide variety of kinds of data – direct experiences, anecdotes, opinions, judgements, reactions and so on. To begin to make sense of these data, the project and project teams organised the responses into 14 categories that help explain why the PROMESA project has been effective.

- It had effects on children.
- It had effects on mothers.
- It had effects on local promotoras.
- It had effects on families.
- It had effects on communities.
- It had effects on people in the project.
- It had effects on people in collaborating institutions.
- It had effects on the way in which institutions worked within the region.
- It brought transfer of knowledge and responsibility to communities.
- It had effects on policy at national and local levels.
- It had effects on the funders.
- It was accepted as a model to be

disseminated, as useful in other settings.
- It was sustained.
- It resulted in the production of local materials.

The site team members of ALMAYA in Israel have also been experimenting with different approaches to organising and working with multiple layers of data, focusing on the relevance of non-linear thinking, structuring and understanding. Initially they set up a website (www.almaya.org.il) that helped to organise and link multiple pieces and types of data on their project. As they did so, they realised that they could also use the Talmud (the body of Jewish civil law, ceremonial law, and tradition) as another reference model.

Jewish learning over the centuries has always emphasised non-dogmatic 'give and take' and a text such as the Talmud is constantly open to examination, dissection, clarification and amplification. The design of each page reflects this creative learning style. The middle column represents the Mishnah (Jewish law as codified about 1,700 years ago). Below this is the section of the Talmud from about three centuries

later that comments on the Mishnah. Surrounding the middle column are notes and commentaries that have been added over the centuries by rabbis and their disciples and descendants; cross-references to other passages in the Talmud; a key to Biblical quotations; and references to other medieval Jewish law codes.

The experience of Talmud study is multi-dimensional, non-linear learning. Pairs or small groups of students delve into the page's core texts of the Mishnah and Talmud. The students then skip around the page to glean additional illumination and revelations of the other interpreters. The written texts are not read silently, but are chanted in a singsong manner, adding punctuation and texture. This information is channelled into the mutual debate as the individual participants question, reinterpret, contribute and relate. The participants, anchored in a rich dimension of time through texts spanning over 2000 years of Jewish intellectual history, continue to learn with the counsel of the past together with present and future realities.

Applying the principles of this Talmudic type of learning, and the vitality of the website, to the project and its search for its effectiveness, is offering the ALMAYA site team dynamic and contextual models for the presentation of their data and methodology. These models help to do justice to the many faceted viewpoints, to perspectives of time and to the project's complexity. At the same time, it allows the 'reader' to learn from this richness.

The communication challenge: enabling dialogues

The communication challenge is to go through all the processes that the EI necessarily demands, sharing the outcomes – that is, all the learning about process and content – along the way. This is complex, and it is hard to keep a focus on our collective goal. There is a little Zen story provides some insight into what can happen. Four monks decided to meditate silently for two weeks but, on the first day, the candle went out. The first monk said,

'Oh, no! The candle is out.' The second said, 'Aren't we supposed to stay silent?' The third asked, 'Why did you two have to break the silence?' The fourth laughed and said, 'Ha! I'm the only one who kept silent!'

The first monk was distracted by the candle going out; the second by the first monk breaking the rules; the third monk was angry with the first two; and the ego of the fourth monk made him break the rules too. All four failed because of their own immediate concerns.

This is the way many of us communicate at times: in a chain of reactions in which we lose sight of the broader purpose. Each of us puts a different weight on different elements in the way we work, share, learn and engage with others. But how well we can realise the broader goal, the common good, what it was that brought us together, depends on our ability to overcome our own bias and limitations and keep in mind that we have a collective agenda. It is in this

light that the following sections discuss what we have been learning about the complexities of the EI process itself.

The status of sites
As has been noted, the framework for the EI is broad and non-prescriptive. Each project is expected to define the dimensions it wants to investigate within the research focus, to design its own research framework, and to ask questions specific to the context in which it works. Teams began the implementation phase anywhere between June and December 1999 and all are operational in principle.

However, some have yet to find momentum: one still needs to build consensus within the team and with the newly appointed leader, while aspects of the structure and operations of another have yet to be finalised. So, people are proceeding at their own pace, not one dictated by the overall project. This makes the communication process much more complex: people have different needs and interests.

Site team composition
The work at each site is carried out by a site team, members of which work together to carry out EI activities. Each site team has at least four members and is a mix of insiders and outsiders of practitioners and researchers, of young and experienced ECD professionals, of programme and field staff. The rationale for this mix was that many different perspectives could be incorporated into the inquiry process.

This has worked. However, differences in expertise, perception and paradigm have been a major challenge to effective communication within some site teams, between site teams, and between site teams and the EI Coordinating Team in The Hague.

Team leadership and membership
Most site team leaders are outsiders, meaning that they are neither from the organisation that has responsibility for the project, nor are they project staff. The members of the site teams are mostly insiders. The idea was to keep a balance of the outside and the inside perspectives. This approach has mostly turned out to be a good strategy. However, we have experienced conflicts of interest in a few cases, most specifically when funders are team members: it is sometimes difficult for them to keep their different roles and responsibilities separate. We need to rethink the benefits of having funders as team members, given that having a funder on the team can influence the research process.

The composition and role of the Advisory Committee
The cross agency Advisory Committee (AC), created when the project began, was supposed to support project teams by being a kind of 'think tank' for the EI. Originally, the AC was composed of programmers, policy makers and practitioners from around the world. It was supposed to meet periodically as a group, and with the members of the site teams once a year to update on progress, share tools and methods, and discuss questions and issues that were arising. Over time we came to realise that the composition of the AC was not representative of the field, and that we needed to find better ways to activate communication between the sites, the AC, and among the sites. Consequently, a major change in the organisation of the AC was made at the May workshop. It shifted from a body of experts in ECD to a body of expertise that consists of all the leaders of the EI site teams who now serve as the liaison between their teams and the Coordinating Team based in The Hague. Hopefully, this will also bring the dialogues closer to the work at the sites, and ensure better communication between and among sites.

Language
There are also two kinds of language barriers. The first is that we work in only two languages (English and Spanish), yet people involved in the EI speak many different languages. The second is about the different understandings that people have of the jargon words so prevalent in all our work. While there are technical remedies to help us overcome these barriers, we have seen that people find

creative ways to communicate: simultaneous translations spring up; people ask until they understand; and discussions take place in a number of languages, but only some of the discussion is translated. The push to break down language barriers is generating many shared understandings.

So far, the main lessons to emerge about our own communication process are:

- that perspectives and perceptions don't only depend on personal and professional experience, they also depend on specific roles that people have in specific contexts;
- that the way we use language has far more important implications for the research process than our ability to speak the different languages within the group. In other words, how issues are presented and addressed is far more important than the language used;
- that in the same way that there is no one single definition of effectiveness, there is no one single reality. There will always be differences within and across cultures, so the challenge is

how to become more appreciative of those differences;
- that there is the possibility of engaging in a dialogue when we are open to different perspectives, and as our perspective changes over time, we can engage in new dialogues; and
- that perhaps the greatest challenge now is to enable critical dialogues to take place with our different audiences, counterparts and partners. Our ability to do this depends on how well we can shift perspective according to where we are in time and space, and on whose realities we decide/choose to take into account.

Our collective challenge is to apply an open communication process both to ourselves within the EI group and to all our audiences in order to facilitate the free flow of information.

Reflections and next steps

The EI research process has been producing a variety of new challenges. Many of these are associated with the development of the wide range of tools

and methods used to gather and analyse data; the diversity of sources of information; and the mass of data at each site that needs to be organised so that it can be managed and analysed. Key questions that have arisen and for which answers have to be found include:

- what are the ultimate goals of the data gathering and analysis processes that we have been undertaking?
- How participatory are we in the ways we interact with the participants in the process of data collection?
- What is the inter-relatedness between the participatory research process and programme intervention?
- How do we return the information to the participants and engage in the analysis process with them?
- While we are unpacking a programme's effectiveness, what do we do when we identify gaps?
- What is the overall learning, for the sites, for the Foundation, for the ECD community?

The EI has an underlying philosophy that guides its operations: no matter which approaches, tools and methods we use at the individual sites, we must open ourselves up to what is really there by learning to listen better. So far we have held to this. We have also held to our commitment not to hijack people's stories and impose our own meanings on them. We have learned to resist the temptation to apply our categories to other people's words, values and meanings. Instead we have been looking for ways of producing and interpreting information in harness with the people who own the information – that is, working co-generatively. Here, it's a matter of asking ourselves two key questions: 'Who owns the stories, anecdotes, interviews once they are gathered?' and 'How do we ensure that we do not speak on behalf of the participants by assuming that we know what they mean?'

We still have to work to maintain a 'subject/subject' interaction, a dialogue between partners, and to remember that knowledge is created through an

interactive process of inquiry in which we learn to listen to each other. We need to really feel that we are all producers, managers and owners of information. But on-going dialogues are the norm now and this is a huge leap forward. Linked to this is the need to keep in mind that the EI is an action research project that is intended to lead to action. Determining appropriate action means maintaining the same participative environment that pervades the EI: the owners of the information must have a say.

