

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICY

Country Note

for

Mexico

The views expressed in the document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mexican authorities or the OECD Directorate for Education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy

1. The *Country Note for Mexico* is an output of the *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*, a project launched by the OECD's Education Committee in March 1998. The impetus for the project came from the 1996 Ministerial meeting on *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*. In their communiqué, the Education Ministers assigned a high priority to the goal of improving access to and quality in early childhood education and care, with the aim of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning (OECD, 1998). A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998).

2. To date, twenty-one countries have volunteered to participate in the review: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries provide a diverse range of social, economic and political contexts, as well as varied policy approaches toward the education and care of young children. Early in the review process, representatives from the participating countries reached agreement concerning the framework, scope and process of the review, and identified the major policy issues for investigation. Between 1998 and 2003, OECD review teams had already conducted visits to eighteen participating countries. Information on the visits and several reports from the review may be viewed on the project web site <http://www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood>. A Comparative Report entitled *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*, was released at an international conference held in Stockholm, 13-15 June 2001.

3. In scope, the reviews cover children from birth to compulsory primary school age, as well as during the transition to primary schooling. In order to examine thoroughly what children experience in the first years of life, the reviews adopt a broad, holistic approach. In addition to an analysis of policy and services, consideration is given to national social policies and various environmental influences on children's early development and learning. In sum, with the aid of ministries and the major actors in ECEC in each country, the reviews aim to:

- a) Distinguish and investigate the ECEC contexts, major policy concerns, and policy responses to address these concerns in participating countries;
- b) Explore the roles of national government, decentralised authorities, NGOs and other social partners, and the resources devoted to planning and implementation at each level;
- c) Identify and evaluate feasible policy options suited to different contexts;
- d) Highlight particularly innovative policies and practices; and
- e) Contribute to the INES (Indicators of Education Systems) project by identifying the types of data and instruments to be developed in support of ECEC information collection, policy-making, research, monitoring and evaluation.

More specifically, the expert teams investigate concerns about *quality, access* and *equity*, with an emphasis on policy development in the following areas: regulations; staffing; programme content and implementation; family engagement and support; funding and financing.

The review process

4. In preparation for the visit of the OECD review team, the national ministries responsible for early childhood education and care commission *Background Reports* on ECEC policy and services in their countries. Guided by a common framework that has been accepted by all participating countries, *Background Reports* are intended to provide a concise overview of the country context, the major issues and concerns in ECEC policy and provision, innovative approaches, and the available quantitative and evaluation data. The Background Reports are an important output of the review process. Their preparation should normally be a participative exercise at country level, and should provide a forum of debate for the different stakeholders in early childhood in each country.

5. After analysis of the *Background Report* and other relevant documents, review teams composed of an OECD Secretariat member and experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix 1) visit each participating country. The visit is co-ordinated by the sponsoring ministry or ministries. In the course of the visit, the team interviews the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice, and are invited to observe a number of examples of early childhood programmes. The selection of particular sites reflects in general not only a concern for geographical diversity but also the desire to show the review team a representative selection of both typical and innovative services. After the country visit, the OECD produces a *Country Note* that draws together the national background materials and the review team's observations.

The review procedure in Mexico

6. Mexico was the eighteenth country to be reviewed by the OECD. Prior to the visit a Background Report on ECEC policy was commissioned by the Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP). After analysis of the *Background Report* and other relevant documents, a review team comprising an OECD secretariat member and three experts with diverse research and policy backgrounds (see Appendix 1) visited Mexico from 2nd to 12th December 2003. The visit was co-ordinated by the Under-Secretariat for Basic and Normal Education (SEByN). Members of the Under-Secretariat accompanied the team throughout the visit.

7. The review team were extremely grateful for the smoothness of the organisation, and the invaluable information provided by SEByN colleagues at all stages of the visit. During the course of the visit, the team met with many of the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice in Mexico. In particular, the team visited the Federal District of Mexico and the States of Nuevo León and Puebla. In these locations, the team had the opportunity to speak with a broad range of providers and managers, and to observe numerous examples of early childhood programmes and services for children aged 0-6 years, including several programmes catering for indigenous children. For this reason, we trust that our visit – aided by the *Background Report* and our meetings with a wide range of policy-makers - has been sufficient to enable us to make some general observations about ECEC in Mexico, as well as more specific comments on the cities and regions that we visited.

Structure of the Mexican Country Note

8. This *Country Note* presents both a description and the review team's analysis of key policy issues related to ECEC in Mexico. It draws considerably on the information provided in the *Background Report*; and on formal and informal discussions, document analysis, relevant research literature, and the observations of the review team. It is structured as follows:

- *Chapter 1: An introductory chapter*, outlining the rationale of the OECD thematic review, and describing the goals and framework of the review visit.
- *Chapter 2: Contextual issues shaping ECEC policies in Mexico*, describing demographic developments, the labour market and employment situation and related policy areas, economic factors and governance.
- *Chapter 3: Current ECEC policy and provision in Mexico*, describing the broad structure of the services, the forms of provision, and their access, staffing and funding, and how these forms of provision compare with one another across these dimensions.
- *Chapter 4: Issues for ECEC in Mexico*, exploring issues related to the way in which ECEC is conceptualized, access and enrolment, funding, the educational process, organisation, training and working conditions and information and its uses.
- *Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations* offers some orientations and policy recommendations for consideration by the Mexican authorities and ECEC stakeholders in critical domains.

Acknowledgements

9. The OECD wishes to thank warmly the Ministry of Education in Mexico, and in particular, the Under-Secretary for Education: Sr. Lorenzo Gómez Morin Fuentes and his team, for making the review of Mexico possible. We would like to acknowledge the work invested in our visit by the *Coordinación* at the Under-Secretariat for Basic and Normal Education (SEByN), in particular; Mmes. Dulce María Nieto, Cecilia Oviedo, Marcela Ramírez, and Marcela García. The *Coordinación* organised most efficiently a comprehensive programme of visits for the OECD team in different parts of the country. Thanks to their efforts, we were able to meet with a wide range of well-informed stakeholders: local officials who meticulously organised our daily schedules and gave us a comprehensive picture of the organisation of ECEC in each State; senior managers who took time off from their busy schedules to brief us; teachers in schools, kindergartens and childcare centres who responded with patience to all our questions; parents who spoke to us about their concerns, and young children who could be seen responding to quality programming with involvement and pleasure. A special word of thanks is due also to the authors of the Background Report, and its co-ordinators: Dra.s Benilde García and Norma A. Castillo Guzmán.

10. Throughout the *Country Note*, the suggestions offered by the review team are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty facing a visiting team—no matter how well briefed—in fully grasping the variety and complexity of a country-wide system and the range of issues that need to be taken into account. Even when multiplied by the number of members of a team, an eleven-day review is extremely limiting in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified. For this reason, our recommendations are offered to the Federal and State ministries not as hard and fast conclusions, but in a spirit of professional dialogue for the consideration of Mexican specialists who are much more knowledgeable about Mexican realities. We trust, however, that our external perspective, based on many years' experience in the early childhood field, will prove to be a useful basis for discussion and progress.

11. The facts and opinions expressed in the *Country Note* are the sole responsibility of the review team. While acknowledging with gratitude the invaluable help received from officials, researchers and practitioners in Mexico, we wish to underline that they have no part in any shortcomings which this document may present. To lessen the potential for misunderstanding or error, it is assumed that the *Country Note* will be read in conjunction with the Mexican *Background Report*, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

Terminology and definitions

12. *References to age groupings* in this Country Note follow the convention set by the European Childcare Network (1996), as illustrated by the following two examples: “children aged 0-3 years” covers children from birth up to 36 months, i.e. up to their third birthday, but does not include three-year-olds. “Children aged 3-6” covers children from 36 to 72 months i.e. up to their sixth birthday, but does not include six-year-olds.

13. For ECEC in Mexico, we have drawn on the definitions outlined in the *Background Report* to describe Mexico’s programmes. As outlined in Chapter 2, programmes for young children in Mexico fall into two broad categories:

- *Educación inicial*, with a childcare and protection bias, serving children from birth to four years. Initial education is further divided into programmes of *direct attention*, that is, direct attention to infants and toddlers in centres, and programmes of *indirect attention*, that is, programmes of parent education. Less than 8% of the child population is covered by initial education;
- *Educación preescolar* or pre-school education is predominantly (over 80%) state provided. It is classified into three main modalities: general (over 88% of enrolments), indigenous (8.4%) and community pre-schools (3.5%). As in most other countries, enrolment rates are much lower for three-year olds (20.6%) than for five-year olds (81.4%). There are marked enrolment differences between States in enrolment rates.

These and other Mexican distinctions and concepts are explained clearly in the text.

14. *Acronyms* - Because of the size, diversity and administrative complexity of the country, there are many stakeholders and many different programme types in the early childhood field in Mexico, each with its own acronym. The following are some of the most common acronyms:

CADI	Centros Asistenciales de Desarrollo Infantil (Centres of Assistance for Early Childhood Development)
CAI	Centros de Atención Infantil (Early Childhood Attention Centres)
CAIC	Centros de Atención Infantil Comunitario (Community Centres for Attention to Young Children)
CAPEP	Centros de Atención Psicopedagógica de Educación Preescolar
CEI	Centros de Educación Inicial (Early Education Centres)
CEIC	Centros de Educación Inicial Comunitario (Community Centres for Early Education)
CENDI	Centros de Desarrollo Integral (Integrated Development Centers)
CONAFE	Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo (National Council for Educational Promotion)
DIF	Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (Integral Family Development)
IMSS	Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social (Mexican Institute of Social Security)
INEA	Instituto Nacional de Educación para Adultos (National Institute of Adult Education)
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Información (National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information)
ISSSTE	Instituto de Seguridad Social y Servicios de los Trabajadores del Estado (Institute of Social Security and Services for State Workers)
PRONAP	Programa nacional para la actualización permanente de los maestros de educación básica en servicio
SEDESOL	Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (Social Development Secretariat)
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Public Education Secretariat)

CHAPTER 2:

CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS SHAPING ECEC POLICY IN MEXICO

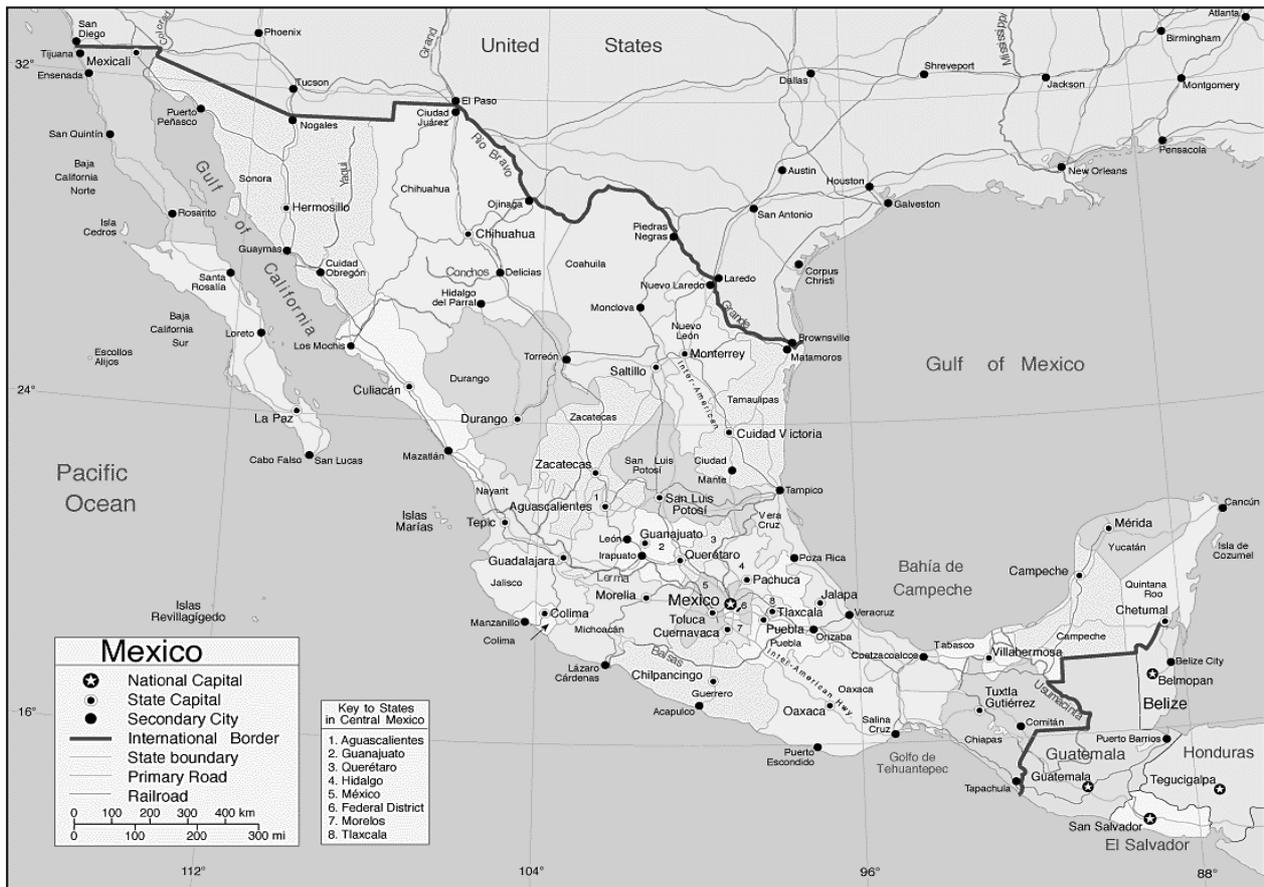
Geographic and Demographic Conditions

15. Mexico is a large country, twelfth in the world in landmass and eleventh in population with somewhat more than 101,000,000 inhabitants, of which about 12% are under 6 years of age. 58% of the population is concentrated in the centre of the country, which covers only 18% of the land mass. Mexico City's approximately 20 million inhabitants are in this area. Conversely, the northern part of Mexico, with 62% of the land, is home to only 26% of the population. The southern and eastern sections of the country, with 20% of the land and 16% of the population, have a higher concentration of poverty and of indigenous populations than other parts of the country. Mountain ranges run the length of the country dividing the population and creating many isolated communities. In sum, size and geography continue to contribute to diversity, while posing the political challenge of maintaining unity, responding to differences and celebrating the richness that diversity implies.

16. Proximity to the United States, with whom it shares a long border, has also profoundly influenced Mexico's history, culture and economy.¹ For instance, this proximity helps to explain the industrial presence in northern border areas and Mexico's entry in 1994 into the North American Free Trade Alliance with the United States and Canada. In addition, migration across the US border is a significant social and demographic phenomenon, and several million Mexicans now live in the United States. In many cases this leads to parental absence and/or split families. It also produces a large flow of remittances back to families and reinforces the more general tendency to adopt elements of US culture.

17. At least three demographic tendencies have had important effects on early education policies and provision: a falling birth rate and decreased population growth, migration (both internal and international) and urbanization. The fertility rate dropped rapidly in Mexico beginning in the 1970s. As a result, population growth has slowed (from a rate of 3.5% per year in 1970 to 1.6% per year in 2001). But more importantly for this review, the *absolute number* of young children is dropping at a rate of about 1% per year in each age from 0 to 5 years. This affects potential demand for services and also means that any expansion of ECEC programmes results in a real increase in coverage for children in this age category. Another result of the drop is a dramatic reduction in the number of large families, affecting not only childrearing patterns and the interaction among family members but also increasing the possibility that children can participate in early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes.

¹ For starters, a large portion of the South-western part of the United States belonged to Mexico in the 18th century. Proximity, as well as the general trend to globalization helps to explain the invasion of American customs (Christmas trees, Halloween and Disney).



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18. Demographic change, internal migration and urbanization trends are all closely linked. According to the 2000 census, three fourths of the population is now concentrated in urban areas (communities of 2,500 inhabitants or more), as contrasted with 50% in 1960. Some 20% of the total population reside in the metropolitan area of Mexico City; eight cities have more than a million inhabitants. As in other parts of the world, the challenges of working with poor urban communities have grown, as new arrivals seek their livelihood and make the multiple adjustments in childrearing practices that a move to the cities implies.