In some senses the nature of the EI itself has changed – or perhaps evolved. At the beginning, the focus was on the reconstruction of the project timelines, looking at what makes projects work in terms of activities, processes and outcomes. Essentially it was about diverse participants and stakeholders taking a qualitative research approach in a variety of contexts. Now we are making the intrinsic link between participatory research and the actions of projects. Seeing how each process informs all the others, and understanding deep inquiry as an on-going dialogue, helps us to get in tune with the changing conditions and realities of people's lives. This helps us do more than simply think of develop-ment as responding to people's needs.

In practical terms, our emphasis will now be on developing a set of qualitative research strategies through the integration and validation of qualitative research processes. These will be embedded in communication activities that will help us to work consistently on research methodology and ethics, while simultaneously considering emerging issues and themes across the sites. These communication activities will include innovative ways to present all this learning to all of our audiences.

In terms of holding on to the essence of the EI, we will be staying with the integration of the experiences and knowledge from individual sites, in very open and participatory ways because this strengthens the feeling of joint ownership. Each individual, each site team and each project feels part of the process of creating and re-creating knowledge. ○

New Zealand: *One reason why it's effective is that the children really want to be there*
photo: Anau Ako Pasifika Project

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Effectiveness for whom?

During the Effectiveness Initiative Workshop in Porto, Portugal, in May, two round tables were organised to discuss 'How we are learning to define effectiveness' 'How different stakeholders see it' and 'What we are learning about it'. The following is an attempt to organise and draw lessons from some of the views that were expressed during those discussions. A selection of Original quotations from the discussions are set out in column one. The Key words from these are then identified in column two, and the Messages and implications for ECD stakeholders are set out in column three and four. The point of this kind of simple analysis is to highlight some of the lessons we have learned in the past year, without losing sight of the richness and diversity of perspectives and understandings.

Original quotations

- Effectiveness is an elusive concept; not a definition but a perception; stakeholders' perceptions of effectiveness; point of view of donor organisation is not necessarily the same as that of a child or parent.

- Sense of what people are looking at, trying to learn about, children are often the focus. I need to be interested in how children think and make sense of things.
- How serious or candid are we in our discourse about children as stakeholders? Children are important, but their influences as stakeholders are minimal.
- Debating among teams if others are saying that their programming is guided by listening to children's voices? Kids have a lot to say, but we often cut them off.

- You can be effective in general or up to a certain point. Even a good programme is not necessarily effective. Effectiveness can also regress. Think of effectiveness in four dimensions: the subjective (affection, the links between people, feelings of power, of dignity, conditions which allow a group to create its own strategies, commitment); the institutional; the material dimension (its 'field of possibilities'); and the interactive dimension, which is dynamic. Sometimes one dimension will dominate. These aspects need to be in balance.

- The idea of dimensions to describe effectiveness: criteria and elements when its focus is clearly on the child and the family and they are an active part of the action – this is very important. When there is a real sense of participation. When it is culturally relevant. When it is flexible not only in terms of the process of the project, but also in terms of governance, and what the people working in it experience. When it has passed the pilot phase, has good coverage and demonstrated validity, and it is ready for replication in another context.

- EI is a process to discover what effectiveness is. People handle it very differently in terms of integrating the EI. For some EI is perfect to embed in their programme. Others see EI as one of the several types of research.

- EI adds resources and discussion in a wider framework. It's a stimulus. Others see EI as the possibility of revisiting a phase which has ended.
- It's a catalyst. It's a safer environment, different level of openness. EI has allowed for broader participation. In EI we are doing the terms of reference, and they are grounded in children. EI is broader than a tool: 'if all you have got is a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail' – an analogy of carpentry and architecture – it is a process about how to keep the house in shape and even improving.

- Not only 'what' and 'why' of effectiveness but also 'how'. We need to get beyond the strictly needs-based, deficit-centred training approach, to one that recognises the 'surplus' available in communities, the abundance of skills and knowledge.

Key words

- elusive concept, a perception, stakeholders' perceptions, different points of view

- children are often the focus, how children think, children as stakeholders, children are important, listening to children's voices, kids have a lot to say

- effectiveness can regress, four dimensions, strategies, commitment, balance

- criteria and elements, focus on child & family, real sense of participation, culturally relevant, process, governance, experience, passed the pilot phase, good coverage, demonstrated validity, replication in another context

- discover, integrating, embedded, research

- wider discussion, revisiting a phase, safer environment, catalyst, open, participation, grounded in children, carpentry and architecture analogy

- the 'what', the 'why', and the 'how' of effectiveness, beyond needs-based deficit-centred training approach, recognise surplus in communities, abundance of skills and knowledge

Message and implications
for ECD stakeholders

- different points of view
- children's perspective

- multidimensional descriptors
- criteria of effectiveness

- integrating research within programming
- generating effectiveness
- effectiveness resides in people's own abilities

- multiperspective & multidimensional character of effectiveness

- effectiveness is generated through people's experience, skills and knowledge

- people's perspectives and realities inform programming

Honduras, Community of La Huerta: *Mothers facilitating an EI workshop by checking the analysis of the information they helped to provide*
photo: Leonardo Yánez

Reflections on dynamics, processes and initial findings

Leonardo Yánez
Coordinator of the Effectiveness Initiative

Right from the beginning of the Effectiveness Initiative (EI), the idea was to investigate what makes an early childhood development (ECD) programme work, from as wide a variety of perspectives as possible. This article discusses some of the dynamics and processes that have helped to determine the nature of the EI's development, and offers some tentative initial findings that those processes have helped to reveal.

A great strength of the EI so far is that processes have developed naturally in ways that recognise the importance of diversity – and indeed build on it. For example, the tempo and pace of the process of negotiation, and the design of proposals and of ways to approach the programmes, have been largely determined by the particular conjunction of factors within each team. These factors include culture, background, and the ways in which people operate in their working contexts. There is no room for universality here, even though each site team departed from the same framework, and even though all site teams shared the same basic organisational structure of the initiative. Obviously such diversity is natural and right in EI terms. But it has been a major challenge for the Coordinating Team in the Hague (CT) to ensure mutual understandings between and across site teams.

The direction that the EI has taken shows how it has been influenced by certain dynamics. These include those that have developed between individual and group initiatives on the one hand, and the creation of a kind of EI family or community on the other. Such dynamics present opportunities as well as risks. For example, the development of an EI family or community speeds up the process of communication among the teams that work on site to investigate the projects taking part in the EI. But as it does this, there is a danger that it may develop and work with its own jargon.

That makes it exclusive: only insiders can contribute and new players find it hard to enter and participate. Similarly, the sense of being a family or community could

make us forget the importance of preserving the uniqueness of each programme and its context. Each site is a special case and generalising could mean sacrificing a great deal of relevant information.

The most recent international EI workshop, held in Porto, Portugal in May of this year, reflected these dynamics very clearly. On the one hand, most participants were left with the feeling that working together on the EI has created a kind of family spirit. This was shown in their desire to maintain continuity among EI participants, by their support for exchanges among site teams, and by their resistance to bringing external consultants into the EI.

On the other hand, among the site teams there were divergent aspirations in terms of the support they require, in terms of the role of the EI workshops, and in terms of what they wanted from the CT. They emphasised the importance of maintaining the richness of the body of work around each site, thereby countering a move towards consensus and the creation of a synthesis of the EI in some kind of final unifying product.

Relative realities

Another example of how the EI has developed naturally can be found in the variety of approaches that each site team chose in order to guarantee its own right mix of insider and outsider perspectives. For example, membership of each site team is restricted to two insiders from each programme. However, the cooperative nature of the Agueda Movement (Portugal) makes this impracticable. In this case, the answer is to have one fixed participant, and one rotating participant at EI gatherings so that every member of the cooperative can take part. Similarly, in the case of SEWA (India), participation in EI meetings outside of India is a form of compensation for the EI work of SEWA members. Again, this calls for rotation of participants.

The positions of insiders are also relative when they are examined in more depth. For example, in the case of Mozambique, Peru and Colombia, the local organisations that are participating in the EI, are responsible for the programmes but don't conduct them directly – in fact, they could almost be described as 'outsiders'. That

gives them special responsibilities: to faithfully represent the voices of the real insiders without editing or interpreting anything in any way that could falsify the information. It also means that the EI has to take account of the fact that the status 'insider' does not necessarily mean having the kinds of direct insights or perspectives that participants in programmes have. This blurring of distinctions means that we must reflect on the tools that are being used to learn from each stakeholder, and on the nature of the data being produced.

Beyond such specifics, each site team is generally the product of decisions and preferences that have originated from the programmes, from administrative or research institutions and from suggestions by the CT. What we really have is a kaleidoscope of site teams in which few appear to have much relation to the EI's methodological guidelines for creating site teams, and in which each team is the product of a confluence of unpredicted factors and different approaches. That makes it impossible to define a common approach to the work of the EI – but there are constants. These are: 1) that all site teams are attempting to gather many different

perspectives on effectiveness, from both the participants and stakeholders; and 2) that they have guaranteed to the communities and participating organisations that what has been gathered will not merely produce abstract collections of data and ideas, it will be a source of knowledge that can be used directly to improve the programmes. But welcome though these constants may be, they do not produce unified patterns in the methodologies that the teams have chosen to work with: diversity is the norm.

A diversity of answers

It is the diversity in the site teams, the approaches, and the methodologies outlined above that give the EI so much of its richness. In moving deeper into what makes programmes effective, that diversity is helping the EI to discover much less obvious aspects of programmes that have impacted on their effectiveness. Some of these are situational, often unforeseen, unplanned and perhaps undocumented. Also, the historical or socio-cultural contexts in which programmes have developed, have been affected by the

Colombia: *The activity that the visiting official saw* (see this page)
photo: CINDE

unexpected or have benefited from serendipity. The following examples make this clear.

Spontaneous reaction to a crisis.
The Honduras programme showed its solidity in responding to Hurricane Mitch, and the work that the 'guide mothers' did was incorporated in the Christian Children's Fund's programming and in its capacity building activities. The programme reacted quickly and appropriately, and its reactions affected future programming.

A chance encounter.
Thanks to the spontaneous testimony of a high official during an unscheduled visit to the programme, the Colombian Government's resistance toward the PROMESA project diminished remarkably. He observed a member of a community using a microscope and making a precise diagnosis. This was a kind of fortuitous, completely unplanned demonstration of the programme's effectiveness, and it served as a kind of silent advocacy for the programme. Such chance encounters can be important, yet their impact is unlikely to be discussed in any manual. It is also very difficult to gather information about them: there is no format for reporting them and, without hearing the story from the official himself, we might never have heard about this key event. We still don't know how the village man would have reported the incident.

Unexpected choices.
In most early childhood programmes the mothers are the ones who take care of the children, and therefore women are generally the childcare providers in ECD programmes. But, in the beginning, the PRONOEI project in Peru boasted a majority of male animators or carers. Looking into the reasons for this situation is revealing. For example: caring for children relieved men of some of the work of looking after their land; the work carried social prestige with it; there was resistance to single women leaving the village for the necessary training; and girls were not encouraged to pursue a study. More recently, this situation has changed: more girls now go to school; there is a small payment for the work; village committees decide who gets the income, on the basis of who has the skills and knowledge; the community no longer helps male carers

with their land; the men are no longer so willing to abandon their land, and the prestige of the carers has decreased substantially.

EI gatherings as keys to process

Every imaginable variety of experience and worry is expressed during EI gatherings. Exchanging ideas and anecdotes, discussing and negotiating within and among site teams and with the CT, all these and more help to define the EI process globally. They also contribute to the redefinition of the activities of each individual site team, in their study and in the ways in which their findings are documented. Each meeting is therefore all about learning from each other and from our own learning, and about remaining flexible and adaptable.

The workshop in Porto emphasised the importance of these kinds of meetings for sharing ideas and experiences: it is clear that the search for innovative approaches in the field of programmes requires moments of shared reflection. It was also a testing of our ideas about the learning process that is the EI.

Workshop participants reiterated the importance of giving those who are most directly involved, genuine room for sharing their perspectives on what makes a programme work. But, while there was unity on the notion of participation in principle, there was considerable diversity in its implementation. For example, some teams had put a great deal of effort into developing instruments to ensure children's participation, using local, culturally relevant instruments. Others had focused on parent participation, involving them directly in the study or in planning information-gathering activities. However, interviews remain the most generally used way of quickly gaining information from people who, in some way or at some point in time, were involved in the programme. This probably reflects our own academic or field work background.

In terms of methodology, workshops are also places to analyse the collection of instruments that we call the 'EI tool kit'. Analysis centres on the extent to which the various instruments genuinely reflect the ideas and opinions of the people participating in the study.

This includes the extent to which these ideas and opinions are actually affected by the characteristics of these very instruments. An example of this is a case study in which children had to present their views about their experiences of adult-child relationships in a programme. They did this directly with the person who was conducting the study, and in front of their peers. Unsurprisingly, their answers were somewhat uniform and stereotyped and it was clear that they were able to identify the 'good' answers in this context. The tool and the procedures had to be improved to enable them to express their real views. This entailed interviewing children two at a time to allow spontaneous child to child interactions to develop; allowing children to spend more time immersing themselves in the materials that enabled them to express themselves; using more open-ended questions; and recording everything that the children said, instead of reporting an edited version.

More important, the Porto workshop reminded us that we need a definition of ethical principles and of common

methodologies, as we search for shared understandings about what has proved to be relevant to the success of ECD programmes. Participants engaged in an exploration of both. For example, the site team from Portugal, and before them the site teams from Mozambique and Honduras, had asked themselves what concrete benefits the EI could bring to their respective projects. The most interesting aspect of this question is that those being investigated are doing the investigation themselves. The validity of the information that is gathered is related to those who provide it and who use it to improve programme effectiveness. Site teams stressed the importance of integrating EI activities into programme planning, and of understanding the value of lessons learned in terms of the extent to which they are important to the programmes themselves. The point is to ensure that communities, instead of being worn down by abusive research that produces no apparent benefit for them, are part of that research, know what they are producing, and are seeking direct benefits from their participation. This reinforces the EI as not merely a learning project, but

also as a way to make programmes more effective.

But the principle of participatory research does not mean that teams are restricted in their search for opinions about their programmes and cannot try out methodologies that are important to them as well. Rather, it emphasises the importance of transparency and respect for all participants in the EI.

In practice, there has been considerable diversity in participation. Some of the site teams have already reached the final stages of their research and have very few resources left to work participatively with in their communities. Others had initiated the study from a methodological starting point that was not necessarily compatible with the participatory learning for action (PLA) focus (see page 7). Still others started out with a philosophy of participation. One other clear issue for the EI is that, while we share a common understanding of participation, we discuss it in terms that reflect our academic backgrounds. Our discussions often seem more like

lectures that express our own models and desires, instead of focusing on the models or desires of different people involved in a programme. In our exploration of the ethical and methodological characteristics of the EI, this is something we must bear in mind.

A final point about EI gatherings: at short notice, the workshop in Porto had to be restructured and, to some extent, refocused. This was to ensure that it properly met the needs of the participants, while ensuring that participants could benefit from the resources that had been gathered. Reading the article by Tom Lent on page 27 will show why and how this should be done. In its new form, the workshop provided room for reflection on ethical and methodological issues and for interaction amongst site teams by establishing working groups around specific themes. These themes were: Effectiveness; Sustainability; Policy and Advocacy; Capacity Building; the EI Tool Kit; and Communication. To ensure integration, the CT now acts as an interlocutor to channel questions and explore possible future actions. Close contact between the CT and the

individual teams has always been seen as essential to the CT. Now this contact also ensures that planning for future meetings is fed by local/site team needs; and it will ensure that there is always room to continue exploring and understanding lessons learnt on a global level. Hopefully, the CT will achieve this by sustaining and further reinforcing contacts among the members of the CT family or community.

As we have progressed through the EI in general, certain rules have been developed. Some of these are practical and relatively straightforward. For example, rules have been developed to help site teams discover their roles and functions in their specific sites, and across the community of EI sites. These relate to the management of the EI. Other rules have been devised to help in much more complex and sensitive areas. For example, some are about the methodology of discovering what works or has worked in ECD programmes. In this area, developing common rules about methodological paths that produce justifiable statements about lessons learnt, is like

walking through a minefield of ethical stances and unexpected dilemmas.

The need now is to develop the EI's structure, and work started in the Porto workshop with the formation of working groups. These working groups will operate somewhat like virtual teams that are centred on individual themes rather than on individual sites. They will continue to consider the results that have been obtained from a number of experiences by reflecting on them more broadly but within the framework of their topics. However, they are not there to substitute for, or set limits to, processes in the EI, the site teams or the participating projects – nor in the dissemination phase of the EI. Rather they will explore their themes using the material that is emerging from the ten participating sites, and circulate their work so that it can be considered and commented on. Once working groups have shown that they are viable, we hope that new themes will be introduced that are significant to the projects and that, at the same time, extend the EI's search for lessons learnt.

In addition to the working groups that will tackle individual themes, we now see the need for a kind of task force that will take a broad overview, ensuring coherence across the EI in working with data. It will consolidate the lessons that are emerging from sites and map the overall progress of the EI. Its findings will feed into the EI community, including the Coordinating Team.

To analyse the overall process of the EI and help it realise its potential as it holds to its visions, we are also working on the idea of focus group meetings. These will fulfil the functions of 'independent consultants' who validate EI outputs and demonstrate and develop their applicability to practice in the field. The first focus group meeting is about giving greater clarity to what is emerging from the operation of the EI in terms of the ethical and methodological dimensions of inclusive learning. These dimensions are associated with gathering, interpreting and communicating relevant information and materials that have been unveiled by the EI teams. Subsequent meetings will explore emerging themes from individual projects.