19. Migration has been predominantly from South to North. On one hand, cities on the northern border have grown much faster than the general population as people are attracted to employment opportunities in mass-production companies and/or by the dream of migrating to the United States. On the other, temporary migration to work in the agro-industrial areas, again mainly in Northern states, has often led to prolonged parental (usually father) absences and/or to uprooting of children, with attendant discontinuities in their participation in ECEC programmes as well as the need for special programmes for children of migrant workers at the migration destination.

20. One perverse result of the out migration from rural areas, whether internal or international, has been an increase in the number of small and hard-to-reach communities. There are approximately 50,000 communities with less than 500 inhabitants. Moreover, those who remain are often individuals with less accumulated social capital than those who emigrate. Working in these communities requires innovative forms of responding to local cultures, selecting educators, delivering resources, adjusting programme times, communicating with parents, etc. While cities grow, so do the number of very small communities.

Economic Conditions, Employment and the Standard of living

21. The per capita Gross National Product of Mexico in 2002 was estimated at \$5,910, placing it slightly above the world average of \$5,073, well above the average for sub-Saharan Africa (\$460) and well below the average for industrialized countries (\$26,214).² The distribution of wealth across the population is, however, very uneven. According to data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Información (INEGI), the richest 20% controlled 54.8% of income in 2000 as contrasted with 4.1% for the lowest 20% (see Table 1)

Table 1 - Distribution of Income in Mexico, 2000

Deciles (%)	2000
I (lowest)	1.5
II	2.6
III	3.6
IV	4.6
V	5.7
VI	7.1
VII	8.8
VIII	11.2
IX	16.1
X	38.7

*Source: Aguayo 2002, p. 134.

A neo-liberal economic policy

22. Since the early 1980s, Mexico has adopted an economic policy linked closely to the process of globalisation, shifting from a model in which the State is seen as the motor force for growth and plays the role of protector of all sections of the population, to one in which the State increasingly sets norms, provides incentives for investment and ensures a minimal safety-net for the most indigent groups. This neo-liberal economic model has contributed to:

- An important reduction in the rate of inflation (to only 4% in 2003).
- Slow and fluctuating economic growth (but less than 1% since 2000).
- Relatively low governmental expenditures and a priority given to the reduction of a large internal public debt.³ Where education is concerned, this means that Mexico spends almost double on education (pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education) than OECD countries *relative to total public expenditure*, but that that expenditure becomes just over average when it is calculated *in percentage terms of GDP*.

Table 2 - Comparative government spending on education, including on pre-school and primary education

Country	Expenditure on education as a % of total public expenditure	Government expenditure on basic education as % of GNP	Pre-school education	Tertiary education
Mexico	16.5	3.6%	0.5% of GDP	51
OECD mean	8.9	2.6%	0.4% of GDP	41

² UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 2004, Basic Indicators.

³ Related mainly to a decision to bail out poorly performing banks.

- Increases in the concentration and uneven distribution of wealth. Current estimates by the government are that 40% of the population (about 40 million people) live below the poverty line.⁴ The high levels of poverty mean that many families cannot afford the expenses for clothing and materials, let alone fees, which are usually associated with participation in a childcare or an early education programme.
- Low unemployment levels but a high level of under-employment and growth of the informal sector. Some estimates place 50% of the labour force in the informal sector. About one-half of the labour force earns less than two minimum salaries.
- Increased female labour force participation. Since 1970, participation by women in the paid labour force has almost doubled, from about 18 to 35%, with levels above 50% for women of childbearing age in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants. Most employed women hold non-agricultural jobs (94%) and the majority are in jobs that pay less than two minimum salaries. Only 7% receive a salary of more than 5 minimum salaries. Almost 40% of women's jobs are part time (less than 35 hours) as contrasted with 20% for men. Many women choose part time, low paying jobs in the informal sector in order to balance their work and parenting roles, given a scarcity of childcare options. The high level of employment in the informal sector means that many do not enjoy the right to the childcare benefits that accrue to workers in the formal sector.

Employment conditions and child-related benefits for women

23. Women working in formal employment and enrolled in social security have the right to six weeks of fully paid leave prior to birth and to six weeks after birth (with the possibility of extension in extenuating circumstances with 50% pay, guaranteed return to the job if the time is less than one year and the possibility of shifting some or all of the six weeks of prenatal leave to the period following birth). They are also entitled to receive medical attention during the pre- and post-natal periods, obstetric attention, medical attention for the baby during infancy, a basket of provisions for the baby at birth, and "milk money" for six months post partum. They have the right to two rest periods during the day to breastfeed for once back on the job.⁵ Fathers do not have a right to interrupt their work unless a special permission can be negotiated at the time of birth with the employer. These benefits are relatively good if they are compared with most countries of the Majority World, but pale beside those offered in many OECD countries. Moreover, they are not available to the large percentage of women working in the informal sector.

Poverty Alleviation Programme

24. A huge governmental programme, called *Oportunidades*, currently reaches more than four million families living below the poverty line, most of whom are in rural areas. This programme provides nutritional subsidies, health care and educational benefits. However, educational benefits, in the form of scholarships, begin at the third grade level of primary school and there are no educational subsidies for childcare or pre-school participation.

⁴ This figure is placed much higher by some university researchers who suggest, using a different definition, that the percentage of Mexicans living in poverty is closer to 70%. (See, for example: J. Boltvinik, "¿Quiénes son los pobres?," *La Jornada*, September 23, 2000.)

⁵ This assumes the child is present at the work site. In the case of the employees of the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS) these benefits are greater, with leaves before and after birth extended to 12 months, milk money to 10 months, and periods of rest for breastfeeding to 3. In the case of the Social Security Institute for State Workers (ISSSTE), the leave time is also somewhat longer (60 days).

Socio-cultural Context

25. *Changing Family Patterns* - In Mexico, as elsewhere, there is a shift from a model of the extended family toward a nuclear family model, with, also, an increasing percentage of families headed by women (20.6% in 2002), many of whom are single. These shifts are related to migration patterns and labour force participation by women. They imply changing childrearing patterns and bring increasing demand for extra-domestic childcare options.

26. *Culture Diversity* - According to estimates by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía y Informática (INEGI), about 8% of the population (8,381,752 people) is classified as “indigenous” distributed among 64 ethnic groups. Of these, 1,233,455 are children under 5 who live in families where an indigenous language is spoken. The economic and educational circumstances in these families are very different from the national average, as shown in Table 3 below.⁶ This extraordinarily rich cultural diversity sets a policy challenge for Mexico as the risks of dilution or even extinction of some indigenous cultures is real.

Table 3 - Indicators of Indigenous disadvantage

	NACIONAL	INDÍGENA
Literacy (in Spanish)	90.5	55.7
Income above 2 minimum salaries	48.0	7.0
Infant mortality	28.2	48.3

Political Conditions and Government

27. Mexico has a federal system of government; the country is divided into 32 “Federal Entities” which in turn are divided into 2,443 municipalities, which incorporate a number of local governments (towns and agencies). The President is elected every six years for one term only. The cabinet is made up of 20 heads of ministries (called Secretariats). In the bi-cameral legislature, members of the Senate serve a six-year term and members of the Chamber of Deputies serve a 3-year term.⁷ In recent years the executive power has been limited through control of the legislature by opposition parties.

28. Most Secretariats and programmes, including education and health, are decentralised. However, although administration is decentralised, power and policy is still concentrated at the centre and relationships tend to be hierarchical. The legal capacity accorded states to raise their own revenues is very weak, limiting their independence. Most revenues accrue to the national government, which then redistributes funds to the states and municipalities according to a complex set of rules, formulas and a process of negotiation.

29. In the year 2000, with election of a new President, control over the executive branch of the government changed party hands for the first time in more than 70 years. That change is consistent with a more general transition toward democracy in Mexico. Nevertheless, the country continues to reflect its recent history as a corporate state, evident for instance in the nature of labour unions (including the

⁶ These figures are taken from Aguayo, pp. 62 and 63 and are based on results of the 2000 census as well as of national surveys.

⁷ In neither case can a member be reelected. However, in the Senate 25% of the members are not elected directly but are appointed by parties, divided among parties according to their representation in the national vote. In the Chamber 40% are appointed under the same rules.

powerful teachers' union) and their relationship to the government. Noteworthy of the current government is its stated commitment to transparency and a system of public accountability.

Educational Context

30. Education in Mexico, according to the Constitution (Article 3), is free and secular. The system is decentralized, a process which began earlier but took a great leap forward in 1992 as part of the National Educational Modernization Agreement. At that time responsibility for administration of all of basic education (including at that time one year of pre-primary schooling) and normal schools was transferred to the states. Subsequently, adult education and rural community education, technical education and some other programmes were also transferred to the states. Despite this decentralization of administrative responsibility, the central government maintains normative, evaluative and planning and programming functions. Accordingly, although the federal system produces variation, as states and municipalities experiment with their own organisational and supervisory and training models or make adjustments to national programmes, the Federal government retains control. The general guidelines for the system continue to be set out from the centre in a national programme created by each new administration as it enters office for its six-year period. The educational programme of the present administration⁸ has placed increasing emphasis on improving the quality of education and on moderating inequities in the system.

31. Obligatory "basic education" in Mexico includes pre-school, primary school and lower secondary school, covering the period from age 3 to age 15. Education during the period from birth to 3 years of age is also considered to be part of basic education but is not obligatory. Private schooling accounts for about 10% of the basic education enrolment.

32. Obligatory Pre-schooling. In November, 2002, the Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling became official.⁹ This initiative of the National Congress, backed strongly by the National Teacher's Union (SNTE), not only makes it obligatory for the State to provide pre-school education services for children 3 to 6 years of age when that is demanded, but also makes it obligatory for parents to see that their children, of those ages, attend a public or private pre-school.¹⁰ The law sets a schedule for attaining universal enrolment: for children age 5 that should occur at the beginning of the 2004-5 school year, for age 4, in 2005-6, and for age 3, in the 2008-9 school year. It also states that pre-school teachers should have a professional preparation.

33. This initiative has had a number of important repercussions. It has:

- Forced the Secretariat of Education to give greater attention to early education;
- Created huge logistical, financial and conceptual challenges related to coverage, equity and quality and has made the Secretariat look for innovative ways to meet the conditions;
- Increased demand;
- Given new significance to an on-going curricular reform, to a reorganisation of compensatory programmes, to a rethinking of parental education programmes and to a restructuring of teacher training;

⁸ "Programa Nacional de Educación, 2001-2006: Por una Educación de Buena Calidad para Todos, Un enfoque educativo para el siglo XXI." México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2001.

⁹ Diario Oficial, 12 de noviembre de 2002, primera sección.

¹⁰ This law makes Mexico the only country in the world to make pre-school obligatory as of age 3.

- Stimulated new efforts to certify teachers on the basis of their experience and pushed the State to look anew at its relationship to programmes implemented by private and social organisations;
- Taken attention away from the earlier years by placing emphasis on the ages of 3 to 6.

In brief, current thinking with respect to early education and ECEC in general is very much in flux.

CHAPTER 3:

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT ECEC POLICY AND PROVISION IN MEXICO

Origins and Traditions

34. As might be expected for a country as large and diverse as Mexico, it is not possible to speak of one ECEC system. At present there are several systems and sub-systems operating with relatively loose coordination among them despite some legal and organisational provisions intended to provide that coordination. These systems are distinguished by different historical origins and purposes, auspices, different “target” populations and age groups, as well as by their forms of organisation, norms and content. Services are provided from bases in governmental (national, state and municipal), private and social sectors. Describing such variety is not an easy task and we will not attempt to do so at the level of detail found in the Background Report (SEP, 2003).

35. Four major historical traditions that have given rise to ECEC policies and programmes in Mexico, each related to a different purpose. In some instances, policies and provision bring together these strands but for the most part they have evolved along different lines. The main traditions arise from:

- a) *Charity and social welfare concerns.* The oldest tradition of childcare and education in Mexico is linked to charitable activities aiding indigent or other particularly needy groups of children in programmes operated either by private individuals or by wives of governmental officials. This tradition persists in programmes established by individuals and private foundations as well as in governmental programmes operated, for instance, through the National System for Family Development (DIF)¹¹. This tradition has placed emphasis on protection (health, food, shelter, clothing and care) with less attention to children’s educational and developmental needs. Current “compensatory” programmes also have their roots in this tradition.
- b) *A need to assist working women.* Formally and legally, this tradition can be traced back at least to the Constitution of 1917 which says that protection should be provided for the children of women who work (outside the home). That principle has been spelled out in federal work and social security laws and has evolved to include two basic kinds of benefits: one defined in terms of work leaves and care during pregnancy and lactation and the other in terms of attention to children in centres during their first years. The emphasis on protection in such programmes is similar to that guiding those originating in a tradition of charity but the populations to whom programmes are directed are different -- in the first case to the “needy” or destitute and in the second, to children of working women. The primary, but not exclusive, responsibility for operating ECEC programmes linked to women’s work has been placed with social security institutes. These are located within the health sector in line with their protective bias but with connections also to

¹¹ Another example is the government funding that is provided to private organisations (Instituciones de Asistencia Privada) from the earnings of a nationally run pawn shop.

education. However, as will be seen, several other entities also operate centres for children of working women.

- c) *Social movements.* To a lesser degree, childcare and education programmes have grown up as activities of popular community-based organisations seeking community cohesion or in conjunction with political movements. Such programmes are essentially non-governmental in origin and operation, with community groups taking the lead. Some are linked to political parties and a few have grown out of the women's movement in recent years.
- d) *Education and pre-school traditions.* The idea began to evolve in the late 1800s in Mexico that early care should help to develop and socialise children as well as provide them with protection. Contemporary pre-school education (both services and training) in Mexico traces its beginnings to the 1880s and the pedagogical ideas of Pestalozzi and Froebel who emphasized starting with the needs and interests of young children and attending to their physical, mental and moral development, all based on play, oriented with materials and sequenced activities. Over the next 90 years, pre-schooling spread very slowly, shifting progressively away from its earlier social assistance bias to an educational and developmental base, incorporating other pedagogical models and currents (e.g., Dewey, Montessori, Freud, Gesell and Piaget among others). In the 1970s, a growth spurt occurred. Curricular emphases changed periodically, an element of nationalism was added and adjustments were made related to the specific conditions of indigenous and other populations. Curricular reforms were carried out in 1942, 1960, 1976, 1981, 1985 and 1992. This pre-school history is set out in considerable detail in the national review undertaken by Mexico.

36. Responsibility for pre-schools has come then to reside in the Public Education Secretariat (SEP) and, from 1948 to 1992, in the Office of Pre-school Education (Dirección General de Educación Preescolar). At times, the Office functioned as an independent office within SEP and at times as part of elementary or basic education. In 1992, reorganisation of the SEP again located pre-schools within basic education. This reform and decentralisation left pre-schools without a national office. Responsibility for promoting and overseeing pre-school education devolved to individual states and to pre-school staff located within the pre-school department of the Sub-Secretariat for Educational Services in the Federal District where staff continued to play a national role despite their redefined responsibilities and organisational relocation.

37. Along the way, various other actors have become involved in offering pre-school services. These include:

- National, state and municipal government entities;
- Semi-state organisations (e.g., the national petroleum company, the national electric company);
- The national council for promoting education (CONAFE);
- Social security institutions;
- The national system for family development;
- Universities;
- A wide range of social sector, non-profit organisations;
- Pre-school organisations established as private businesses;
- Corporations.

38. *Other traditions and programme origins.* Other traditions have also influenced early care and education programmes in Mexico. For instance, parental education programmes are rooted in an adult

education tradition combined with a perceived need to attend to children with disabilities and/or children whose home conditions put them at developmental risk. This tradition of parental education differs from that found in countries where such programmes grew out of a “home economics” tradition. It also differs from a mass media approach to reaching parents, a relatively new development that has begun to evolve in Mexico in recent years.

39. Yet other programmes can be traced to specific social needs that have been identified as times have changed. These include, for instance, the need to attend to children of indigenous parents, migrant workers, itinerant circus workers or women in prison. The idea that early education is a right has only recently begun to take on importance in Mexico.

An overview of ECEC provision in Mexico today

40. Discussions of ECEC provision in Mexico are usually divided into two main categories:

- *Initial education*, with a childcare and protection bias, serving in general children prior to the age of four, and involving two main lines of action, one directed to parents and the other of direct attention to young children. Initial education is not obligatory.
- *Pre-school education* for children from age three to five years of age, oriented toward development and learning and, as the name suggests, toward preparation for schooling. Primary schooling begins at age six. Together, pre-school, primary and lower secondary schooling constitute 12 years of obligatory “basic education.”