The point of the EI is to discover what makes an ECD programme work. EI processes are just beginning to produce a collection of lessons and reflections, and these are starting to inform team visits, the international and team meetings, and the preliminary reports. They are also sparking off more focused cross-site debates, and launching searches through the collected data that are beginning to highlight some initial findings. The most important aspect of this is to synthesise findings by using processes that make sense to the EI; and we must preserve the authenticity of these findings and avoid reducing them to some kind of generalised 'check list' by which effectiveness can be measured. The following initial findings are offered in this light.

Turnover of programme workers
The rapid turnover of programme workers that is characteristic of many ECD programmes is often seen as undesirable: programmes lose experience, skills and knowledge. But we are learning that, if changes are properly understood, they can actually be advantageous. For example, as a part of the policy of Parent Associations in Puno (Peru) the communities regularly change the animators who work with children. This means that the income that goes with the job is shared among a number of women, and that more women have the chance to learn about child development. But there are obviously implications for the programme: for example, new workers have to be trained on an on-going basis and this has to be factored into planning and budgeting.

Turnover of leaders
When comparing the life of a programme to a river, changes of leadership appear as key events in its course because qualitative changes in the content and the components of the programme frequently occur at these times. We have seen that these changes are judged differently by the various stakeholders. For example, in the PROMESA (Colombia) programme, the departure of the founders created new challenges for the organisation. It was a critical time and the emergent leadership signed an agreement with a new main donor that took the programme through its crisis and ensured its continuity. However, from the point of view of the founder, the agreement was not 'the best' that could have been negotiated. Nonetheless, the river still flowed. We have learned a complementary lesson from Puno (Peru), where there was also a change in the leadership, this time as a result of a change in the funding of the dissemination phase of the pilot. The originators of the programme perceived that the quality of the programme deteriorated and the rivers that they drew tended to dry up. But the rivers drawn by the educators showed the programme growing strongly.

Planned succession
Accepting that changes will follow a change of leadership and making the best of the new situation, is one way of coping. A more radical approach is to plan for change by creating a process for succession. We have seen this in the Madrasa preschool programme in Kenya. In 1999, the woman who began the project some 16 years ago, stepped down from overall project management,

and responsibility was passed on to a woman who had been trained for the task. This mechanism for change exists throughout the programme: each position has someone in training to take over the role when the current person moves on.

Continuously adapting tools
Following on the above, we have learned that tools that help us to learn about ECD programmes have to be continuously adapted. We have also learned that these adaptations must be guided by sensitivity, knowledge and reflection. For example, the Arpillera (puppets and flannelgraph*) tool was used by the data collectors working with the PRONOEI programme in Peru. At first children were asked to use the Arpillera to express their opinions about their play centres. The tool was used in an artificial situation, and questions were asked in such a way that children responded very mechanically. Once the researchers saw that children's responses were very limited, they changed the situation and the task, although the same materials were used.

EI Workshop, The Hague: *Demonstrating SUMBI's flannelgraph technique (see page 24)*
photo: Angela Ernst

* This is a technique that enables children to express themselves readily and fully. Animals, houses, geographical features, etc. are cut from cloth. In one use of the technique, children choose the elements that they need to tell their story, and arrange them on the flannelgraph; a piece of cloth that the graphical elements stick on to easily. Elements can be moved and removed and others can be brought in, as the stories unfold.

We have also seen the need for continuous adaptation of tools from interviews by Madres Guías of other mothers in the community. Here, the design of the interview led to reports of 'failures' (for example, women who were not making the requisite number of home visits) that were embarrassing both to the person who has failed and to the person who has to report that

failure. In discussing the results of the interviews it was clear that interviewers were not reporting accurately in order not to cause embarrassment. The team then developed drama techniques that identified key issues without linking these to individuals. This shows us that in describing the EI tools, we need to suggest ways that the tools might be adapted to meet local needs.

Programme design versus implementation
There is often an apparent mismatch between programme design and reality: what the programme is supposed to do, and the ways in which it is supposed to work, are not necessarily reflected in practice. We have learned that such mismatches can be identified and acknowledged, and can lead to an

adaptation of the programme. For example, in Honduras, the programme does not officially allow young women who do not have children of their own to be Madres Guías. However, it is allowed 'unofficially' with the connivance of the local supervisors. Factors such as the availability of single women and the fact that they could offer more time to the programme than women with children, led to this development. This adaptation brings practical benefits to the community: mothers and educators say that young girls who become Madres Guías defer their childbearing until later; and that they know more about motherhood than their peers. It also brings practical benefits to the programme: there is a larger pool of potential workers.

Consulting children
We are learning to consult children to learn about their ideas, opinions and feelings as one way of understanding a programme's effectiveness. This is a change from the traditional model of assessing impact on children only through measurement (their height, weight, school readiness, and so on).

We are also learning that children's opinions and attitudes have to be sought and assessed in the child's natural context – isolation of children in a test setting produces artificial outcomes – and that play and drama are very powerful tools to get at children's ideas.

Personal growth
We are seeing that one of the greatest impacts of ECD programmes, and thus one of the outcomes of effective ECD programmes, is the personal and professional growth of those involved, particularly those from the community who are involved in direct service delivery. Programme workers claim that, thanks to the training received and the programme itself, they benefited in terms of social prestige, self-confidence, increased knowledge and greater understanding and ability to use technical vocabulary appropriately. These benefits have very often increased their credibility in the community and have led to their greater involvement in community affairs. These kinds of outcomes of ECD programmes need to be better documented.

The roles of women
Related to the above, we are seeing that women who have more knowledge and skills in childrearing as a result of their involvement in an ECD programme, may become important leaders in their communities. We need to learn more about the extent to which these new roles impact on traditional male/female roles within the culture. For example, while the Women's Bank of SEWA (India) is set up to make transactions with women, frequently men take the position that they must accompany the women when they go to the bank to get loans for their projects. This maintains the traditional power relationship between men and women. Another example comes from Honduras. While the Madres Guías demonstrate considerable leadership abilities in the programme, within the family they are very supportive of the way their traditional family structure divides up roles for men and women. We need to understand more about how changes that are introduced by programmes affect (or not) the traditional positions of women in their families and communities.

People as resources
The notion that people are the most important resource in ECD programmes is being strongly reinforced. In fact, people are often the only resource in many non-conventional programmes in majority world countries. Entering a crèche in India, a preschool centre in Peru, or a school in Mozambique, similarities are evident. There is an unfurnished and undecorated space full of children with little if anything in their hands, and an adult taking care of them. Some of these settings are static and cold; others are full of activity. While the physical conditions in both settings may be similar, the difference is the adult and her ability to create a supportive and stimulating setting out of the local physical and social environments.

Ideology
We are learning about the role of ideology in both stimulating the creation of a programme and in sustaining it over time. For example, the SEWA programme in India was created on Ghandian principles that are very

much alive more than 50 years after they were developed. Also, the social movement created in Portugal stimulated by the revolution in 1973 is still the motivating factor and at the core of the Agueda programmes today. In contrast, another programme created from a strong ideology, PRONOEI in Peru, has lost its ideological core. It was founded on Paulo Freire's vision of how to work with communities so that they could take control of their lives. However, the ideology was lost when the project moved from a pilot phase to national dissemination. Only the framework or form of the project was maintained. (This is quite possibly the reason the founders see the PRONOEI river running dry.) We need to learn more about the role of ideology in sustaining programmes.

The power of the written word
We are seeing the value of using locally meaningful tools in spreading ECD messages. When new religions were introduced to Latin America, one of the main tools was the Bible. Very often one finds people who can read the 'Holy Book' and nothing else, and when

things get difficult, the spiritual leader helps by reading from the Bible. Thus the 'book' has a mystique that is powerful in many contexts. An example of the power of the written word comes from Honduras where handbooks have been developed for the programme. The fact that the handbooks existed was important, and was used to good advantage during the crisis created by Hurricane Mitch. Even though they provided no direct guidance in how to respond to the devastation resulting from the hurricane, in the midst of the chaos and uncertainty of the floods, the handbooks were perceived as a solid rock of knowledge and truth, providing all the necessary answers. The use of the book helped bridge the gap in communication caused by disrupted telephone lines between the central coordination of the programme and local action.

Appropriate ECD
It is now widely recognised that effective ECD programmes must be contextually appropriate. However, we are beginning to get a real sense of what that means in practice. For example, the

Madrasa preschool programme in Kenya has evolved in a way that maintained the cultural and religious expectations of their communities and their traditions. Within the programme, Muslims have been able to preserve their identity and at the same time they have been provided with a programme that promotes positive attitudes to secular education. There is now a unique and innovative curriculum that has not only integrated Islamic education with secular education but has also provided active learning methods for both religious and secular education.

Rich sources of complementary lessons about appropriate ECD programmes are emerging from the Pinatubo programme in the Philippines for the indigenous Aeta people. The Aetas have been resettled within a dominant culture following a volcanic eruption. The establishment of an ECD programme was the entry point to a broader community development initiative. In the operation of the ECD programme, a number of dilemmas arose as the Aetas chose educational

objectives for their children. These reflected the Aeta lifestyle, values and culture but appeared to clash with their children's need to participate in the life of the wider community and to adjust to formal school. In response, members of the NGO have had to be wary that their own formal school experiences did not affect their ways of facilitating learning experiences for children and parents. They have also had to avoid assuming that the development and progress of the Aetas depended on their adjustment to the dominant culture. ❍

Medio Anbiente

Proteremos los bosque.
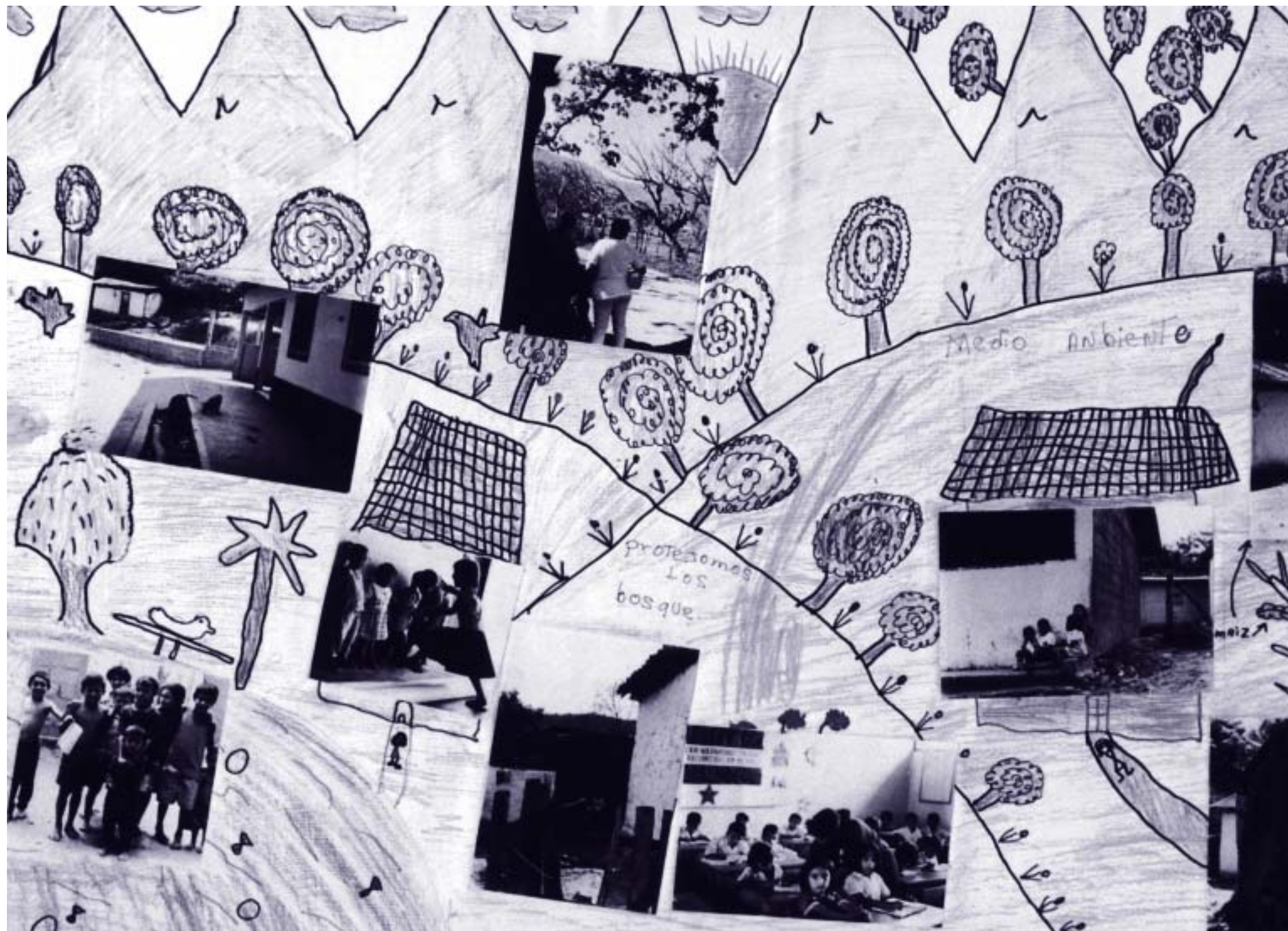
Workshops as a space for individual and collective change

Tom Lent

Tom Lent has been a facilitator of a variety of workshops for over 30 years, understanding and practising facilitation in the context of each individual's relationship with change for the better, and demonstrating his conviction that '... the work begins with us as we simply try to be the change we want to see happen in the world' (Gandhi). In this article he shows how he makes this philosophy concrete, by ensuring that workshops build on people's capacity to get from where they are now, to where they decide they have to be.

*Go to the people,
love them, learn from them,
start with what they have,
build on what they know,
and when the work is finished,
they will say, of the best leaders,
we have done it ourselves.*

In this quote, Lao Tsu was speaking about 'the best leaders' but it could apply to facilitators as well. Facilitation is about techniques, methodologies, tools and approaches. But more importantly, it is about applying them in a way that is coherent with our values: we want to put into practice values that lead us to a more equitable and fair world. Facilitation is also a question of politics and ethics, of power relationships, of who decides, who benefits and how. It is not about dominating, taking power, or having power over people, it is about generating and creating power among people ... the power to make a reality of an ideal.

If, because of the way we relate to a group, it moves from where it is towards its goals with its dignity, integrity and self-confidence strengthened, and its abilities and energy enhanced, then we have facilitated. But the value that our facilitation adds is mostly the result of knowing and sensing where the group is coming from, where the group is, where the group wants and needs to be, and knowing and sensing how to get there. It is more about seeing the problem solving process of the group itself, than about solving a particular problem. It is more about helping a group achieve a certain critical awareness, capacity, and confidence in itself, than about being the one who solves the problem for the group.

The broader and deeper context of facilitation

Because of the stark contrasts in the human condition, whether it be in development, early childhood development, human rights and children's rights, disaster relief, refugee and/or migration programmes, many of us working in these areas tend to see, and act in, the world in terms of the vast discrepancy between what is and

Honduras, Community of La Huerta: *A visual report of mapping exercise*
photo: Ruth Cohen

what should or could be. Our energies, actions and focus seek to move prevailing and unacceptable situations of injustice, inequity, inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and discrimination towards a better state. Of course, the great debates in such work revolve around what is 'better' and who decides? How far do we go and when do we stop? How deep or broad do we need to go in our analysis of the context and our response to it? What are the root causes of the problems? How capable are we in confronting or addressing the historical processes, structures and forces that form the problem? What are the most appropriate and intelligent roles of each of us and each of our organisations in this human dilemma? How do we become more effective as time goes on?

The point of departure of this article, and of facilitation, is that present conditions and patterns are not acceptable, inevitable or permanent discrepancies between what is and what should be. Furthermore, within these situations and dilemmas there also exists an inexhaustible wealth of human energy, capacity for good,

creativity, imagination, hard work, resilience, capacity to learn, and so on. However, none of this on its own will make a big enough difference *vis-à-vis* the challenges that confront us.

Progress and innovations can be made in parts: technology, science, legislation, managerial science and administration; but people, individually and collectively must make advances as well in their collective attitudes, wisdom and relationships. We need to make progress and innovation in a new 'inwardness' and 'outwardness' that is based on respect for self and others, the spiritual commons that we all draw from, and the global commons in which we all live.

There also needs to be a thread, a glue, a unifying force, a chemistry, or synergy among all these elements and more in order to bring about the changes that we want to see in the world. There needs to be a facilitation among the elements and their relationship with the whole in order for significant changes to come about.

Some changes will come about through serendipity, accident, fortuitous events,

but for the most part, the kinds of changes we seek in the world will come about through a greater and better degree of intentionality and purposefulness. That means that we need to transform ourselves, our most intimate and close relationships and our organisations, if they are to become agents and protagonists of change and transformation; and it means that we need to connect theory and practice, ethics and actions, the macro and micro, visions and steps, our life and our life project.

*To see the world in a grain of sand,
and a heaven in a wildflower,
hold infinity in the palm of our hand,
and eternity in an hour.*

(William Blake)

Workshops as a space for individual and collective change

We, as individuals, groups and organisations, all need our oasis, retreats, sanctuaries and sacred spaces. We need a place to be creative, to see new ways and approaches, to experience new ways of relating and relationships, to open doors and windows, to recharge our batteries and

energies, to care for and energise our bodies, spirits, souls, and minds ... or to affirm our old ways and values but in a different light.

But what is often the reality of workshops? Over the past three decades, I have had the privilege of observing NGOs, community-based organisations, movements, local governments, and others in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, North America, and Europe. Without exception, workshops have been extensively used for training, capacity-building, team-building, organisational development, and individual and collective change. Indeed, a lot of frustration and comments exist about 'workshop-itus' – not to mention silly trainer techniques, and group dynamic exercises that do not energise.