41. As a result of the recent law making pre-school education obligatory as of age three, initial and primary education now overlap at age three. Moreover, the childcare/education distinction presumably embodied in this division has always been approximate. Some childcare programmes have a strong education component and extend upward in age to include pre-school children and some pre-school programmes provide childcare through extended hours.

42. Despite these grey areas, the division between initial education and pre-school education marks organisational and content differences in approach, policy and provision. Moreover, the division has traditionally been used to organise the descriptions provided in previous reviews of early childhood education and care in Mexico. Because of this divided conceptualisation of children’s services and the split organisation of services on the ground, we follow this lead in our description of ECEC in Mexico today, drawing on interviews completed during our visit (see Appendix 3) as well as on the National Review and other documents provided (see references). The following pages will describe four aspects of early childhood education and care in Mexico, viz.:

- The provision of *Educación inicial* (Initial Education for children 0-3 years), through programmes of direct and indirect attention;
- The provision of *Educación preescolar* (Pre-school Education for children 3-6 years), through general (mainly State), indigenous and community pre-schools;
- The financing of early education and care in Mexico (a brief note about the public and private origins of funding and the distributive mechanisms used);
- ECEC at state levels (Nuevo León and Puebla).

Initial Education

43. The provision of initial education in Mexico is divided roughly into a) programmes of direct attention to young children in centres and b) programmes of parental education. In 2002-2003, according to official statistics, a total of 682,936 children under four years of age were being directly or indirectly attended in these two kinds of programmes, representing less than 8% of that population. Programmes of direct attention enrolled 195,931 children or less than 3% of the age group with the remainder indirectly attended through non-formal parental education programmes. From the statistics, it is evident that:

- Participation is minimal, particularly in programmes of direct attention.
- The main strategy for attending to the 0 to 3 age group is one of indirect attention through non-formal, parental education.
- Less obvious is the concentration of direct attention in urban settings for children of working mothers in the formal sector.

Programmes of Direct Attention

44. Programmes attending directly to very young children in centres can be divided roughly into two groups, according to their degree of formal organisation. The first group are the more formal, usually larger centres, such as the CENDIs, and the second, the less formal, smaller and more community-based models. The main differences between these two groups relate to the formal qualifications of their staff, their size, the variety of services offered directly in the centre, and the degree of community involvement.

More formal, larger centres

The CENDIs

45. The more formal, usually larger, centres include *Centres of Integrated Development* (Centros de Desarrollo Infantil or *CENDIs*). Social security laws with roots dating back to the Constitution of 1917 provide that women workers should be able to enrol their children in child care centres up to the age of four.¹² Although these centres are officially called Centres for Integral Development, they are still often referred to as “guarderías” suggesting a bias toward protection rather than development. In CENDIs, care is provided for children from 43 (or 45 or 60) days up to 4 years of age (and in some cases up to 6 years, adding care during the pre-school years). CENDIs are operated by: the two social security systems, the education sector, social welfare (through DIF), unions, semi-state organisations, universities and independent organisations and businesses within both the social and private sectors. Almost all CENDIs are in urban areas and they take the following forms: CENDIs-IMSS; Estancias-SSSTE; CENDIs-SEP; other CENDIs (mainly CADI-DIF).

46. *CENDIs-IMSS*. The main institution responsible for providing this form of care is the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS) To administer these centres, IMSS receives an amount equal to one percent of the salary base of participating companies, divided along the companies (which contribute 75% of the 1%), the workers (who contribute 20%) and the State (which contributes 5%).¹³ IMSS is located within the health sector on the organisational chart, again emphasising the protective bias in programmes. The education sector sets out a curricular programme to be followed and sets developmental norms for

¹² The provision also applies to fathers who are widowed or divorced and have custody. If these fathers remarry, however, they lose their right to childcare services.

¹³ In the case of ISSSTE, the company and the state are the same so that the state subsidizes 80%.

children in general, but in practice the educational as well as protective elements of the programme are overseen by IMSS.

Table 4 - Initial education in México: formal governmental programmes of direct attention to children in centres

Programme	Population attended	Hours	Characteristics of personnel
CENDI - SEP	Urban children, of working mothers (ages 45 days to 48 months)	7:30-16:00 13:00-20:00 7:30-20:00	Educators, normal school teachers, dentists, certified assistants, psychologist
CENDI – IMSS 1. IMSS Mothers 2. Conventional 3. Community Neighbourhood	Urban children (43 days to 48 or 72 months) 1. Children of IMSS employees (43 days to 72 months) 2. Children of working mothers in the formal sector, (43 days to 48 months) 3. Children of working mothers in the formal sector (43 days to 48 months)	7:00 –19:00 for all models	Specialized personnel: doctor or nurse, dentist, social worker, educator, certified assistants for models 1, 2 and 3
Estancias – ISSSTE	Urban children of mothers who work for the state (60 days to 72 months),	7:00-15:00 7:00-21:00	Specialized personnel: doctor or nurse, social worker, educator, certified assistants
CADI - DIF	Urban children of working mothers with preferences to those without social security (ages 45 days to 48 months)	8:00-16:00 7:00-15:00	Specialized personnel: doctor or nurse, social worker, educator, certified assistants
CENDI- Semi-state, university, unions	Urban children of mothers working in these specific institutions (43 days to 48 months)	Variable hours	Specialized personnel: doctor or nurse, social worker, educator, certified assistants

47. IMSS operates four different types of programmes with centres that vary in size, personnel and content. a) Centres serving women who work for IMSS and most of the b) “conventional” centres which operate under agreements with private or semi-state businesses, are rather large institutions with trained personnel which include a medical doctor or nurse, a social worker, a nutritionist and kitchen help to prepare meals as well as caregivers and educators who work with groups of children during the day. Professionals are typically certified in their particular profession, but most staff who work directly with groups of children during the day are “assistants” with some technical training or without any training on arrival. Usually, child to staff ratios are favourable. Centres function between 8 and 14 hours each weekday. This combination of traits leads to relatively high costs per child, a fact that has slowed extension of services. To reduce costs and expand coverage, IMSS has concentrated its expansion in recent years on c) “Participatory” services contracted to individuals or groups that receive a subsidy for each child who attends and who must adhere to the norms set by IMSS. In addition, IMSS provides training and supervision to d) participating community centres operating less formal models. In all cases, supervision is provided by IMSS. The various models are listed in Table 4 (and 5 in the case of the participatory model).

48. *Estancias para el Bienestar y Desarrollo Infantil - ISSSTE.* The Institute for the Social Security and Services of State Workers (ISSSTE) provides benefits, including child care, for state workers. These are similar to those IMSS whose responsibility is to provide for a more general population enrolled in social security. Estancias (which qualify as CENDIs for statistical purposes), also provide health, nutritional and educational services, function with specialized personnel and boast good child to care-giver ratios. They normally extend attention to 6 years of age, thereby including a pre-school component. Per child costs in these centres are also relatively high.

49. Although all working women who have young children and who are enrolled in social security should be able to enrol their children in day care centres of either IMSS or ISSSTE, only about 10% can do so because the number of places available is limited or because centres are not located near their home. Ironically, some centres are now underutilized while waiting lists are often long in others. Women with social security who need to place their children in child care often seek other arrangements.

50. Other CENDIs. CENDIs administered by the educational secretariat (SEP) are similar to those run by IMSS and ISSSTE in terms of ages covered, size and staff, but as might be expected, place greater emphasis on educational content. CENDIs operated by universities, unions, and semi-state organisations are also similar to those of IMSS and ISSSTE.

51. *Centros Asistenciales de Desarrollo Infantil: CADIs*, that is *Centres of assistance for early childhood development*. These centres have their origin in a charitable tradition of attending to needy children and particularly to children of mothers who do not qualify for social security benefits. In size, staffing and content they are similar to other CENDIs. They receive a subsidy from DIF which oversees the protection component and from SEP which provides qualified staff and oversees the education component.

Less formal, smaller and more community-based models include:

52. *Centres for Initial Education* (Centros de Educación Inicial: CEIs) are overseen by the SEP. This “semi-scholastic” or semi-formal model is for children ages 2 to 4 attended by staff who usually come from the community in which the centre is located and who are trained by the SEP. The centres are supervised by the SEP and receive some materials but are expected to manage themselves. Parents pay a modest fee for these services.

**Table 5 - Initial education in México
Less formal governmental programmes of direct attention to children in centres**

Programme	Population attended	Hours	Characteristics of Personnel
CEI-SEP	urban children of working mothers (2-4 years of age)	3, 5 or 8 hours	community volunteers, with varied educational levels, supervised by sep
CAIC-DIF	Urban and rural children of working mothers (2 to 6 years)	8:00-12:00 8:00-17:00	Community mothers, with varied educational levels, supervised by DIF and SEP
IMSS- Participatory	Urban children of working mothers (45 days to 48 mo.)	7:00-19:00 (some variations)	Specialized personnel, but with exceptions.
IMSS- Guarderías del Campo	Children of agricultural workers (45 days to 48 mo.)	Determined by the groups	Local mothers supported by various services and supervision
CAI-Sedesol	Children of migrant workers, (0 to 6 years)	Determined by the groups	Mostly volunteer mothers elected by groups but sometimes specialized workers.
Casas de Atención Infantil-Sedesol with others	Children of urban working mothers (18 months to 6 years)	Determined by the groups	“Educational mothers” from the community, varied educational levels, 80 hours of training
CEIC-CONAFE	Children from rural families, communities less than 100 (0 to 3 years)	Two 3-hour sessions per week plus home visits	Secondary school graduate with some pre-school teaching experience in CONAFE, assisted by local mother

53. *Community centres for attention to young children* (Centros de Atención Infantil Comunitario: CAICs) share the “semi-scholastic” designation with CEIs and apply educational model worked out in cooperation with the SEP, but are supervised by DIF. Resources (including the educators and the locale) are provided by the community. Many of the educators are local residents who do not have formal training in early childhood care and development but receive training on the job. As with the CEIs, parents are expected to contribute financially.

54. *Centres for attention and education for young children* (Centros de Atención y Educación Infantil: CAEI) have been established for migrant farm workers. These are administered, with variations, by the Secretary for Social Development (SEDESOL), CONAFE, the SEP or IMSS. These non-formal programmes choose a mother who is then trained on the job, with support from health and educational organisations. Funding varies, with support coming from international organisations, governmental budgets, and in some cases from agricultural employers who provide space and materials.

55. *IMSS-Participatory*. This modality requires community participation with training and supervision from IMSS. It seems to be a hybrid between the other, more formal IMSS modalities and less formal examples run by other organisations and described above.

56. *SEDESOL-Casas de Atención Infantil (CAI)*. This modality, still in a pilot phase, is embedded in a larger programme called *Habitat* and was initiated in 2003 in seven middle-sized cities. It is designed to provide care for groups of 10 to 15 children during a full day, sometimes in homes of community women and sometimes in centres provided by DIF or a municipality. An “educational mother” and an assistant are selected and provided with training on the job through weekly supervision, by participating in a course (*diplomado*) for at least 80 hours and in monthly meetings. Participating homes or centres can request funding to upgrade facilities, acquire equipment and materials, and participate in training. Parents pay a modest fee for services, primarily to cover food costs and the time of the educational mother. The centres are expected to be self-managed. Pre-school aged children are accompanied to and from the pre-school but spend the rest of the day in the CAI.

57. *CONAFE-CEIC*. Somewhere between a centre-based and parental model of initial education is the new and still experimental programme of CONAFE which brings parents together, with their children, for three two-hour sessions during the week. This approach, which also includes home visits, looks at periods of direct attention in a group setting, as occasions for parents to learn how to relate better to their children.

Social and Private Sectors

58. An unknown number of children are attending childcare centres run by social and community organisations or by private individuals as businesses. The hours, staff qualifications, infrastructure and other characteristics of these initiatives vary widely as does their quality. In the Federal District it was estimated that these social, community and private arrangements may provide for as much as one-third of the overall provision of services for children under four years of age (Myers and De San Jorge, 1999). As examples of programmes and centres originating in the social sector, we mention those supported by: the Foundation for Attention to Children (FAI) that assists 97 centres; the Christian Children’s Fund, with 143 centres, and World Visión with yet another 100 or more centres. More than 2000 children are enrolled in the community centres affiliated with COPOME, a network of community-based centres operated by “*madres educadoras*”.

Programmes of Indirect Attention: Parental Education

59. The second strain of initial education is that characterized by indirect attention to children and focussing on parents. The enrolment statistics show that the bulk of the enrolment in initial education programmes (71% in 2002-2003) is in parental education programmes.¹⁴ There are several governmental parental education programmes currently operating as well as some non-governmental initiatives.

60. *CONAFE-PRODEI*. This large *Programme of Non-formal Initial Education* (PRODEI) began as an initiative of the SEP in 1978 but has been operated by the National Council for Educational Promotion (CONAFE) since 1993 as a “compensatory” programme. An important part of its funding, in the form of loans, has come from the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. The programme has been directed primarily toward families in low-income, and often isolated, rural areas, with the expectation that providing groups of parents (almost always mothers) with information and a chance to discuss problems during the period of approximately 40 weeks, would bring about changes in child rearing practices which would, in turn, improve the development of children and their preparation for school. The main educational agent in PRODEI is a community member trained to work with groups of parents, with supervisory support and backed by a local committee. At present, major changes are being contemplated in the pedagogical model used, the organisational and operational structure of the programme and an attempt will be made to link provision more directly to pre-school education.

61. *The National Institute for Adult Education* (INEA): As part of its programme for adults who have not completed their basic education, INEA offers four modules related to the care of young children. These are set within a more general line dealing with the family. This programme is expected to expand in the near future.¹⁵

62. *Others*: During the visit we encountered several other parental education initiatives that operate from a governmental base. These include:

- A programme in the Federal District which is similar to PRODEI but administered by the SEP;
- “*Si a Nuestros Niños*”, a programme presented in 20 modules through educational television, involving also group discussions and activities;
- Programmes embedded in formal initial education programmes of IMSS, ISSSTE and DIF. These programmes lean heavily on giving talks to parents;
- In Nuevo Leon, the state has melded a university initiative into its parental education programme. The initiative, called *Working Together*, was funded originally by the Organisation of American States (OAS) and uses radio dramas as the basis for discussion in periodic group meetings;
- In San Luis Potosi, an adaptation of the Cuban community-based programme for adults, *Educa a Tu Hijo* has been tried out.

63. In addition, the Teachers’ Union has published parental education materials. A set of materials for parents was also published by the Fundación Vamos, an organisation headed by the wife of the President, one volume of which deals with children during the pre-school years.¹⁶ In Nuevo Leon, an

¹⁴ The number of children is estimated by multiplying the number of participating parents by about 1.3.

¹⁵ It is not clear how participants in this programme enter the ECEC statistics because they are counted as part of a general adult education programme rather than as non-formal initial education.

¹⁶ These materials have received critical reviews by groups concerned about what is perceived to be their conservative social tone.

experimental parental education and support programme is being run by a community organisation called *Tierra y Libertad*. In this programme, three groups of 20 adults meet once a week in the morning and another three groups meet once a week in the afternoon, providing education and support to 120 families on a regular basis at a relatively low cost. Several magazines and television programmes are directed toward parents and child rearing.

64. In brief, there seems to be no dearth of modalities for either direct or indirect attention to children under four. However:

- Coverage is low (particularly for programmes of direct attention);
- Many programmes rely on workers who arrive with little or no formal qualifications or experience and learn on the job;
- Coordination is lacking; and
- There is little evidence or research on the effects of different strategies or modalities.

Pre-school Education

65. The responsibility for administering pre-schools devolved to the states in 1992 as part of the decentralisation of basic education. At present, 80% of all enrolments are in pre-schools for which states have the main responsibility. Pre-school provision is predominantly a public affair with only 10.2% of the pre-school population enrolled in private pre-schools (although that percentage is probably slightly higher if unregistered private pre-schools are taken into consideration).

66. Pre-schools are classified into three main modalities: general, indigenous and community pre-schools. Most (88.1%) children, in both urban and rural areas, are enrolled in the *general pre-school* programme. The *indigenous pre-school* programme, administered by a special division within the SEP, accounts for another 8.4%. *Community pre-schools*, offered by CONAFE to children in rural communities with less than 500 people, enrol the remaining 3.5%.