On the other hand, organisations have experienced workshops that have been inspiring, exhilarating, informative, generative, and that have unleashed positive streams of confidence, creativity, and energy: 'We created a shared vision of where we want to go and clarity on how to get there.' 'We found that we had the capacities inside

the team.' 'We can change.' So what are the qualities of workshops and facilitation that seem to enable, empower, and capacitate individuals and groups, so they move on with their dignity, integrity and self-confidence strengthened, and their abilities and energy enhanced?

For one thing effective workshops contrast strongly with the authoritarian, hierarchical, exclusive, unequal, elitist, non-sustainable, oppressive, unaccountable, and discriminatory institutions and organisations that surround us. As facilitators, we try to create a workshop environment that is horizontal, participatory, inclusive, democratic, equitable, empowering, sustainable, responsive and accountable to the participants. Workshops become a space and a nucleus of change, a space to create, to see what is possible, in which we simply try to be the change we want to see happen in the world.

But how do we create such an environment, an environment of justice, fairness, listening, respect, participation and expression? How do we generate horizontal and collective

leadership, and help people feel valued and appreciated? How do we ensure greater individual and group effectiveness, and help people to best learn to do things better and to do better things? In short: how can workshops bring people from where they are to where they want to be?

Some of the answers to these questions will be found in the architecture or design of what we do as facilitators; others will be found in the carpentry, or day to day, and moment to moment contributions we make. Yet others will be found in how we relate and interact with the group as human beings and the values we want to see germinate in those relationships. To illustrate this, let us look at the two stages in a workshop: its preparations and its facilitation.

Prior to the workshop: the preparations

Workshops can go wrong even before they start because of our lack of preparation or communication in logistics or workshop content, and our lack of attentiveness to

EI workshop, The Hague: *Recording information graphically*
photo: Angela Ernst

participants' personal and professional rhythms. We facilitators can make matters worse by also ignoring significant factors around us such as national elections, school vacations, civil war, massive dismissals, natural disasters, religious holidays, important cultural or sports events, an organisational leadership crisis, a budget crisis, and so on. Yet all of these points and many more are covered in manuals about preparing a workshop well.

We can also nurture the seeds of failure by operating the workshop in a distractingly luxurious venue that sends the wrong messages back to the people who we work with, people who are denied privileges, rights, resources, and the basics of life. Yet the essentials for a venue are simple: natural light, and ventilation; enough space to sit in a circle, and to break away and do group work; plenty of wall space to put up group work, plenary work and conclusions that build up and project and reflect a sense of accomplishment; staying away from food that is rich, fatty and not nutritious; and serving fresh fruit during the breaks. In short: the location needs to nourish the mind, the spirit, the body and the soul.

Better sitting in the shade of a tree than sitting in a dark, stuffy conference room in a five star hotel.

In the workshop: establishing the participative spirit

Once in the workshop, we want people to immediately feel that they are participants in, and co-responsible for, defining and creating the workshop that they want. Often people come with expectations or an image that the facilitator is an authority figure, a teacher, a director, someone who will be the expert and give the answers. Early on, we want to facilitate in such a way that people see that the authority resides in the group. Everyone teaches and everyone learns, direction is provided by the group through consensus; the participants have invaluable expertise, and the answers can be generated from the group.

It is easy to fall back in traditional patterns: show, teach, tell, direct, instruct, give answers, dictate structure, impose the rules, be the authority figure. Under another logic, this may be efficient sometimes and even justified. But remember, what is it that we want

to create? What values and practices are we trying to cultivate? We want the group to become empowered and enabled, and that takes time and intentionality. But when we opt for the easy way, we need to ask ourselves, what does this do to group integrity, discovery, self-confidence and self-management? When we make decisions for the group in the name of efficiency, what does this do to the group's capacity building process of making its own decisions?

To begin to answer these questions, we have to remember that the workshop has multiple human dimensions. These have to be acknowledged from the beginning: it is a collection of individuals where each person brings in his or her energies (positive and negative), experiences, expectations, fears and angers, hopes and dreams, with different passions and commitments to outcomes. It is a group that becomes more and more complex than the sum of its parts as all of these energies,

experiences, expectations, fears and angers, hopes and dreams, passions and commitments begin to interact with each other.

Yet the outcome of the workshop may be less than the sum of its parts because the negative can dominate the positive. This is very much dependent on how well we facilitate. For example, while recognising and affirming each individual's right to his or her feelings, we also need to build a collective sense of commonality, the collective expectations, a collective energy that is positive and begins to move toward a sense of common purpose, or the development of one. Not that individual expectations are negated, rather that they are found in the construction of the common whole.

These considerations come strongly into play as workshop components are introduced: the 'icebreaker exercise' to warm people up; the 'expectations exercise' in which participants express their priority expectation

of the workshop, thereby determining the content of the workshop; the 'working conditions exercise' to determine the group principles, norms, and rules of the workshop that will ensure that we can work together to reach our expectations; and the 'timetabling exercise' in which the group defines its own degree of commitment and determines its own level of energy from day to day. In each of these processes, group ownership is reinforced.

To add to this, workshop governance can be built among the participants by having the group define its own committees. These may range from a 'discipline and punctuality committee' that assures we start and end breaks and sessions on time, to an 'animation committee' that comes up with ideas to start sessions in dynamic ways, and with exercises and dynamics for low energy points in the workshop.

Similarly, evaluation by participants is vital. It should be

from day to day, to channel positive and negative energy, and provide both constructive and collective ways to improve the workshop content and process in good time. Leaving evaluations to the mid point or end of a workshop can make them more an autopsy of a dead or sick process when in fact they can be a way to revitalise the energy, health and sense of direction and ownership of the group. And waiting too long can also mean that frustrations accumulate, become destructive or subversive, and show up as apathy, disengagement, boredom, resistance, and even rebellion. Day to day evaluations also mean that there is less need to work 'behind the scenes' or in 'private lobbying' – operations that can distract and dissipate energies.

Again, if we are serious about empowerment, engendering group responsibility and self-management, then we need to create authentic ways and times for the collective analysis. These are what generate the kind of

Years of experience

The 'Years of experience' exercise is a quick and simple technique to heighten a group's sense of self-esteem and self-worth. The group stands in a circle, and using a rolled up ball of flipchart paper, taped together by masking tape, begins to toss the ball around the circle, each time to a different person. When each person catches the ball, he or she tells how many years of work experience he or she has. The facilitator writes the numbers on the flipchart, adding up the figures along the way. At the end of the exercise the group can see how much accumulated experience and expertise it collectively has. It's empowering to find that the group has, for example, 645 years of experience. So do we look for an expert who has even more experience? Or do we learn how to draw better on the group's 645 years of experience and expertise?

India: *Practising preschool activities*
source: Liana Gertsch

changes that the workshop is supposed to help to bring about. That indeed means a participatory workshop that has its structures and institutions, expression and freedom, and that is a balance of the individual and collective, and so on. But it also means that facilitators have to make sure that the balance between process and content is right. It means making sure that the group doesn't lose itself in discussions on process, while it only advances slowly in content; or talk a lot about content but miss the richness and multiple perspectives of that content. Process (how we address an issue) and content (the issue itself) are not always in neat balance or proportion, but they do always go together. Time must be given to allow perspectives to develop; and, while spontaneity has its place, so does continuity and a healthy rhythm.

The power of questions

In facilitation, a good question is worth a thousand pictures. Good questions are like keys to the spirit, to the heart, and to the minds of people, organ-isations and groups. They unleash inhibitions, overcome repressions, open up windows, doors, and new worlds.

Good facilitation is in essence the ability to ask questions that challenge a group, stimulate its imagination and open up new perspectives. Good questions touch and engage the group's core values, essence, sense of curiosity or discovery, latent concerns, searching, and key issues or problems. They can inspire people to reach to new heights from where they can see themselves and what they do in a different light, see better where they are in an issue or problem, and envision where they want to go and determine how to get there.

A specific example of a good question is 'What questions are we asking ourselves or do we want to ask ourselves about (the theme of the workshop)?' The point is to generate a lot of discussion that shows what the concerns, debates, problems and issues are surrounding the theme of the workshop. Through these we can show 'where people are' and what they are thinking, what their codes and key phrases are, what is of value, where they want to go, and so on.

Associated questions can help the group begin to create a common ground for discussion. Examples include 'Where do we want to be in (one year, five years,

ten years, a generation)?' and 'What should we see happening then if we have been effective in our work?'

More fundamental questions can clarify vision and deepen analysis. For example, 'What are the values and ethics that are the basis of our work?' and 'What are the positive and negative forces, internally and externally, that influence our ability to get from where we are now to where we want to go?' The findings from the resultant discussions can be used as reference points throughout the workshop and, as later discussions deepen, can be fed back to enrich the original visions and analyses.