67. As indicated in the previous discussion, children of pre-school age can also be found in initial programmes administered by the National System for Family Development (DIF), by the social security institutions (IMSS, ISSSTE), SEDESOL and others. A variety of programmes exist for particular populations. In addition to the programmes for indigenous children and those in small rural communities, these include pre-schools for children of migrant workers, mothers in prisons, circus workers, working mothers.

68. Pre-school education is organised in three levels: children of age 3 tend to be enrolled in level 1, of age 4 in level 2 and of age 5 in level 3. Most pre-schools operate for 3 or 4 hours, five days a week. Some pre-schools offer a morning and an afternoon session. A special subset of pre-schools are labelled "Mixed Pre-schools" (Jardines Mixtos) because they combine a regular pre-school session with care during a day-long programme. This pre-school model is not very extensive, limited mostly to the Federal District, with a few centres in other large cities.

Enrolments

69. Official statistics show that in 1970, only 400,138 children were enrolled in pre-school. That number grew to 3,635,903 in the school year beginning in 2002. Growth was rapid during the period from 1975 to 1985 then slowed so that in the period from 1988 to the present growth has been at a rate of about 2% per year. Enrolment figures are provided in Tables 5 and 6. From the official enrolment statistics, not all of which can be presented in this document, one can derive the following observations:

- Enrolment ratios are essentially the same for girls and boys.
- There is a relatively wide disparity among states in their enrolment ratios (65% to 113% for age 5; 2% to 53% for age 3). There is a tendency for the poorest states to have the lowest ratios although there are exceptions to this.
- Participation by the private sector in providing services is relatively low (10.2%). This participation has grown very slowly in recent years. It varies by state, reaching 30.4% in the Federal District and 24.5% in Nuevo Leon as contrasted with 2.0% in Oaxaca and 2.2% in Chiapas.
- The bulk of the enrolment in governmental and private schools is in general pre-schools (84.4% overall) with the remaining enrolment divided among indigenous pre-schools (8.4%), community pre-schools (3.5%) and pre-schools for children of working mothers (3.7%).
- The main responsibility for administering (but not funding) government-run pre-school programmes is at the state level (about 80%).
- The gap between present coverage and universal coverage, as required by the mandatory pre-school education law is considerable, requiring the creation of new places for approximately 400,000 children per year for the next six years. Pressures that this mandate places on the system and efforts to moderate them while advancing toward a universal enrolment goal will be discussed in the following chapter.

Table 6 - Pre-school enrolments, 2002-2003

Characteristics	Enrolments
Total Pre-school	3,635,903
General	3,066,693
Indigenous	305,125
Community Courses (total)	128,136
CENDIs	94,275
DIF	41,674
Federal Pre-schools	338,882
General	189,269
Indigenous	0
Community Courses	128,136
Rural dispersed	110,899
Indigenous	10,965
Migrant	1,923
Community Infant Centre	4,349
CENDIs	21,477
State Pre-schools	2,926,321
General	2,552,783
Indigenous	305,113
CENDIs	29,541
DIF	38,884
Private Pre-schools	368,948
General	324,274
Indigenous	12
CENDI	41,872
DIF	2,790
Autonomous Pre-schools	1,752
General	367
CENDI	1,385

Source: www.sep.gob.mx

70. Enrolment levels for the three age groups in 2002-2003 were as follows:

Table 7 - Pre-school Enrolments in Mexico, 2002-2003

Age	3 years	4 years	5 years	Total
Total Population	2,127,941	2,174,515	2,218,022	6,520,478
Population enrolled	438,044	1,374,104	1,806,522	3,618,670
Percentage	20.6%	63.2%	81.4%	55.5%

Source: www.sep.gob.mx

This table suggests that approximately 2,900,000 children in the 3 to 6 age group were not enrolled in 2002-2003.¹⁷ However, another 198,886 five-year olds were already in primary school and need to be subtracted out making the total closer to 2,700,000.

The Pre-school Curriculum

71. The 1992 curricular reform, labelled the Pre-school Education Programme (PEP), has guided programming in recent years.¹⁸ It was based in the constructivist theory of Piaget and directed toward improving social, affective, intellectual and physical development. The curriculum gives play, free expression, and creativity a central place. It promotes respect for differences, participation, cooperation and interaction, e.g. blocks of activities are proposed to promote artistic expression, motor development, a positive relation to the environment, language and mathematics. Educators, whose role is seen as guide and promoter, organise learning around project themes based on the experience and interests of the children who participate by creating a frieze in a planning stage. Evaluation, centred on observation is also seen as important -- in early planning, throughout the year and at the end of the school cycle. However, given the very high numbers of children per teacher – often reaching 30 or more children per group - it is reasonable to assume that many teachers will be unable to manage an open framework curriculum in which the initiative of the child is encouraged. Variants of the PEP are used in community, indigenous and general pre-schools. Several states have created their own curricula.

The Funding of ECEC in Mexico

72. According to the constitution, education, including pre-schooling, should be free. Funding for pre-schools comes primarily from the national budget, with relatively small, but nonetheless important, contributions from state and local governments. The States obtain resources from the federal government in the form of:

- Transfers earmarked to cover the operation of schools whose administration was assumed by the states in 1992 when a major decentralization occurred. These funds are almost exclusively used for salaries. Although the transfer is earmarked for education at the state level, there is no special earmarking for how the state decides to distribute those funds among early education, primary, secondary and higher education levels.

¹⁷ Source: SEP, Dirección General de Planeación, Programación y Presupuesto. Datos de fin de cursos ciclo 2002-2003. Table presented in UNESCO and SEP, “National Study on Care and Education Services for Children in Mexico, p. 20.

¹⁸ However, this curriculum was never officially recognized and has been criticized for its lack of specificity and absence of content linked to the three levels of pre-school education. This topic will be taken up in the following chapter of the report.

- Special transfers earmarked for infrastructure and maintenance. Again, states can exercise judgement in how they distribute these funds among the various educational levels. A portion of these funds (typically less than 20%) are transferred by the states to municipal levels.
- Funds made available to states for their participation in special education programmes, some of which are administered directly from within the education sector (e.g., the Quality Schools programme or compensatory programmes such as those run by CONAFE with loan funds from international organisations) and others of which are administered by other dependencies (e.g., preschools run by DIF or educational programmes for children of migrant workers run by SEDESOL). Included in this category would be funding in the form of scholarships. However, there are no scholarships at the preschool or initial education level. These special programme funds are all earmarked for specific educational activities at specific levels.
- In-kind contributions of equipment, materials, books, etc.

73. Direct contributions to education from state budgets are used to cover operation of each state's Education Secretariat (responsible for paying salaries, building and maintaining and running schools that were not among those transferred at the time of decentralization) and to provide counterpart funds for participation in special programmes initiated at the centre that requires a matching component. Some state level funds may also be provided by other dependencies at the state level such as rural development or agriculture to support programmes particularly relevant to the activities of those agencies.

74. Although the constitution stipulates that public education must be free, in almost all public pre-schools, parents are asked to set a fee that they must pay to cover materials and sometimes food. It is also common to ask parents to contribute time to help with the maintenance of the centres.

Notes on Education in Nuevo Leon, Puebla and the Federal District

75. During the visit to Mexico by the review team, visits were made to two states, Nuevo Leon and Puebla as well as within the Federal District. Nuevo Leon is a richer industrial, Northern state bordering on the United States, with relatively little rural or indigenous education. By way of contrast, Puebla is a poorer, more diverse state located in the middle of the country, with larger rural and indigenous populations. The Federal District lies within one of the world's largest metropolitan areas. As indicated earlier, control over the educational system continues to be exercised in large part from the federal government. However, in recent years federal entities have been particularly lively in their innovations and adjustments of programmes. Although we realize that our visits could not possibly provide a proper appreciation of the variety found within Mexico but they did help to provide insights to how education functions at state levels and to identify innovative and model experiences. Some impressions from these visits are presented in Boxes 1, 2 and 3. The first two identify issues that emerged during visits to Nuevo Leon and Puebla, the third describes a particularly stimulating visit to a preschool in the Federal District which was not only impressive because of the way in which the learning process was handled but also for its use of space, its involvement of parents and its attention to local accountability.

Box 1. Education and Care Policies in Nuevo Leon: Reflections on a Visit

The visit to Nuevo Leon coincided with a recent change of government and the entrance of a new State Secretary for Education. Despite the pressures inevitably accompanying this change we were received most cordially and provided with all the information requested. The Secretary explained the basic policy lines that the government proposed to follow, synthesized as follows:

Initial education is a priority for the new government of Nuevo Leon. This priority will be realized through three basic points:

- Attention to children from birth to six years of age will be treated as a continuum and from an educational perspective. This marks a profound change in current thinking, particularly for children from 0 to 3 years of age.
- The main form of educational attention will be in centres, both public and private.
- The education and qualification of personal will be the key element driving the changes that are envisioned by the government.

The new government knows that in order to develop its priorities it will have to study and analyze in depth the existing situation and, on the basis of this knowledge, elaborate a financial proposal in order to confront rigorously two challenges:

1. Increase considerably the actual programmes offered in order to respond to the new needs of the population of Nuevo Leon
2. Improve the quality of the set of offerings, present and future, responding to the knowledge available today about the importance of education during the first years.

During our visit, we had the opportunity to learn about, intensely and in an accelerated fashion, the opinions and concerns reiterated by our hosts. Several of these opinions and concerns stand out that, from our point of view condition the major transformations that the government proposes:

- In Nuevo Leon, as in all of modern society, changes in the family structure and the ever more general presence of mothers as well as fathers in the labour force, means that families need a long school day in order to meet both work and family demands. This emerging need contrasts with the present reality in which, in order to enrol children 4 and 5 years of age, schools offer one session of three or four hours during the morning or afternoon. To meet the need will require sensitive planning and an important budgetary pledge.
- In Nuevo Leon, both now and in the future, school offerings for children from 0 to 6 will be developed and administered by private and social organisations as well as by government. This open policy requires that the new government establish criteria to guarantee educational quality in attention to young children and creates the challenge of balancing between quality and quality as well as between diversity and coherence.
- In Nuevo Leon, the continuing process of changing from a charitable to an educational institution, as proposed by the Secretariat, will certainly have to confront the weight of tradition, making real change difficult, as has been the case in many countries passing through a similar process. Again, finding equilibrium is a concern. For example, it is difficult to balance a vision of the hygiene necessary in a centre, particular for small children, with a traditional and antiseptic vision of a hygienist. Or, the traditional school idea of learning by repeating, still very present in many places, will certainly make it difficult to shift from instructive practices to more open and active ones. The challenge and concern, then is to contribute to a change of mentality in the professionals. This is perhaps the most important and most difficult to obtain while taking into account the weight of tradition in each institution.

Box 2. The preschool and initial education challenge in Puebla

Puebla is a multi-cultural and ethnically plural state. According to the National Census of 2000, the 565,509 indigenous people who live there, representing 7 different language groups make it is the fifth largest state with respect to indigenous population. The state also has one of the highest indexes of “marginality” (ranking seventh among the 32 federal entities) and one of the lowest indexes of human development (ranking 25th). The level of illiteracy, for the population over 15 years of age, is 14.6% state wide, but reaches 25.4% in the mountainous northern region of the state. If one adds to this those over 15 who have not completed primary or secondary school, the total is almost 60%, most of whom are indigenous, urban poor or farm families living in extreme poverty in the mountainous regions. Administratively, Puebla is made up of 217 municipalities and 6,556 localities, a third of which have less than 2,500 inhabitants.

In this context, formal Initial Education (in centres) is offered to 3,844 children under 4, attended by 94 educators in 38 centres concentrated in urban areas but spread throughout the state. Another 1,533 children were reached through non-formal education programmes directed to vulnerable groups in marginal urban areas, rural marginal areas experiencing a great deal of out migration and indigenous communities. Preschool coverage was 62% for the 2001-2002 school cycle. More than 116,000 indigenous children were not being attended.

The Public Education Secretariat of Puebla (SEP-Puebla) recognizes that greater coverage with quality of initial and preschool education could contribute to improving the conditions of the population. In this vein, the challenges posed by the Obligatory Preschool Law have been interpreted as an opportunity.

Accordingly, at the time of the visit, the authorities of SEP-Puebla presented a Strategic Plan to comply with the Obligatory Preschool Law. This included: a) a diagnosis of the educational situation of children, ages 3 to 6 in the state; b) identification of the places where increases in coverage are necessary; c) a proposal for increasing enrolments, actively involving the private sector in the task, and d) an estimate of the number of schools and teachers required, including also plans with the institutions that train teachers to accelerate the adequate preparation of teachers, and e) an estimate of the budget needed to meet the challenge. Permanent and expeditious coordination between initial education and preschool education was evident, with the two taking on the challenge together.

With respect to the rural and indigenous population – which together constitute the majority in the state – an initiative is underway to create educational materials in the indigenous languages currently in use.

Among the lessons and observations resulting from the visit are the following:

- There is participation by specialists from initial and preschool education in various teams concerned about education for children under 6, including programmes of indigenous and community education.
- It is important to help teachers carry out the policy of including disabled children. Specialists and experienced personnel within the SEP exist to help with this task.
- The value of a decentralized approach to meeting the commitment to universal preschool, as evident in the plan created by the state.
- The importance of involving both public and private institutions in the common task of meeting the goals of obligatory preschooling.
- The challenge of shifting from a traditional, vertical education emphasizing instructional learning, particularly of reading and writing, to an active learning favouring integral development. In this regard, there is an obvious need to improve the ratio of children per teacher: in many of the schools visited the teacher was not able to educate adequately the number of children assigned which was as high as 55.
- The need to improve infrastructure, especially by providing minimum spaces for children to learn by exploring and playing, but also by improving lighting, furniture and arrangements that permit children to have materials at their height.
- The need to diversify educational material beyond the books and materials actually provided.
- The importance of moving to decentralize the curriculum so that states and individual centres can take better advantage of the rich variations in local culture.
- The potential for taking advantage of good family education experiences to reach children in the 0 to 3 age group who are not incorporated by law into the system.

Box 3. Impressions of a high-quality preschool in the federal district

In the doorway of a preschool near the centre of the Federal District, a teacher receives a child and talks with her mother. The child runs through the entranceway. She is happy. We three visitors present ourselves to the teacher who invites us to come in and takes us to the supervisor of the zone (who, it turns out, visits each school in her area periodically during the morning).

In the passageway near the entrance, to which mothers and fathers have access, is a table of about 1.5 by 2 metres. Above it are various coloured materials and a poster in which the school has presented in detail an account of the income received from quotas and other sources and of the school expenses – placed where all parents can see it.

The construction separates four areas: classrooms, a kitchen and dining room, an administrative area in which the director has her office as well as a small meeting room and bathrooms. The brick construction is covered by ceramic in a soft yellow which makes cleaning easy with a wet cloth. The floors are linoleum, also making cleaning easy. The teaching area consists of six rooms, grouped by twos with a small patio between each set of two classrooms. This design gives all children easy access to a patio area and helps to minimize the sounds of children's conversations and songs. To the rear of the area is a large patio with trees and plants, watched over by a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe placed in a niche in the wall. This is where all the children come together at least once a day.

We went from one classroom to another and in each we observed tables and chairs of an appropriate size, a small radio and recorder, wooden furniture, old but well painted, in which diverse materials were available: paper, pencils in painted cans, story books, magazines, etc. On the walls children's work was displayed. The furniture, materials and decorations varied from one room to another, including the musical atmosphere.

Upon entering the first classroom we found children preparing for their school breakfast. Two children, one boy and one girl, arranged on the table individual placemats that were made with pictures of the children, covered by plastic. Two other children (boys) brought large plates from which they served juice and crackers. The seated children thanked them and ate. In the second room, two children (one boy and one girl) were cleaning the room with a wet cloth while the rest wandered and choose books to read. In background was the cradle song of Brahms. In the third room, the children were cutting paper; when they finished they got up from their tables and pasted their cut outs on a large piñata of many colours. In the background was music by Mozart. A fourth group was in out in their individual patio, in a physical education class (with a special teacher in charge). The children exercised their arms, then balanced and then jumped about.

It was evident that in each classroom the children observed were happy, working, conversing, smiling – a productive murmur. Each activity was carried out in an autonomous manner. The teacher helped, collaborated, questioned, provided the background music and responded to children's petitions. It was also clear that each room was different (from the furniture and arrangements to the personal placemats). Nevertheless, the teaching method was similar: active, participatory, centred on the children's interests, and permitting children to be autonomous.

Paralleling the work of the children, in the small meeting room in the administrative area, about 30 parents were participating in a meeting. They appeared interested. Their presence was surprising at 10AM because many were working parents. The Director explained that the school has monthly meetings and that the parents obtain permission from their employers to attend.

The school has taken on obligatory preschooling in its area as a personal challenge and parents have become involved. Mothers and fathers have been charged with interviewing their neighbours in order to discover the preschool educational needs in the barrio. Each mother and father interviews people in their block. The partial results of this activity have already been used by the Director to plan work for the coming year in such a way that a double session can accommodate new entrants. She has presented a proposal for more teachers and educational materials based.

CHAPTER 4:

ISSUES ARISING FROM THE VISIT

1. Purpose and concept of ECEC

What kind of child?

76. The Mexican National Review comments that the country lacks an agreed-upon national philosophical and pedagogical framework to help define clearly the type of child who should emerge from pre-school education. Researchers with whom we spoke echoed this view. They also suggested that a tendency toward preparing children for school had led to an “instructive pedagogy” and to seeing the child as an object. The sheer weight of numbers in the classrooms contributes to this and tends to undermine a more open and active pedagogy that would help children form a positive self-image.

77. At the time of our visit, a debate was in process between the more established practice of profiling children using general developmental categories (physical, cognitive, social, language...) and a more recent practice of describing children in terms of specific competencies and learning outcomes. This debate is linked both to defining the goals that should guide planning and activities in the classroom and to how evaluation systems are conceived. In the recent past, most children in ECEC programmes have been evaluated at various moments during the year either by applying a standardised developmental test or by using a checklist to guide teacher observations of children within very general developmental categories. The more recent tendency would change that by defining specific competencies, such as those defined in the new Programme to Renew Pre-school Curriculum of the SEP (see Box 4). This tendency is also present in the curriculum and pedagogy adopted by CONAFE; in the curriculum recently developed in the Federal District; and in work by an inter-sectorial project on indicators of children’s well-being in Mexico.

78. These efforts to redefine what kind of child is desired are encouraging but also raise questions. Are these skills and competencies far too numerous and complex? (see discussion on educational process below). Has the normal teacher the capacity to integrate such competencies – even a small number of them – into her daily work?¹⁹ How do the competencies and profiles being considered for children in initial education, pre-school education and primary schooling relate? Will the several initiatives to define competencies be brought together to try and obtain agreement or will there be several parallel definitions?

¹⁹ Compare, for example, the 178 competencies proposed in the SEP curriculum with the simplicity and concreteness of the *Swedish Curriculum for the Pre-school*. In Sweden, each pre-school centre should aim to achieve five goals: a) Norms and values; b) Development and learning; c) Influence of the child; d) Strong pre-school and home links; e) Co-operation between the pre-school class, the school and the leisure centre. These five categories are broken down into a few, simple goals, e.g. the key element in norms and values is defined as follows: *An important task of the pre-school is to establish and help children acquire the values on which our society is based. The inviolability of life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the pre-school shall actively promote in its work with children.* The Curriculum underlines that these values are to be lived and promoted by the staff, and not to become a subject for instruction or evaluation.

How will the definitions be operationalised to permit systematic evaluation? Does the move toward defining competencies suggest that preparation for school has become an even more dominant framework driving early education, as contrasted, for instance, with a broader human development view? Will the definitions of competencies be sufficiently broad that they will help open up teachers to more socially constructive strategies or will teachers teach toward the development of certain narrow and specific competencies related to reading and writing, seen as essential for entrance into primary school?

Box 4. A new curricular vision - profiling pre-school children by defining competencies*

In a document setting out fundamentals that should guide a renewed pre-school education, the SEP established a set of general competencies that children should acquire and which represent goals for pre-school development and learning. These are:

- Develop a positive sense of self and a disposition to learn, acting with initiative and autonomy and recognizing personal capacities in different areas of participation.
- Strengthen oral expression abilities including listening and comprehension and enrich language in order to communicate in different contexts and with different purposes.
- Acquire interest in and love for reading, discovering and understanding the functions of written language and beginning to communicate ideas by writing using the personal resources available (drawings, diagrams).
- Understand the functions of the available means of communication and take advantage of them to learn, to exchange opinions and to form judgements.
- Develop ideas and abilities that permit the manipulation of numerical information in daily situations: numbers, calculations and the establishment of relations of form, space and measures in situations that imply the recognition of similarities and differences, location, size and quantity.
- Develop the capacity to solve problems in situations that require reflection, explanation, and the search for solutions through personal strategies and procedures, in comparison with those used by others.
- Develop abilities to observe, question, predict, compare, registrar, elaborate explanations and seek information by exploring the natural and social worlds.
- Develop sensibility, initiative, imagination and creativity through artistic expression (music, poetry, plastic arts, dance, theatre) and in order to appreciate artistic and cultural expression in ones own and others contexts.
- Be able to interact with others, assume distinct roles, work in collaboration and help those who need help, resolve conflicts through dialogue, and recognize and respect rules permitting social sharing in, and outside of, the school.
- Acquire, in daily practice, the values that society has created to permit living together and socially responsible participation: liberty, individual integrity, tolerance, recognition of human and gender equality, social solidarity, recognition of and respect for cultural and ethnic diversity and of the rights of others.
- Improve abilities of coordination, control, manipulation and movement, increasing understanding of how the body functions and putting into practice measures to keep healthy and to prevent health risks.

These “fundamental proposals” have been condensed into six major categories, each with a set of sub categories within which more specific competencies have been defined. The categories are as follows:

- Personal and Social Development (confidence and self-esteem, attitudes and predispositions, relationships, behaviour and self-control) 36 competencies
- Language and Communication (oral expression, familiarization with written language) 28 competencies
- Mathematical Thinking (numbers, forms, space and measurement) 32 competencies
- Exploration and knowledge of the environment (observation, experimentation and inquiry, elaboration of conclusions and explanations) 21 competencies
- Expression and artistic appreciation (music, dance and body expression, plastic arts, drama and literature) 32 competencies
- Physical Development and Healthcare (movement, sense of space, prevention, protection) 29 competencies

The result is a preliminary listing of 178 competencies which should be cultivated in the young child!

Source: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Dirección General de Investigación Educativa, Programa de Renovación Curricular y Pedagogía de la Educación Preescolar, “Fundamentos y características de una nueva propuesta curricular para educación preescolar”. Septiembre, 2003.

79. In the process of defining the kind of child desired and the curriculum thought appropriate to achieve that end, a question arises as to how rigid or flexible the guidelines should be. This issue relates also to setting norms, to be discussed below. In a country as diverse as Mexico, operating with a decentralised educational system, it seems important for states to be able to set their own goals and to establish their own curricula, within general guidelines.

The division between initial education and pre-school education

80. In Mexico, ECEC is divided into “initial education” and “pre-school education.” However, the conceptual differences and corresponding administrative divisions between the two are not clear nor, it seems, always functional. This is only in part due to the confusing overlap at three years introduced by the obligatory pre-school law. More important, separating ECEC into two parts by age seems to reinforce an unfortunate distinction between childcare programmes and education programmes, with initial education oriented toward custodial childcare and protection rather than education, whereas pre-school programmes are oriented toward learning and instruction with insufficient attention to care and the young child’s pattern of learning. This is so despite the fact that some initial education programmes have a strong education component and extend to age 6 and at least one pre-school model (Jardines Mixtos) brings together education and care for pre-schoolers.

81. Although the present conceptual and administrative separation is understandable in terms of the different historical origins described in Chapter 3, the division does not seem developmentally appropriate. General principles of development and learning pertain to the entire early childhood period from birth to six years of age.²⁰ Moreover, the evolution of programmes within these two categories has led to differences in the levels and kinds of training of staff that are provided and required, with generally higher standards set for pre-school personnel than for initial education personnel. These differences are being reinforced by the “obligatory” designation for pre-schooling which sets it even more apart from initial education. Further separation will occur if, as seems to be the case, new, but totally separate, training programmes are set up for initial education.

82. The conceptual and organisational picture is complicated further by the fact that initial education groups together programmes of *direct attention to young children* under 4 years of age and programmes of *indirect attention* through the *education of parents* of children in this age range. As explained in Chapter 3, these strains of initial education have their roots in very different traditions. Using a global definition of initial education linked to age groups puts in the same category relatively high quality programmes that attend directly to children for as many as 60 hours a week and programmes of unknown quality that work indirectly with parents for two or three hours per week, perhaps with a home visit. It ignores the fact that working with parents requires different skills and approaches than working with young children. More importantly, however, it fosters the idea that direct attention to children in centres and indirect attention by working with parents are alternative rather than complementary strategies for improving early development. A complementary view would mean that centre-based programmes, whether for children under four or for older pre-school children, should include work with parents as well as direct attention to children. It would mean that skills needed to work with parents should be included in the training of all ECEC workers, at initial and pre-school levels.

²⁰

For instance, children in this period, regardless of their age, develop and learn in interaction with their environments, especially the early childhood centre and the home. In both environments, adults need to know how to listen and respond, to treat children with respect, to identify needs and abilities, to guide active learning, to set limits, and so forth. In addition, the child’s development is integral, that is, sound cognitive development depends greatly at that age on parallel physical, social and emotional progress.

83. An alternative to the above is to conceptualise “initial education” as the period from birth until entry into primary school. This is done, for instance, in the original (1990) LOGSE law in Spain; in New Zealand with its unitary Te Whariki curriculum, published in 1996; and in Sweden from 1996, and the United Kingdom since 1998, which have brought together - both administratively and in terms of curriculum - the daycare and pre-school sectors.

84. One implication of this redefinition would be that one organisation or body might more easily be held responsible for coordinating and articulating the range of programmes within that broader age range (see comments below on coordination). Another is that ECEC training, at least in its initial stages, might start from the same base or framework, whether directed toward working with very young children or pre-schoolers. Yet another is that working with, and educating, parents would become a part of the content of all early education programmes directed toward children 0 to 6. Strategies for such work would be incorporated into all training programmes. Breaking down the distinction should help childcare programmes to strengthen their educational component and educational programmes to strengthen their attention to care and protection.

2. Access and enrolment issues

85. Since 1970, important gains have been made in the enrolment of children in ECEC programmes, particularly for children ages 4 and 5 years of age. Indeed, the official pre-school enrolment percentages for Mexico compare favourably with those of several other OECD countries at these ages. Moreover, the obligatory pre-school policy has stimulated demand and additional efforts to expand enrolment. Nevertheless, a number of basic issues related to access emerged from conversations during the visit.

Improving quality under conditions of rapid expansion

86. In this report we will not take on the issue of quality directly. That issue crosses all of the categories discussed here – setting goals, improving training, curriculum, pedagogical practices, infrastructure, organisation and management, evaluation, relations with parents, financing. Taken together, these elements help to define quality in the system and determine the levels of development and learning of participating children.

87. That said, it is important to note that concerns are often expressed that the push to get all children, three to five, into pre-schools could easily lead to setting aside, at least for the moment, the emphasis on quality that is so central in the National Programme of Education for 2001-2006. In one of the sessions we were told, for instance, that to meet the enrolment goals “we will probably have to raise the number of children per group.” Both the statistics and our own observations suggest that the child to teacher ratio is already high in most urban pre-schools, usually more than 30 children per teacher.²¹ Moreover, employing assistant teachers in these classrooms does not seem to be an option. Using funds to construct new buildings and pay more teachers could take funds away from the recent efforts to improve quality through other strategies such as operationalising and implementing the curricular reform, making changes in the training system and improving and expanding the Schools of Quality programme.

88. The good news is that the growth rates in pre-school education over the last decade are generally higher for children in rural areas than in urban areas and for indigenous than for non-indigenous children. Although it is not possible to show with hard data, it is probable that growth rates in recent years are higher for low-income than higher income populations. This effort must be recognised and the passage of the obligatory pre-school education law pushes it further by mandating that all children from ages 3 to 6

²¹ See for instance, Myers and de San Jorge, 1999 or Myers and Martínez, 2003.

should attend pre-school. However, if pressure to enrol more children from 3 to 6 years combines with insufficient funding, then improved access may be at the expense of quality. Existing inequitable differences between programmes in urban and rural areas and between indigenous and non-indigenous populations will probably increase, despite closing gaps in enrolments. Special vigilance will therefore be needed vis-à-vis those groups who, at the moment, need greater support, namely:

Children from less privileged groups

89. In spite of efforts to even up enrolments, particularly at the pre-school level, it is clear from the statistics that important inequities remain. The process of “catching up” is still in an early stage. Enrolments in rural areas and for indigenous groups are still considerably lower than for urban middle class and non-indigenous populations. This could cause a problem in areas where services are still not easily available if pre-school is seen as a prerequisite for enrolling in primary school.

90. The further one goes down the age scale, the lower the general enrolment rates and the greater the inequities. This reflects the tendency for advantaged groups to have access to and use available services first. In our visits to CENDIs we were impressed, for instance, by the large proportion of children enrolled who were not only children of mothers working in the formal sector but also of mothers with relatively well-paying jobs. A significant proportion of CENDIs are specifically for children of governmental (or semi-state) employees. That is not only the case, explicitly, for ISSSTE but also occurs in CENDIs run by the semi-state organisations, by the SEP, by teacher’s unions, and by IMSS in the modality reserved for its employees. Even in the case of centres operated by DIF where, presumably, priority is given to children of mothers who are not in formal employment and enrolled in the social security system, we found a high proportion of children came from families where employment was in the formal sector.

91. Again, we were informed that part of the process of evening up the enrolment numbers seems to have involved opening programmes of lesser quality to less advantaged, more isolated populations. If this is the case, simply increasing enrolments may not have a significant impact on closing the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged.

Young children of mothers working in the informal sector

92. A policy that places emphasis on childcare as a benefit for mothers working in the formal sector discriminates against mothers working in the informal sector, who may have an equal or greater need for access to ECEC, both for childcare and educational reasons. A small proportion of ECEC places in initial education centres are available to such mothers working, but, as suggested above, we discovered that a significant proportion of the children enrolled in these programmes have mothers who work in the formal sector, although the programmes are presumably directed to an “open” and disadvantaged population. The practice runs counter to the publicly declared desire to help poor families escape from the poverty cycle. In fact, it sets up a counter cycle whereby mothers from low-income families, without funds to pay for private ECEC, are obliged to be content with part-time, poorly paying jobs in the informal sector, in order to balance work and maternal roles. These jobs do not allow mothers to make the productive contribution of which they are capable, seldom provide the funds necessary to seek out a private childcare arrangement and do not give them the right to enrol their child in governmental ECEC programmes. In sum, their children do not have the same chance of receiving good childcare and education in centres outside the home, with negative consequences on their development and readiness for school.

93. The bias toward ECEC provision for children of working mothers in the formal sector is evident in both the organisational and financial arrangements that are mandated. The main responsibility for programmes providing ECEC for workers falls to the social security organisations (rather than to education or to welfare). The tax levied on formal organisations goes directly to those organisations rather than to a

more general fund that would be used for programmes to attend to children of mothers working in the informal sector. Other countries (Colombia or Sweden, for instance) do not make access to ECEC programmes contingent on any employment, let alone employment in the formal sector. In these settings, taxes paid by businesses go into a more general pot and are made available to support programmes that serve the entire population.

Children with special needs and abilities

94. The General Education Law mandates the inclusion of children with special needs into regular classrooms. In our field visits we saw several examples of inclusion at work. One of these is presented in Box 4. However, we also found that inclusion is still at an early stage. Moreover the existing system for helping children with special needs is limited. Preschool Centers for Psycho-Pedagogical Attention (CAPEP) are available in many places to respond to children with special learning needs but are heavily concentrated in urban areas leaving those in rural areas to fend for themselves.

95. The inclusion process will require: additional funding for special education teachers; better systems of support to centres and classrooms from specialised teachers and institutions; additional training of educators; working with parents to overcome a tendency to keep their children at home, particularly in rural areas; and, continuing adjustments in infrastructure to accommodate special physical conditions.

Box 5. Nuevo Leon: Visit to a “rural” preschool

After four days immersed in an unknown, yet somehow familiar, setting, our “mission” arrived at a small rural town not far from Monterrey to visit a “rural” preschool centre. We were told that this school integrates disabled children into its regular groups as part of a general principle of providing school for all, an unusual situation considering the context.

The school was situated in a simple, clean and well maintained building. The three classrooms, all in a row were connected directly to a large outdoor area. At one extreme of this patio was a new, one-room construction where children with special difficulties come together for several hours during the school day.