Clearly then, good questions are empowering – as long as the answers come from inside the group. But giving answers, and teaching as a monologue can lead to domestication, submission and dependency, and can stifle creativity and the desire to search. Therefore, facilitators do not try to provide packages of questions, answers or recipes, or a set of instructions. Each setting, each group, each time has latent questions, currents, energies, concerns, worries, hopes, negativity, and

positivity. Some are easier to find than others but facilitators of change need to know how to look for, and connect to, those forces, and create connections within the group.

Ideally, the group will heighten its own capacity to better ask itself questions and to self-manage its process of discovery, group learning, and 'betterness'. Encouraging this is part of ensuring that the process is increasingly group centred, and that the facilitator is not 'on stage' and the centre of attention. It is also part of having a good rapport with the group and a lively relationship, and providing leadership when needed is not at the expense of the group's own development and capacities.

Holding the participative spirit

This is not the place to review the well-known, often almost mechanical devices that are necessary to keep workshops focused and on track. But used properly, some of these devices can reinforce real engagement and help ensure that individual and collective resources are naturally in play. One such helps people keep the content of

workshop sessions in mind by making it visible via charts that show how the workshop is developing. A second device helps people better see the broader process within the workshop and how one activity and one day links to another and builds on what comes next. This can be a chart:

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Process			
Content			
Results/Products			

There are many variations on this. But the key point is that all participants at all times see where they are, where they have come from, and where they are going to within the workshop process. They should know why they are doing what they are doing, how it connects to what was done previously, what it builds on, what it contributes to and what it builds towards.

A third device is to have a chart called 'Pending issues' that is left in an accessible place, and on which we write down ideas that have yet to be addressed. As we go along we can add to the list, and either address an issue

when it is most relevant, or plan how and when to address it. This helps the sense that the workshop really is tackling what participants want it to.

A fourth device is to begin a session with the question 'What do we want out of this session,' and making sure everyone agrees on how much time will be given. This helps keep processes dynamic and participatory, and gives sessions a rhythm; and it's a way of supporting the self-regulation of the group while helping the facilitator to know what the substance and rhythm should be.

Facilitating progress in content and process

At the same time as using these devices and tools, we may also find ourselves playing many different roles to ensure that we help the group move the content and the process along in a participative spirit. This is a good time to clarify a common misconception and myth about process and content. They are really not dualities or polarities. Both are interlined in a very real way. The fact that a group cannot agree about

The facilitator's roles in moving the CONTENT forward are to make sure	The facilitator's roles in moving the PROCESS forward are to make sure
- that we are addressing the relevant sides of the issues; - that we are going deep enough; - that we are going broad enough; - that we know who has information or knowledge on the issue and that they have the appropriate time to share it; - that we help resource people or 'experts' to adjust to the group, if they are losing people; - that the questions we ask generate enthusiasm, creativity and touch the essence of what the group wants; - that data and information is generated, analysed, synthesised and integrated, and that it is the basis for decisions; - that there is evaluation and planning of next steps.	- that everyone is participating and contributing, and feels safe to do so; - that not one person or group dominates; - that everyone feels they have been heard and respected; - that people know where they are in the course of the day and week ... they seek linkages and meanings; - that the questions we ask generate enthusiasm, creativity and touch the essence of what the group wants; - that we develop a shared sense of responsibility for the content, process and results ... a co-responsibility for the management; - that we predict problems and issues that may arise, diagnose the causes of the difficulties when they do arise, and mobilise sources of support and analysis to aid the planning of next steps.

process is probably a reflection of a greater disagreement on content. Good process and good content go together and the job of the facilitator is to move both ahead at the same time. The chart on the previous page gives a sense of how the facilitator enables this.

Weaving threads across sessions and linking it all together

At the end of each session, it is frequently useful to come up with conclusions or at least a synthesis or integration of the session. Some facilitators take this role on themselves, or just read back the flipchart notes/bullets and think they have synthesised. Better to ask the group first 'What are we learning?' or 'What have been the key points here and our conclusions?' or 'What was most useful and interesting, and why?' or 'How are we working together?' or 'How is the process contributing to our goals?' or 'How was our participation?' or 'What questions does this raise for our next session?'

Such questions give everyone a sense of where the workshop is, and they also provide the facilitators with key information for the 'after hours' work that is necessary to prepare for the next session or day. For this work, we start with everything we have learned from the group. We have seen the group in action, we have heard their evaluations, and we have a sense of where people are and where they want to go. Now we need to review the day's work, review all the flipcharts of the groups and plenary, and begin to see what the emerging issues are and what issues are just beneath the surface. We need to begin to see patterns and clusters of ideas and issues that the group is seeing and feeling. We need to see to what degree the workshop outline is relevant and responds to the group's expectations, as it is maturing and evolving as a group. Expectations can mature and evolve, so as the group moves forward (or not) the workshop design must be where they are and take them to where they want to go. Neither are static points.

In essence, we are recognising that the group is alive and that it is taking on a life of its own. We are establishing a living connection to it, and we are ensuring that the workshop design is alive and sensitive to the group's

Peru: *Teacher coordinators of Villa El Salvador reconstructing the history of the project using the river technique*
photo: Carmen Vasquez de Velasco

evolution: it's not just a matter of planning mechanically for the next day. To help us to do this well and to further reinforce the participative nature of the workshop, we might create a reference group or a planning and evaluation committee – in addition, not as a substitution, to the daily evaluations – and members might rotate so the responsibility and a sense of close engagement is created and shared.

It is in these ways that the continuity of the workshop is sustained – and again there are several techniques for bringing out the links, the emerging themes, the salient issues from day to day. For example, we can ask 'What sticks out in our mind about yesterday, what did we find most useful?' 'What are our key lessons learned from yesterday?' and we should go back to our workshop matrix (process, content, results) to see what we have done, and

where we are going in the day ahead of us. It is also useful for the group to ask itself questions such as 'Is this where we want to go?' and 'Will our process take us there?' or 'Are we asking ourselves the right questions today?'

One common fallacy is that it is a good idea to leave the 'action plans and next steps' – the tying together, the commitments about who will do what and when – session to the end of the workshop. In theory this is a great idea and it seems logical: it is the moment that we have been building for and when we can synthesise the previous days, and prioritise. But if we leave it late, people are most tired, are thinking about going home, have already left or are distracted by the logistics of leaving. In short, at the moment when we most need a heightened sense of focus, seriousness, and commitment, some people have already disengaged.

Several devices can be used to avoid this problem. The first is to make the point prior to, and during the workshop, of the importance of full participation through to the end because decisions and commitments will be made at that time. A second is

to make conclusions and commitments to the degree possible all along the way in the workshop. In addition to a 'Pending issues' list, we also should have a 'Conclusions and next steps' list on an open flipchart that we build throughout the time we are together. A third device is to help the group to stay alert to the end by having breaks in which members can socialise, energise, get out of the workshop venue, relax, recharge batteries and refreshen. It's important to recognise that every group has its own work habits, stamina, energy level: some groups can go two weeks without a break; others fall in exhaustion in two days. A fourth device is to take the conclusions and next steps session in the morning of the last day when people are still fresh. If this is not possible, at least the last day should not be so fully packed as to squeeze everything together, leaving people lost and frustrated.

Normal winding up activities include how to cope with pending issues, and an evaluation of content and process that includes suggestions and comments. But one exercise is highly useful for seeing how far we have come

in creating linkages and awareness of each other as resources. This is the 'Bazaar or market day exercise' in which people or work teams write down on individual pieces of paper each of the things they need in order to work better in the future and put into practice what they have learned in the workshop. They also write down what they can offer to other participants or groups. These 'Needs' and 'Offers' are then taped on a common wall and time is given so people can make the appropriate contact and arrangements.

At the very end, especially if people have bonded and linked and made new friendships, it is important to honour and affirm that bond and let people have their collective space to express their appreciation and goodbyes. We have done our best to build a sense of community and commitment to one another, now we do not want to ignore it. One useful exercise here is to have everyone tape a blank sheet of paper on his or her back. People then walk around and write comments/messages to everyone else on their sheets. This becomes a kind of souvenir of good memories from the workshop.

Conclusions

Facilitation is an approach to life and to relationships. It is about more fully respecting, acknowledging and appreciating the legitimacy and value of oneself and the other within diversity. It is about believing in, and bringing out the best in ourselves and others in pursuit of a better tomorrow. It is about bringing sunshine and warmth to each other and our relationships. It is about creating true and equitable partnerships, where we accompany each other in the walk through life. The ideas in this article are but experiences and discussion points, and nothing could be better than for the reader to go beyond them.

As Matsuo Bashoo (1644-1694) said in a haiku,

Do not follow the footsteps of the ancients,
look for what they looked for.