It was not long before we saw that the teachers in this school were working in a different way from that which we had come to know up to that point in our visits. In spite of the fact that the groups were very large, such that the activities could easily have been dominated by the teacher, the protagonists were the children.

In the group of older children, the activity that morning consisted of creating, together, a story. The children offered their ideas and the teacher helped by constructing a narrative thread from the collection of ideas. Afterwards, the children, organised in small groups, illustrated the story with their drawings.

During the short time we had to observe the group of the youngest children, they carried out a musical activity, listening to some classical music. The children were attentive and happy. After listening, all had the opportunity to follow the rhythm with “instruments” of various kinds, rich in possibilities and within reach. Two locks permitted the children to experiment with their metallic sound. The objects of little “value” acquired value with the children’s actions, while the teacher gave dignity to their use as “cymbals” with which the small hands produced a new and interesting sound.

In the middle group, all of the children were immersed in an activity, so interested in and concentrated on what they were doing that they did not even know we were present. The activities were varied that they were developing simultaneously in small groups. There was a group in which the silence was only broken by the buzz of an intimate conversation between friends. One group was making a large construction in a space where they had access to the materials and conditions to do so, in another space a group worked with plastic, and yet another group looked at the details of leaves picked from trees on the school grounds while talking about their forms and colours.

In this setting of intense activity by the children, the teacher went from group to group, showing her interest in what

they were doing, sharing and following their ideas to see what they were accomplishing and thinking, responding to their questions or asking them. From time to time a laugh made us pay attention to the activity of one of the groups. Little by little, with respect, the teacher passed from one group to the next, suggesting that they bring their activity to a close in order to share what they had done with the rest. Following the teacher's signs, they put their chairs in a circle and sat; organized in this way they told what they had done in their groups.

In this new learning situation it was particularly interesting to see the trees that one group had drawn, each tree very different. And each child showed a different kind of discovery and knowledge; one had concentrated his curiosity on the trunk, others on the leaves that were reproduced in detail, others on the branches, and others on the colours. The teacher had a stimulating comment for each of the children, recognizing in each of them the original contribution made. She delicately collected the opinions about the trees expressed by workmates.

3. Funding issues

What is the level of funding for ECEC in Mexico?

96. The answer seems to be that we really do not know. It is difficult to trace the funding sources and patterns for ECEC in Mexico. To do so involves putting together many pieces of a complex puzzle. ECEC funds come from public, private and social sources. Within the public sector, most education and health funds come from the national budget which depends on the collection of a variety of taxes (principally income and sales taxes), the sale of rights, fees collected, contributions to social security, the revenues obtained from the sale of oil and electricity, lottery earnings, money borrowed internationally and probably other sources not included in this list. These funds are distributed among the various branches of government and among sectors. Some funds are used nationally and others are transferred to the states which in turn make transfers to municipalities which decide which localities to support. A small amount of funding goes directly to municipalities for their use in social infrastructure projects (which can include education). Some of the funds transferred to the states are earmarked for education but not for specific levels of education making it difficult to know how much goes to ECEC.

97. As indicated in Chapter 3, most public support for *initial education* comes from contributions to social security, a small portion of which is then allocated to childcare and support for mothers during pregnancy. This support is complemented by general funding from the health sector that is used to attend to young children or pregnant and lactating mothers, part of integral support for early development. It is also complemented by funds from the budget of the Education Secretariat, some for direct attention and others for parental education, as well as by funds from Family Welfare (DIF), Social Development (SEDESOL) and other government sectors which run separate programmes, and by semi-state organisations, universities and unions which make small contributions to operating their own childcare services. The most important support for initial education continues to be the attention that parents give to their children in homes, a contribution that does not enter into accounting. However, parents also pay quotas and fees for their children to be in private, and even public, programmes. We did not find a recent estimate of the magnitude of this family contribution.

98. The public funds for *preschool education* come mainly from the national budget and arrive in the form of educational transfers for operation and infrastructure, funds supporting state participation in special programmes, and in-kind contributions. In addition, a small portion of the funding from social security, DIF, SEDESOL and others is used in programmes that include children of preschool age as well as children in initial education. States also receive non-educational funds that might be tapped for ECEC such as funds to improve "social infrastructure" at the municipal level (which can include building schools) or funds for school breakfasts. States, and sometimes municipalities, contribute modestly from their own budgets; the level of the contribution varies significantly from place to place. Again, parents make important contributions through their payment of quotas and fees.

99. The complex picture described makes it virtually impossible to determine the total expenditures for ECEC with any exactitude. In 1998, a very rough attempt to estimate of the amount of public funding provided for attention to children less than six years of age in Mexico resulted in the conclusion that expenditures for education and care programmes as well as health and maternity benefits was considerably less than a billion US dollars which represented much less than 1% of the Gross Domestic Product (Myers 2000). We were unable to find a similar up-to-date estimate of the total government funding of programmes for young children, but it is unlikely that the proportion has increased a great deal over the past six years.

ECEC funding, federal-state relationships and earmarking

100. It was not possible to obtain an estimate of how much funding for ECEC comes from the national level and how much comes from state or municipal budgets. In one case, it was estimated that the state provides in the neighbourhood of 10% of the preschool funding (vs. more than 30% of funding for secondary schools). Major variations from state to state are likely. In general, however, we can say that most of the public funding for ECEC programmes comes from the national budget even though programmes are administered by the states. We have also noted that although some of the educational funds states receive from the national level that are earmarked for special ECEC programmes most can be applied to any level of the educational system. In some cases, matching fund arrangements have helped to attract state and municipal funds to ECEC; this is the case in the Schools of Quality programme which is innovative because it establishes trust funds at the state level into which national (predominantly), state and local funds are deposited.

101. Although there has been some opening in recent years to give states additional power to raise funds locally, they are still heavily dependent on the federal government. When combined with the fact that the federal government reserves the power to set and evaluate programmes and to establish norms, the states still have little room to develop their own initiatives. On one hand, additional earmarking of funds for ECEC that come from the national level could help to improve attention. Such earmarking could be particularly important to try and moderate inequities across states. On the other hand, if decentralization is to be given a real chance to function, states will need to have more power to obtain funds and greater control over their own budgets in which case less rather than more earmarking is probably called for. A major challenge over the next years, if not decades, will be to achieve a proper balance between giving states additional authority to make their own decisions about where to invest funds and earmarking funds in order to assure a solid base for quality attention to young children.

Is funding sufficient?

102. Despite the inability to determine with any rigor the actual level of ECEC funding is, it nevertheless seems to be clear that major improvements in ECEC access, quality and equity will necessitate additional funds. These will be necessary to comply with the law requiring access for all preschool aged children. But additional funds are also necessary, for instance, to provide needed childcare services for working mothers, to reduce the large class sizes found (mostly) in urban preschools, to improve supervision, to develop and apply a better system of evaluation.

103. Additional funds for public ECEC can be obtained in two main ways, by reallocating existing funds to ECEC or by seeking new sources of funding and earmarking them for ECEC. Because ECEC appears to command a relatively modest percentage of the total education budget, there should be space to make some small shifts that would nevertheless have an important effect. As primary school enrolments drop, for instance, consideration might be given to shifting budget "savings" downward rather than upward. It is also possible to imagine provision of funds for ECEC within non-educational budgets, including particularly the social development budget where additional funding for childcare, linked to

women's work as well as to child well being could be explored. At issue here is the degree to which the government is really convinced that investment in ECEC, especially in the earliest years, will have a social and economic payoff.

104. New funds earmarked for ECEC might be obtained in a number of ways. For example, corporations might be provided with tax exemptions if they donate funds for childcare, above and beyond what they contribute to social security. Specific taxes might be earmarked for ECEC. In Finland a portion of the tax on alcohol is assigned to ECEC. In different states of the United States funds have been earmarked for ECEC that come from: sales of special automobile plates; a special levy on property; a special sales tax; proceeds from lotteries.

105. Another way to increase funding for public programmes is by charging light user fees on a sliding scale with exemptions made for those who cannot pay. This strategy, which has been used increasingly in a range of countries, runs counter to the Mexican constitution which says that public education should be free. Although most public preschools do in fact benefit from fees paid by parents, these very modest assessments are determined by parent organisations and are not set or regulated by the state. Whether or not this option might be appropriate for early (initial) education and care, which is not obligatory, is not clear. Nor is it entirely clear whether it might be applied to preschool programmes with extended hours. We were told that families whose children participate in the full-day programme called Jardines Mixtos are responsible for meeting at least the costs of providing a midday meal. The state might argue that it is meeting its obligation to provide 4 hours of free pre-school but beyond that, parents should expect to contribute financially, according to their means.

106. Finally, funds may be stretched if they are used more efficiently. This might involve minor administrative reforms such as taking advantage of computer technology to reduce clerical costs and speed up bureaucratic processes. However, it is also possible to imagine major organisational reforms designed to bring dispersed programmes under one administrative head, presumably cutting out some of the duplication involved. It is likely, for instance that savings could be obtained by consolidating the tri-partite system of CENDIs in which essentially the same programme is administered separately by IMSS, ISSSTE and SEP.

Incentives for social and private investment in ECEC

107. Within initial education, the social security system offers per child subsidies to community or private groups which offer a service deemed to be of adequate quality. This seems to be one of the few ways in which the government is providing an incentive to social and private sectors to invest in ECEC. However, it is possible to imagine other ways to strengthen co-participation in this field. For instance, tax exemptions might be offered to businesses that provide funds for ECEC (in addition to what they are obliged to pay through social security). At issue is whether more might be done to assist struggling but competent non-governmental organisations as they offer attention, particularly for children of working women who do not have access to social security benefits. Could, for instance, participation in the Quality Schools programme be opened up to preschools that are not operated by the government? Or, would it be possible to offer childcare "scholarships" to children in families living in poverty where the mother would like to work but must stay home? This could help to sustain social organisations which now offer their services to such families but cannot maintain their programmes because they cannot charge a break even fee. Thinking in these terms would require the government to recognize and strengthen civic efforts to complement what the government is presently able to do.

4. Issues related to the educational process

Reforming curricular and pedagogical practices

108. The curriculum of reference for the last decade has been *Programa de Educación Preescolar* (PEP92). However, recent diagnostic and research studies (SEP 2003, Barocio 2003, Myers and Martínez, 2003) suggest that only a portion of the pre-school teachers actually adopt this curriculum as their guide and/or put its principles into practice. Some continue to use earlier versions or use no curriculum at all to guide their classroom work. Our visit occurred at a time when curricular and pedagogical reforms were being reviewed and renewed. The proposal for a renewed pre-school curriculum not only places new emphasis on developing competencies but also stresses: identifying and building on children's individual potential, language and cognitive development, attention to diversity, and an active and intentional role for the educator. The framework seems to be much influenced by the thinking of Vygotsky.

109. In this renewal process, there continues to be a tension between general development goals and a focus on preparing children for school. The increased attention to language and cognitive development appears positive and much needed, but it seems to be driven by a school readiness perspective. Depending on how it is managed, placing competencies at the centre of the pre-school teacher's project could reinforce an instructional perspective. For many years, mention has been made by pre-school reformers of the need to adjust the first two years of primary school, moving early education practices upward. However, the reform document does not elaborate on this point. Indeed, the general impression we obtained during the visit was that pressure had increased to move the instructive practices of primary schooling downward, even as efforts are underway to renew and reinforce the constructive, active, exploratory, differentiated learning, keyed to interests and abilities, that characterises pre- schooling.

110. To date, emphasis has been on curricular redesign and getting principles and bases right, rather than on making the curriculum work in the classroom. This may be a legitimate starting point, but it remains to be seen how the design can be operationalised appropriately in a programme and brought into everyday practice. Indeed, the recent studies referred to suggest that the major problem lies in difficulties associated with putting the curriculum into practice rather than in major flaws in the curricular design. The strong tendency observed and documented in these studies is for educators to continue with an "instructive" rather than a "constructive" approach to the educational process, curriculum to the contrary. In part this continuity in practice results as new teachers, advised by older teachers, create their own pedagogy, based on the every day experience of coping with the practical challenges of high child to teacher ratios, administrative demands, demanding parents, etc. A reactive teacher dominated, instructional approach is likely to occur in this situation, particularly when pedagogical accompaniment and monitoring are weak (see comments below on supervision, discussed in relation to training on the job).

Setting and Working toward Norms

111. Norms are set for some aspects of initial education and pre-school education. However, different norms are used by different organisations, e.g. IMSS and ISSSTE and the SEP have their own norms for initial education centres. Moreover, norms seem to serve two basic purposes: logistical planning and certification. They do not seem to be seen as a standard, toward which all centres can work, based on what experience and research says seems to be best for the child. For instance, the "norm" used by the SEP for the number of young children per teacher is 25:1. That has served a planning purpose in which budgets are tight and pressures to expand are great; it was not formulated on the basis of what is considered best for the development and learning of young children.

112. Currently, norms, in the form of competencies, are being defined for the certification of educators based on their experience. To see whether or not educators have the desired competencies, two methods

have been proposed, one leaning heavily on paper testing, the other on observations at the workplace. Because many of the women who have experience and need certification may not perform well on written tests but nevertheless have the knowledge and practice needed, it would seem that the observational alternative would be more appropriate.

5. Organisational Issues

Coordinating different sectors: Education, Health, Labour, Social Development and Family Welfare

113. As shown in Chapter 3, there are many actors within the official government sector. These have grown in part from the different ECEC traditions, serving different segments of the population. The various organisations act with relative autonomy. “There are no common norms that limit us” said the person responsible for ECEC in one of the sectors. And, although conversations between the SEP and others occur with some frequency, often on an informal basis, there is a significant turnover of public servants in the institutions that interrupts these relationships. We were told that at a general level there is a problem of systematising experiences and of institutional memory. “Each number of years, we begin over again.” The situation makes policy co-ordination extremely difficult. As suggested above when commenting on funding, it would seem logical to try and foster effectiveness and coordination by bringing together within one organisation, similar programmes that are now operated independently within different parts of the bureaucracy. The example given was that of CENDIs operated separately by IMSS, ISSSTE and SEP.²²

114. One of the observations made was that there is no institution charged with bringing ECEC policy planners together, not only to exchange information but also to help to systematise experience and identify areas in which working together would be useful. The OECD team was informed that additional cooperation could lead to joint efforts to define general policies or to work on more specific issues such as Workers profiles and competencies. Joint training programmes or supervision might be developed, helping in the process to use resources more efficiently.

Federal-State relationships

115. As is evident from the previous description of ECEC programmes and the discussion of finances, in spite of efforts to the contrary, there exists in Mexico a history of control exercised from the centre and of vertical relationships that runs contrary to more modern decentralising processes. The two main examples evident to us from the ECEC field involve: a) the way funding is handled, making it more difficult for States to adjust to special local needs and conditions; and b) the process of carrying out reforms and evaluations, which we were informed, were essentially driven from the centre. In such a short visit, the OECD team had little opportunity to examine the question in any depth, but its experience from other countries would suggest that reform from any quarter can be successful if due process and consultation are present. There is nothing inherently inefficient in quality reforms being driven from the centre, but it presupposes strong ECEC policy teams in the central ministries, the co-ordination of their efforts and sufficient discretionary funding to steer reform. Reform initiatives also require dedicated ECEC administrative teams at State level, capable of accompanying local stakeholders, teachers and parents in understanding the rationale for reform, and of creating their own local variations appropriate to the needs of the groups of children they serve. As our analysis of the history of ECEC within SEP suggests, these basic requirements for decentralised policy in the early childhood field may have been

²² This idea would undoubtedly meet firm resistance from the separate union organisations linked to each service.

weakened in recent years by the absence of a strong and stable early childhood policy unit within basic education.

The placing of pre-school within Basic Education

116. The last major educational reform brought pre-school, primary school and secondary school together under basic education, organising along lines that cut across the traditional organisation by levels. At the same time, a new drive toward decentralisation took place in which states took over the main responsibility for administering basic education. As a result, pre-school education seems to have functioned without a locus of energy and control. The creation of pre-school technical teams in each state has certainly been a step in the right direction toward recovering a space within the SEP to which pre-school groups can turn. At the central level, however, the ECEC sector may need greater expertise, mass and stability to take in charge the necessary changes which the new law requires.