EI workshop, The Hague: *Enjoying an insight revealed by considering the project as a tree with roots, the trunk (main development) and branches*
photo: Angela Ernst

Trinidad and Tobago: *Giving you my view of things*
photo: Servol

Look again

Documentation and communication through audio-visual media

Angela Ernst
Department of Programme Documentation and Communication

One of the objectives of the Effectiveness Initiative (EI) is to define a set of tools for multi-perspective and participatory approaches that can help provide more valuable information about what makes a programme effective. The EI workshop in Porto was about investigating and sharing techniques for data gathering and data management. Within that, one of the activities was to investigate the possibilities of alternative and creative ways of data gathering. One of these alternatives is to collect non-written information – that is, audio and/or visual materials. These can provide a rich source of information that for various reasons cannot be conveyed through writing. But one major challenge is to find out and understand what the images contain and convey. This article discusses some basic principles in working with audio and/or visual materials, and goes on to present experiences from the EI that show some of the ways in which visual materials are important in development work.

Some basic principles

The use of audio and/or visual materials is a great way to communicate with people. Photos, videos, drama, story-telling and other media, enable people to record their own knowledge and represent themselves about issues that are important to them: whether they make their own pictures, drawings, videos and so on, or whether their presentations are recorded. Precious traditions in story telling, village poetry and songs can also be saved in these ways – something that could never be achieved through writing alone.

In addition, audio and/or visual materials are more than just another way of documenting events, or of adorning written documents. In visual terms, for example, the old adage of 'a picture can say more than a thousand words' still holds true – just think of the picture of the student standing in front of the tank in Tian'anmen Square in China. A picture like this tells a strong story, conveys emotions and implants the story in hearts and minds.

In our search for ways of learning from the field in a participatory way, the use of audio and/or video materials can give those who are seldom heard (children, non-literate people and vulnerable people) a voice. It can also add to, and sometimes even alter the information we already have, creating a multi-perspective approach to issues that we want to investigate. If this is our point of departure, we should look at two sides of the use of audio and/or visual materials:

1. gathering data and information, using pictures, drawings and songs and talking about them to find out more about what people feel is important; and
2. sharing them.

India: *Non-literate working woman making a video*

In both cases, development workers may find themselves acting as facilitators and, if they do, they have a huge responsibility. It is not a matter of, for example, just taking a camera and starting to 'shoot'. Clear purposes and objectives are essential and, in development terms, this will often mean making all the necessary processes into a community-based tool. The community itself is then in a position to participate in key decisions about purposes and objectives, and ways and means, using its own knowledge of the subjects and of its audiences. And, as this is done, development workers could find themselves learning a great deal too. In addition, they may find themselves facilitating follow up processes; and they

may find important roles in ensuring that those who have participated are not left to their own devices after the planning, the interviews and the talking about pictures is over. Such roles might include giving feedback on how the information is being used. Finally, the capacity building that may be necessary with the community, helps to ensure ownership and continuity.

Documenting and communicating is about selection and omission. The trick is to be clear about what those famous 'thousand words' are, and who is saying them and why: it's essential to present the intended message. But that is just the start. It is also necessary to be aware of how audio and/or visual stimuli impact on the target audiences. To do that, means knowing something about our audiences – for example: do they share the perceptions and understandings of the communicators? How do they interpret what is presented to them? When they see pictures of children, do they see a picturesque image or – as was intended – do they see the drama?

A classic example of what can go wrong concerns the efforts of western relief workers in Africa to eradicate the problem of malaria by enhancing awareness of the danger of mosquitoes. They put up big posters with a detailed image of a mosquito. To their dismay and

surprise, the project failed. When they asked people in the target communities why, they replied that there was no danger because the local mosquitoes weren't as large as the ones in the posters!

Alternatives in qualitative information and data gathering: experiences from the Effectiveness Initiative

One exercise in the EI workshop in Porto was based on the idea that pictures can tell a story. Participants formed groups, and each group selected a number of pictures from projects from around the world. They arranged these into a story without words. Other groups then looked at the selected pictures and were asked to 'read' the story.

A number of interesting things happened. The groups chose pictures at random, with no concern for the country or region they came from. Pictures were chosen because of the messages they contained and it didn't matter that scenes of children and parents or caregivers from

different countries were used together. They organised the pictures in different ways – some circular, others linear. In general, the way in which pictures were selected and the way in which a story was told was different in each group. Yet each group could read the other groups' stories and sometimes could even read more than one story in the pictures. But somehow, the intended story that the group wanted to convey was always understood.

Two of the picture stories are displayed overleaf for you to 'read'. A description of the story participants wanted to convey can be found at the end of this article.

What does this exercise prove? Well, that pictures can tell a story. But did the

Peru: *A mother explains a drawing made by her group*

participants all understand the same story because they are all like-minded, working in the same field, all adults? Would a layperson see the same things in the pictures? And what would a child see? The answers to these questions are not clear and one may argue that using pictures to convey a message can be risky business – but then, so can using words.

Selective perception?

Pictures can be used very effectively as an entry point for starting a conversation and this may, quite unintentionally, lead to new and valuable discoveries. This is illustrated in the following example. In a discussion during the workshop, one of the participants showed a picture from a magazine in which children were playing on a swing and looking very happy. When he asked a girl in the community he works with what she saw, she said that the children were playing while their mother was being buried ...

Here a rather neutral subject helped a child to begin to reveal her own experiences and feelings, and to talk about them. The picture opened up the possibility of exploring what death means to her, what her real life situation is, what values are shared in her environment about death, what her relationship is with her mother, and so on. It is very likely that she would have given a similar answer if she was shown a picture of a tree. Children will try to find ways of accommodating the picture to the subject they want to talk about: selective perception. Essentially, the picture becomes a

Picture story 1

tool for gathering information that otherwise might not have surfaced by providing an opportunity for interaction.

In Peru, the Wawa Wasi (Quechua for 'Children's House') project has been working with visual materials in order to gain insights into what the children think about their Wawa Wasi, their parents, the animators, and so on. For example, teachers and animators are asked to put a number of pictures into different categories (quality of childcare, childrearing, child welfare, and so on) and to discuss positive and negative aspects of these in relation to the child or the programme. In this way, it is easy to recognise what teachers and caregivers regard as positive and negative aspects of childrearing, and to view the programme through their eyes. Sometimes things that an outsider would consider as a shortcoming in fact to them is seen as something positive – and *vice versa*.

In the Mount Pinatubo programme in the Philippines, the non-literate Aeta people draw pictures about themselves and make maps of the environment in which they live. They are asked to talk about them, giving them a sense of ownership. Photographs and videos are also a part of the programme, and used as additional tools for these eager and animated storytellers. For their part, children – whether young or older – are always thrilled to see

Picture story 2

their images in these photos and videos and talk about what they were doing and who they were with. Seeing that they and their life experiences are valuable and important enough to be recorded, helps to build positive feelings about themselves and the people who are close to them.

In India, the SEWA programme is all about empowering women, and the use of video is an ideal way for them to document and communicate their realities, and what they think is important. And they are very competent at it too. The fact that most of these women are non-literate might be seen as a positive trigger that has inspired them to seek alternative and creative ways of conveying their views. More ways of using this medium in, for example, the early childhood development programme are now being explored.

Hopefully the Porto EI workshop ignited a desire to expand the use of audio and/or visual materials in early childhood development programmes, and to use creative ways to gather information about what makes a programme work. Many photographs are taken and quite a few videos are made – and many of these are never looked at again. But if people would go back to their archives and look again, they might find a wealth of information already there!

One final thought: a picture really can say more than a thousand words: and just look at the amount of words I needed in order to say something about pictures! ○

Explanations of picture-stories

1) Elements that contribute positively to early childhood development (parent involvement, nutrition, health, education, programme development and research) are set in a close circle around a happy child. Elements that threaten a child's development (malnutrition, child labour, abandonment, poverty) are set on the outside of the circle.
2) This is a sequential story starting with a (dismal) situation, followed by an assessment of the problem and a discussion, a meeting with the community, planning, implementing the plan and a positive situation.

Further reading

Su Braden: *Video for development; a case study from Vietnam.*
Su Braden: *Committing photography.*
J. Collier Jr: *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research tool.*
J. Prosser (Ed.): *Image Based Research: A source book for qualitative researchers.*
Jackie Shaw and Clive Robertson: *Participatory video: a practical guide to using video creatively in group development work.*
Media Network: *In her own image: films and videos empowering women for the future.*
Teaching Aids at Low Cost: *Teaching and learning with visual aids.*
Barbara Rosenstein: *The use of video for program evaluation.*
Indi Rana: *Developing a pictorial language: an experience of field testing in rural Orissa; a guide for communicators.*

Fuller details about these publications are available from the Foundation.

A community mapping exercise

Thailand: *Intense concentration*
Refugee Camps Project

The Bernard van Leer Foundation

Investing in the development of young children

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in The Netherlands. It operates internationally.

The Foundation aims to enhance opportunities for children 0-7 years growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, with the objective of developing their potential to the greatest extent possible. The Foundation concentrates on children 0-7 years because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:
– a grant-making programme in selected countries aimed at developing culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development;
– the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

The Foundation currently supports a total of approximately 150 projects in 40 selected countries worldwide, both developing and industrialised. Projects are implemented by project partner organisations that may be governmental or non governmental. The lessons learned as well as the knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development, which are generated through these projects, are shared through a publications programme.

The Foundation was established in 1949. Its income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.