Coordinating strategies

117. How will the different strategies to implement the law come together? As indicated, the present administration is confronted by the extraordinary challenge of trying to make access universal to pre-school education on a limited time line and with limited resources while also expanding initial education and trying to upgrade quality. To meet this challenge, a number of strategies have been identified which include:

- Increasing numbers of children in existing classrooms
- Building new classrooms and/or rehabilitating available spaces
- Bringing unregistered centres into the system
- Expanding non-formal education, particularly for children under 3
- Upgrading the curriculum and providing an improved pedagogical base
- Producing new materials
- Upgrading staff through periodic training courses
- Reforming the content of the training received before entering the classroom
- Improving educational management through auto-evaluations linked to project planning and by involving families more fully.

118. These strategies seemed to be parcelled out among different departments of the educational bureaucracy and we were not clear to what degree there was coordination among them. For instance, the strategy of improving educational management seems to be centred in the programme titled “Schools of Quality” whereas curricular reform is being worked out by a separate group²³. Training initiatives are the responsibility of another group. Accreditation falls to yet another. We were given the impression that, despite some efforts to overcome divisions, these different groups within the SEP and often within Basic Education, tend to go their individual ways with relatively little coordination among them.

²³ The two groups are both part of Basic Education and even work in the same building but seem to be going along separate paths.

The Public-Private sector relationship

119. A set of criteria exist, set by the public sector, for certifying private programmes at the pre-school level. Until recently, the rigid application of these criteria, difficulties in negotiating the bureaucratic labyrinth and problems in meeting the criteria under cost constraints made it challenging for many small programmes, particularly those serving marginal populations, to register. The policy of the government seemed to be, on one hand, to ignore the growing problem of unregistered centres and on the other to assume that all these centres were of such poor quality that they were beyond the pale and should disappear. With the pressure to expand enrolments, a somewhat more lenient policy has been formulated that permits centres to present a plan for improving themselves over a period of time in areas in which they are found wanting. An opening has also occurred with respect to certification of educators on the basis of their experience. This strikes us as a useful turn of policy.

120. In the case of IMSS and ISSSTE a policy of sub-contracting out services has been put in place. Subsidies and supervision are provided. This sort of arrangement has not been considered for pre-schooling, in part for budgetary reasons and in part because there is a concern about “privatising” education. Unfortunately, centres serving the most marginal populations cannot charge parents for their services at a level required to meet basic costs. (See previous discussion of financing).

6. Staffing: Issues related to Training and Working Conditions

Pre-service training

121. Opportunities for pre-service ECEC training in Mexico are widespread, at least at the pre-school level, but they are atomized. According to figures provided during the visit there are 200 normal schools that provide such training. These schools are evenly split between public and private institutions, and produce each year about 8,500 educators with a *licenciatura* in child development and learning. In 1984, such training and certification shifted from a secondary school to tertiary level, but without a major shift in the teacher trainers providing the normal school courses. Teachers whose training was at the secondary level have been offered the opportunity to earn their university degree in ECEC through courses offered on weekends during the school year.

122. In 1999, the content of the *licenciatura* for pre-school teachers was upgraded as part of a programme to transform and strengthen normal schools. New materials to support the curricular reform were published and distributed. Additional time was allotted within the four-year programme to acquire practical experience in classrooms, including a full year stint in a centre with a tutor. A process of bringing normal school teachers up to date and introducing them to the 1999 curriculum was begun, but changes are slow. We were told that at least a third of the professoriate has not incorporated the 1999 changes into their teaching. The challenge of renewing normal school staff continues.

123. Pre-service training for the educational component of initial education is not widespread. The multi-disciplinary nature of initial education in centres, and its emphasis on protection means that workers come from diverse backgrounds in health, nutrition, psychology and other fields as well as from education. Centres frequently have certified doctors, nutritionists and psychologists. However, “The great majority of people in charge of providing direct attention the children under 3 years of age do not have professional training and their level of education varies from incomplete primary to university education and professional studies.” (ISSSTE comment on the country report, p. 8). Some have attended a school for childcare assistants but in many cases they begin without any formal qualification.

124. Recently a specific course for training educators at this level has been set up in the State of Colima. This important initiative seems to have been welcomed as filling a gap but raises a question about the wisdom of separating training for educators in initial education and pre-school education.

In-service training

125. Since 1992, a set of diverse course offerings have been available at the pre-school level for teachers, most as part of a teacher career line to help upgrade their work. Teachers who have been accepted into the *Carrera Magistral* (roughly, teaching career) can take courses which are considered part of the career line and make them eligible for pay raises. Others take courses that may or may not have a salary implication. In addition, in recent years, a general upgrading workshop (*Taller General de Actualización*) has been introduced in which all teachers are required to participate during three days prior to beginning the school year. These workshops take on specific themes such as: oral expression, reading teaching or mathematics.

126. Again the picture is bleak for initial education. We were told that 30 to 50 courses are proposed each year for initial education workers but only 1 or 2 are approved to be offered. Part of the problem is that most of the initial education workers are “assistants” and are not eligible to participate in courses offered as part of a career line. As an alternative to specific courses for technical staff, “*diplomados*” have grown in number offered by universities or normal schools. These short and usually very basic courses do not permit official certification of workers or have a direct effect on their salaries. Other courses are offered by publishers or by advocates of a particular methodology (Montessori, High/Scope,...) but again without certification. IMSS and ISSSTE have their own systems of continuous training of workers linked to needs determined by the workers or professional staff.

Supervision on the job

127. In theory, an important element of in-service training occurs through the technical-pedagogical advice that is provided by directors, supervisors and coordinators. Our impression from conversations and from studies made available was that this important potential source of training and support for teachers does not function well, with important exceptions, for several reasons (see Box for a brief description of one of the exceptions). For instance:

- The budgets for travel to schools are non-existent or so low that supervisors have to put money out of their own pocket to do their job;
- Distances in rural areas are large and often supervisors are assigned a large number of schools making it difficult to visit more than once or twice during a school year;
- The supervisor’s job is still defined more as one of inspection than of technical and pedagogical advice. Administrative demands leave little time for the more important substantive task;
- The process of selecting supervisors has helped define that position as a reward given toward the end of a career with the result that many supervisors are worn out and unwilling to make the effort needed to get to schools to observe and advise.

In brief, it would seem that there is ample room for reorganizing and reorienting the supervision process particularly as related to the process of training and supporting teachers on the job.

Box 6. Supervision and accompaniment: the role of the “trainer” in CONAFE

One interesting exception to the generally weak systems of supervision and accompaniment seems to be that developed by CONAFE in which a special figure has been created called a “trainer” who oversees 10 pre-school centres in small rural settings. The educators or “instructors” in these rural pre-schools are young students who have completed lower secondary school and who are hired to teach in a CONAFE pre-school for one or two years, following which he or she is given a scholarship to continue formal studies. These “instructors” receive two months of pre-service training before they begin their work. It is necessary, therefore, to have a strong system of supervision and accompaniment during the year to support and improve their work. Accordingly, the trainer, who is also a relatively young person selected from the ranks of previous instructors, visits each centre at least twice each month, and meets with the group of educators at least once a month when they come together for a general training session. In essence, the “trainer” serves as a kind of roving director for the set of classrooms which are separated from each other. The system seems to give good results. Trainers are in turn supervised by a regional supervisor.

Working conditions of staff

128. *Assignment to schools:* A number of challenges appear in the process of assigning teachers to schools. In the official system, the union controls to a large extent the placement of teachers and the selection of supervisors, and there are vestiges of “inherited” teaching positions that have little to do with preparation for the job. At the same time, there are restrictions for staff with respect to their possibility of choosing among unions or among other forms of association. Moreover, it is possible for teachers trained for primary schools to be assigned to teach pre-school, a solution that the union endorses to meet the reductions in the number of primary school positions due to the fall in primary school enrolments and the simultaneous press to expand pre-schooling. Although this process may guarantee employment for some, it does not create the best working conditions for the teachers involved or ensure appropriate pedagogical approaches in the pre-school classroom. Again, within the general and indigenous systems, pre-school educators can be assigned to jobs that are not near to their home base. In some cases this has led to discontent and relatively high turnover rates, particularly if the assignment is to an isolated rural area.

129. *Number of children.* The OECD team encountered, especially in urban areas, ratios of 30 or more children per teacher making the task of teaching difficult and often one of maintaining social control. In some cases high ratio occurred simply because there were too few teachers, but in others because the teachers were considered good and parents requested them.

130. *Salaries and benefits:* Salaries for those involved in ECEC in Mexico are modest at best. Pre-school teachers, on the average, earn one and one-half minimum salaries for a little more than a half day of work. In order to increase their earnings, some teachers work a double shift. Others take a second job outside education. Salaries for those in charge of groups in initial education programmes hover around one minimum salary and benefits are often limited unless they are part of a union as is the case, for instance, with workers in the conventional centres of IMSS.

131. *Participation:* Although a general school council exists in all pre-schools where there is a director, the frequency and manner in which this mechanism functions varies greatly. Moreover, “participation” is a two-edged sword. In some cases teachers were said to oppose such initiatives as the creation of a school project because it implied too much work. In others, collegial participation has helped to bring about important changes in the centres.

132. *Certification:* In the past, the only route to certification was by completing formal educational course work. This created a major inconsistency when non-formal programmes were established, whether within the government system (the pre-schools of CONAFE or the programme of attention to migrant children or the caregivers of IMSS and ISSSTE) or within private system. The new obligatory pre-school

law calls for professional teachers in all pre-schools. This has reinforced a move to accredit teachers on the basis of experience as well as course work. A system of incorporation is being developed to certify teachers and caregivers on the basis of their experience (Agreement No. 286 of the SEP). Two proposals have been made, one emphasizing examinations and one emphasizing observations of practice.

133. *A professional career line:* As indicated, a professional career line or “teaching career” exists that has been agreed upon with the teachers’ union. Access to this career line is limited. If one looks beyond teaching toward more general career lines in the public service, it would appear that promotion in a teaching career line is not representative. Positions of director, supervisor or administrator in an educational authority are often a political matter. A recognizable teaching career line is not, at present, a competitive process related to merit.

7. Information and its uses: Issues of monitoring, evaluation and research

134. The system of continuous educational statistics in Mexico is well organised and provides essential statistics on enrolments. In addition, an information base is growing as a result of numerous research and evaluation studies carried out over the last three decades, and especially within the last two years, many with government funding. These include:

- A diagnostic study, in 600 pre-schools, carried out by the Pre-school Reform group
- An study of a sample of over 500 pre-schools carried out by the Department of Educational Evaluation
- Some pre-school studies, funded as part of a research competition, e.g. one examining the quality of pre-schools located in various subsystems, a second studying what happens in classrooms in 40 pre-schools in the Federal District
- A national evaluation of the PEC-Pre-school Programme
- An evaluation of CONAFE’s initial education programme
- A diagnostic study of CADIs and CAICs carried out by DIF.

134. The review of research and evaluation carried out as part of the national review has also identified a significant body of research and evaluation concentrated in the fields of education and psychology. This research covers many topics related to learning and to development. More recently, an inter-sectorial project has been underway for three years that has made progress toward defining indicators of competencies of young children, programme quality and equity, and contexts affecting development and learning.

135. Despite these advances, the information base appears to have a number of gaps and the uses and reporting of information could be strengthened. The following points were mentioned to the OECD review team:

- a) *Emphasis on enrolment in the presentation of statistics:* In the periodic national and international reports, figures are presented for enrolment (and numbers of teachers and schools), but little attention is paid to reporting on the quality or equity of programmes despite the fact that these are presented as the main guiding principles and goals in the National Plan. Although efforts are underway to develop systematic evaluations of quality that might serve to monitor that dimension, these efforts are in an early stage and have not found their way into the everyday working of the system. Indicators of equity could be created with existing information and reported but, with the exception of an occasional reference to gender equity, this has not been done. An ability to monitor the development and learning of children at different levels of the educational system is also at an early stage and when information is made available, it remains at the classroom level.

- b) *The reliability of enrolment figures:* Although the SEP has a systematic and generally well-conceived system of gathering information about enrolment, the process continues to need some adjusting in order to make figures more reliable. The statistics do not, for instance, pick up unregistered pre-schools which in some places (particularly in the Federal District and other major urban areas) contribute in a small but significant way to overall pre-school coverage. This would increase the enrolment figures. Moreover, enrolment figures presented do not seem to take into account the percentage of children at age five who are already enrolled in primary school. This would increase the percentage enrolment or, conversely, would reduce the calculation of the number of children at age five who have not attended pre-school and need to be attended to in the expansion.²⁴ At the same time, we were told that participation is often considerably lower than enrolments, not only because there may be a tendency to exaggerate inscriptions, but also because actual attendance on any particular day is well below enrolment. When we asked teachers how many children attended regularly, in some schools the total was 75% or less of the number of children officially enrolled. This difference seems to be borne out by recent studies.
- c) *Systematic evaluation and monitoring:* Despite the existence of the studies cited above, surveys tend to be one-shot evaluations or research projects. Systematic monitoring and evaluation procedures are not well developed. Those varied procedures and instruments that are most operational are used for the most part at the classroom level and are not aggregated to provide monitoring at the system level.
- d) *A narrow research viewpoint:* The national review noted a recent opening in research beyond education and psychology that included some medical and nutritional research as well as the application of sociological and political perspectives, but also lamented the dearth of work from historical, anthropological or economic perspectives. Also noted was a lack of evaluative work exploring the impact of ECEC programmes on children, families and communities.
- e) *Little coordination and systematisation of information across the system.* We were told that the available information is not always well coordinated (among institutions in different sectors; at local, state and national levels, among parts of the education sector). As far as we could discern, an attempt has not been made to bring together the various studies cited above and to draw conclusions from similarities and differences in the results.
- f) *Research as an academic exercise:* Research continues to be seen by some as an academic and theoretical exercise that can only be carried out by pedigreed researchers rather than as a systematic exercise of observing and reflecting upon experience that is well within the reach of practitioners. For this reason, significant information is lost to policy makers.
- g) *Availability and use of research and evaluation information:* There seems to be an opening in the present government toward supporting research and evaluation as an important element guiding decisions. Moreover, a policy of giving back results to the practitioners who have participated in the studies is emerging, in a way that is understandable and relevant to their work at the levels of centres and state subsystems. At the same time, we were told by researchers that there is a tendency to keep the information in house and to limit sharing results. The various studies listed above are not yet, for instance, published or easily available in the public domain. Although it is possible to seek out research results in various documentation centres, as was done for the National Review, and, as the authors of that review note, locating pertinent studies was not easy.

²⁴

These children, who have virtually all completed at least a year of pre-schooling, need either to be added to the coverage figures when the comparison is made to the total population age 5 or they need to be subtracted out of the population figures when the comparison is made. They need to be taken out also when calculations are made of the number of new places needed for five year olds.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS

136. In this chapter the OECD team offers some conclusions linked to the observations that have been made in previous chapters. In line with our terms of reference, we shall focus on various issues and aspects directly related to early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy and provision. It should be noted, however, that unless ECEC is looked at in a broader context – including national economic and social policy and its impacts on women and families - the possibility for achieving major improvements in ECEC is severely limited.

137. From our many interviews during the visit, it became clear that now is a time of effervescence and hope in Mexico with respect to ECEC. An important space has been created for generating new policies and programmes. The request to the OECD to help with a review of policies is indicative of the new opening and the will to move forward. Supportive conditions that frame our observations include the following:

- *A strong pedagogical tradition:* Mexico can build on an interesting pedagogical base derived from of the Active School tradition, present since the end of the 1800. It incorporates such principles as: the child is the centre of the educational process; each child is a unique person with specific rhythms and modes of learning and development; active learning is based on the needs and interests of the child; important modes of learning for the young child are play and active relations with other children as well as with adults. Consistent with this conception, the adult or educator has a responsibility to create rich educational environments within which her role should be one of facilitating learning by generating new questions and challenges, and of actively accompanying the child's learning process. The present curricular reform seeks to recover and extend this tradition;
- *A corps of trained and dedicated early childhood educators* who are interested in providing more and better educational opportunities for young children. Many committed educators across the country are improving their own capacities in order to generate beneficial changes in their teaching and family outreach practices. In addition, the general level of training is rising, and there is the long-term goal of providing professional university training to the level of the Licenciatura for all early childhood educators;
- *A sound legal base:* This base includes the recent Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling which has generated the legal conditions for improving both the quantity (coverage) and quality of ECEC;
- *A wide variety of ECEC institutions and programmes:* Both state organisations and those of civil society provide early education based on diverse norms and criteria, and utilize varied modalities directed toward diverse populations. This, as we shall observe, can lead to incoherence and poor quality, but within these programming strands, there exist examples of innovative and/or well-functioning programmes, many of which incorporate the concept of an integral education

involving not only an educational component but also nutritional, health, socio-emotional and other protective features;

- *A professional information base:* A system of continuous statistics has been established and a number of diagnoses and studies are currently underway that add to the store of existing knowledge based on previous research base and internal evaluations.

138. The following observations are set within this background of existing strengths. In many ways, Mexico is not starting from a position of weakness but has already accumulated a vast experience in providing early childhood programmes both at a national level and to widely varying populations. Our suggested actions – 20 in number - are presented therefore not as prescriptions but are intended to generate reflection and discussion among Mexican policy makers within the present atmosphere of exploration and change. The cogency of these proposals relies on the analyses provided in earlier parts of this report. Their presentation follows the order adopted in Chapter 4, namely:

- Purpose and concept of early childhood education and care (ECEC)
- Access and enrolment
- Funding and financing
- Educational processes and curricular reform
- Organisation and management
- Training and Working Conditions
- Monitoring, evaluation and research

Purpose and concept of early childhood education and care (ECEC)

1. Seek clarity about ECEC goals, competencies, and curricula

139. *Observation:* The educational project of initial education and the pre-school in Mexico is not always clear. This makes it difficult - despite the long and interesting pedagogical tradition cited above - to establish goals, to renew the curriculum, to adjust training and pedagogical practices and to define evaluation procedures. As presented in the *Background Report* (SEP, 2003), there is a division in thinking between those who base their work on specific competencies developed in context and those who aim at general goals arising from broad developmental categories, such as, physical, linguistic, social, emotional, cognitive or intellectual development. Moreover, a clear profile of what children should be like at the moment of their transition into primary school has not been agreed upon nor operationalized. Continued reflection is needed on these questions, and in particular, on the level of specificity (and prescription) of educational goals that should be proposed by the ministries.

- *Action suggested:* The OECD team encourages current efforts in Mexico to establish clear goals for children in both initial education and the pre-school. We recommend agreement on a common set of objectives for both institutions, e.g. to nurture healthy and involved children who can participate actively, democratically and productively in a diverse but interconnected, knowledge-based world. For all children, it will be important to establish a set of common goals for learning, and define clearly the basic competencies thought to be necessary, for instance; to foster and maintain health; to relate well and empathetically to others; to learn how to learn; to participate socially in a democratic manner; to live in a plural society and celebrate differences; to understand and protect the environment; and to develop human potential through the mastery of diverse languages (linguistic, idiomatic, aesthetic, scientific, mathematic, physical, etc.). This

work of definition should be based on broad consultation in which ministries, early childhood experts, teachers and parents are involved together. In the process, young children should also be included, and goals and pedagogical practice brought into line with their learning patterns and desires. The broad goals and related competencies that emerge could set a basis for a general curriculum, while allowing for curricular variants, based on the needs and interests of particular children and cultures.

2. *Overcome the initial education/pre-school dichotomy*

140. *Observation:* The division observed in Mexico between pre-school and initial education according to age is neither clear nor functional. For historical reasons, the educational component in initial education is subordinated to protective considerations. The present educational reform related to obligatory pre-schooling seems to reinforce the division and could increase the neglect of educational opportunities for children in their earliest years for whom education is not obligatory. The division runs contrary to emerging practice in OECD countries, e.g. in the Nordic countries, New Zealand and the United Kingdom where all programmes for the education and care of young children have been merged under a single ministry, with (in general) a common curriculum, teacher profile and learning goals.

- *Action suggested:* Construct a short-, medium- and long-term vision of ECEC for children from birth to six years of age within a framework that avoids the present division into pre-schooling and initial education by ages, particularly in the organisation of training programmes and in the curriculum.

Access and enrolment

3. *Meet the challenge of obligatory schooling while maintaining or improving quality*

141. *Observation:* The new law mandating obligatory pre-schooling from age 3 has helped to put pre-schooling on the agenda, has increased demand and has simulated new thinking as the system faces the major conceptual, logistical and financial challenges that the law creates. At the same time, the reform, with its tight timetable, could have negative effects on quality and equity unless preventive measures are taken.

- *Action suggested:* If all children, 3 to 6, are to have access to quality pre-schooling, a concerted effort will be needed that involves adequate funding and a variety of measures that will be detailed in other recommendations. Additional incentives will be necessary to motivate municipalities and states to invest more in ECEC. It would be unfortunate, in our opinion, if the pressures of time led to introducing new modalities of low or questionable quality. Recognising, working with and helping to upgrade, existing social sector and private efforts, currently functioning outside the official system, will be required. As these challenges are being faced, no child should be denied access to primary school because he or she has not been in a pre-school.

4. *Moderate inequities in access*

142. *Observation:* Despite increases in access to ECEC programmes in recent years and important plans to increase that access, a significant percentage of children continue to be left out and/or discriminated against. This is especially the case for those who live in rural areas, indigenous communities and urban marginal zones as well as children affected by HIV/AIDS and those with special physical and social needs. Moreover, there seems to be a tendency to incorporate those who are left out in programmes of lesser quality.

- *Action suggested:* Guarantee access to education of comparable quality for all children from 0 to 6 whose families need or require provision, without social, economic, cultural, or personal discrimination. To know if this is being accomplished it will be necessary to establish a system to monitor quality and equity as well as coverage.

5. *Provide better for children under 3 years of age, especially children of working women*

143. *Observation:* The low level of direct and integrated attention to very young children in childcare and education centres, the limited support provided to parents through education programmes or through work leaves and other work-related benefits for mothers, and the lack of educational subsidies to families during this period suggests that attention to children from birth to 3 years of age has not been a priority theme on the educational agenda, or for that matter on the labour and employment agenda. At the initial education level, caregivers and educators are often poorly trained, few common norms exist, institutions coordinate efforts only sporadically and informally, and little systematic evidence for the relative outcomes of different initial education strategies and programmes has been generated. We feel impelled, therefore, to call attention to this area in spite of advocating for a continuous and seamless treatment for children from birth to entry into primary school.

- *Action suggested:* Appoint a Working Group involving ECEC insiders and some outsiders to review provision of services for children from birth to age 3 as part of a plan to restructure this educational level. This Group would bring together existing information, commission new studies where that is needed, and, most importantly, present a Plan for developing common norms, building coordination, streamlining and obtaining additional resources needed for this level.

Funding and Financing

6. *Clarify and increase levels of funding*

144. *Observation:* Precise information about funding levels and costs in the ECEC system seems difficult to access. It appears, however, that the level of financing for ECEC programmes, and especially for those directed to children under 3, is very modest. Increased funding will be necessary to respond to the pressures generated by the law of obligatory pre-schooling, to expand initial education and to advance the administration's commitment to improving quality and equity. Considering the general budget pressures it seems necessary to seek new and innovative ways to capture funds that can be used in beneficial ECEC programmes.

- *Action suggested:* Carry out a study of the financing of initial and pre-school education, and explore the feasibility of increased funding for ECEC through such strategies as:
 - Earmarking a portion of funds distributed to states and municipalities for ECEC;
 - Providing tax forgiveness to private enterprise for donations and/or subsidies to their workers to cover costs of ECEC programmes and/ or to social organisations;
 - Earmarking funds from specific taxes for ECEC programmes;
 - Expanding taxing powers to state and local authorities;
 - Establish matching provisions that give states and municipalities an incentive to contribute to ECEC, e.g., the *fidicomiso* arrangement used in the Schools of Quality programme;

- Using sliding scale fee arrangements, with exemptions for those who cannot pay, for the portion of ECEC attention in preschool programmes that provide services beyond the basic period of four hours each day.

7. *Assisting low income families*

145. *Observation:* Families living below the poverty line and families without access to social security or other benefits because they are unemployed or in the informal sector are not in a position to make the payments required for their children to participate in quality ECEC programmes. In fact, unless subsidies are provided they may not be able to meet their legal obligation to enrol children in pre-school. Mothers too are often prevented from seeking work because free childcare is not available.

- *Action suggested:* Prioritize support for children 0 to 6 whose families need it, without social, cultural or personal discrimination. Explore the possibility of including payments, e.g. scholarships or vouchers, to poor families in urban areas as part of Oportunidades, the inter-sectoral poverty alleviation programme. Open such programmes as Quality Schools to centres run by social or private groups that serve low income populations.

Educational Process and Curricular Reform

8. *Move curricular renovation into action*

146. *Observation:* Official curricula are directed toward active learning and are based on an integral concept of development. The written differences among official curricula (general pre-school, indigenous pre-school or community programmes; variants of initial education) and in the methods recommended for fostering learning and development are not great, despite the variety of modalities through which ECEC is provided across Mexico. However, there are large differences in the capacity to implement the curriculum. Although adjustments may be needed to curricular content and method in line with a re-definition of goals, the main problem confronting early education seems to be - and will probably continue to be - one of implementation, and a shift from “instructive” to “constructive” methods. This seems to be linked in part to the practical conditions that teachers face in classrooms and with parental misunderstanding of early cognitive development, but is also due to an inadequate system of accompaniment. In addition, the educational component is weak in provision for children under three years of age.

- *Action suggested:* The educational curriculum component within initial education programmes should be re-thought and reinforced. In pre-school education, a decisive move should be made to reduce child/staff ratios, and to abandon instruction and drilling methods in favour of active project work. Any process of adjusting the curriculum should be accompanied by:
 - An intense effort to inform, motivate and orient staff concerning the rationale for change;
 - An equally intense effort to provide staff with the proper accompaniment. This will mean revamping the system of consultation and supervision, provided by directors and supervisors. In this effort, not only periodic technical-pedagogical assistance will be needed, but also moral support to staff and the adoption of team-teaching and whole-school approaches. The process should be linked to a system of auto-evaluations at the level of centres that will help teachers as a group to change their practices.

9. Reduce the number of service types and establish common norms

147. *Observation:* The large diversity of ECEC programme modes in Mexico seems more closely related to the differing traditions from which programmes arise and to variations in institutional forms and operational priorities than to differences among children in their needs and interests or even to cultural differences. Diversity in provision and programme implementation is often linked to uneven quality, related in turn to the level of funding and access to resources or, in certain programme modes, to a lack of personal with adequate training and experience. Common norms are lacking, or are undermined by operational considerations linked to funding constraints rather than by what is best for the learning and development of children, e.g. norms for the number of children per educator or caregiver. In addition, some norms may be so rigid that they do not allow for local variation.

- *Action suggested:* A concerted effort among the main providers to reduce the number of programme modalities, while generating together a basic set of general norms for ECEC programmes to guide all institutions and organisations that provide attention to children from birth to age 6. Simplicity and flexibility of norms should be aimed at to allow each centre and region to take into account the needs of local families and children, but with a determination to apply norms rigorously when the best interests of young children and pedagogical quality are at stake. The progressive application of norms across all institutions requires a flexible but time-bound process giving credit to advances made toward the norms rather than as a set of absolute standards that dictate the immediate closure of programmes.

10. Safeguard the specificity of ECEC pedagogy

148. *Observation:* The present climate in which the pre-school curriculum is being redefined tends towards re-definition in terms approaching those of formal primary schooling.

- *Action suggested:* In the process of adjusting curricula (as well as establishing consistent and coordinated goals, competencies and norms) care should be taken not to convert ECEC into a junior primary school. Instead, ECEC should be defined in accordance with the needs and interests of children under 6 years of age. While linkages with the primary school should be strongly encouraged as children move into their final year, the early learning curriculum should remain an open learning framework that provides the young child with ample opportunity for personal activity, exploration and play.

Organisation and management

11. Improve decentralisation processes while strengthening ECEC expertise at central level

149. *Observation:* While recognising the invaluable role that the central ministries can play in guiding a system and proposing necessary reforms, stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with processes of decentralisation that did not allow flexible funding, and made it difficult for state policy makers to adjust to local needs and conditions. Moreover, while the creation of pre-school technical teams in each state has certainly contributed toward recovering a space within the SEP to which local pre-school groups can turn, the indistinguishable inclusion of ECEC within Basic Education has weakened expertise and dispersed specific policy responsibility for the sector.

- *Action suggested:* Within a general set of norms, strengthen the decentralisation process and provide flexibility to states and municipalities to make adjustments to goals, benchmarks, curricula and evaluations so as to make them more appropriate to local contexts. At the same time, strengthen and gather together ECEC capacity at central level. This requires greater

expertise, mass and stability than at present to take in charge the far-reaching changes that successful implementation of the new law requires.

12. *Build greater coordination*

150. *Observation:* The lack of coordination among sectors (education, health, labour, social development and family welfare), between public and private institutions and across programmes leads to duplication, confusion and inefficiencies. The end result is dissipation of scarce funding, with groups of parents and children receiving unequal treatment. Although diversity must be promoted and respected, the basis for diversification needs to be made clear and determined efforts made to simplify and integrate services.

- *Action suggested:* The OECD team urges consideration of the experience of other countries with respect to improving efficiency and co-ordination of services. To tackle the issue, some OECD countries have integrated all education and care policy under one ministry or under a designated funding and policy agency. In other countries, not yet ready to merge policy and management across ministries, co-ordinating mechanisms such as national councils or other bodies have been established and charged with the harmonization of policy and planning, often through the formulation of national plans for early childhood development and education, with clearly spelt out targets, time-lines, responsibilities and accountability measures for co-operating departments. In parallel, – and particularly in the early childhood field, which by its nature is local - a successful measure has been to decentralise the planning and management of ECEC services toward integrated agencies or committees at state and municipal levels, with the central State retaining only those functions necessary to develop, steer and regulate the system, e.g. legislation, regulation and standard setting; discretionary funding to steer reform; monitoring and data collection, supervision of training and curriculum...

Training and Working Conditions

13. *Strengthen training*

151. *Observation:* The system of training ECEC workers has recently passed through a process of reform. However, the reform as well as more recent actions seems to reinforce the tendency to divide training in initial education from training for pre-school. The majority of caregivers/educators attending to children under 3 do not have adequate training. In addition, the process of continuous training is weak and biased toward participation in short courses with little follow-up or on-site training.

- *Actions suggested:*
 - Integrate training programmes for pre-school and initial education, at least during the first segments of the training but preferably throughout, so that all ECEC personal would be able to work at both levels and work with adults as well as children.
 - Carry out a critical analysis of the processes of pre-service and in-service training as a base for strengthening training and in order to determine how well training responds to the rights both of teachers and diverse groups of children.
 - Develop better information about the preparation of initial education workers as a base for strengthening pre-service and in-service training.

14. Integrate educators without formal qualifications

152. *Observation:* The new law on obligatory pre-schooling insists on education by professionals. However, a large number of early educators actually in practice do not have a degree or formal certification, but possess valuable experience in social, private and community programmes. These workers are a valuable resource and should be supported rather than discharged.

- *Action suggested:* Develop policies that would allow uncertified workers to continue their work until a clear process of acquiring formal training and/or of seeking certification of experience can be established. Identify and begin co-operation with academic institutions that can provide reliable certification of experience, preferably by means of observing actions rather than by means of written examinations.

15. Rethink supervision and accompaniment

153. *Observation:* The shift from inspection to supervision to accompaniment is underway but is at a very early stage. In general, and despite the creation of technical teams at state levels, providing professional and technical training on the job as well as personal support to educators seems to be a weak link in the system.

- *Action suggested:* Overhaul the supervisory system to favour the selection of supervisors on the basis of their real capacity and suitability for this task. The system also needs proper financing so that supervisors are properly trained and remunerated and are not obliged to pay transportation and per diems from their own pockets. A reduction in the numbers of centres assigned to each supervisor may also be necessary, to allow at least monthly visits to each centre. The content of supervision should focus on technical-pedagogical goals rather than on administrative matters. A policy of monthly meetings of educators with their supervisor needs to be instituted where that is not now the practice. The educational authorities may also wish to consider the creation of a new intermediate figure to support activities in rural areas similar to the “trainer” in the CONAFE pre-school system. Lastly, but important for the overall monitoring of the system, use technology to support supervisory activities.

16. Establish a professional career line

154. *Observation:* There is a lack of a professional career line within early education and care, with a rigorous process of selection on the basis of merit and a process of continuous formation beyond the level of the *licentiaturo*. The OECD team was informed that the actual basis for most promotion (up-grading through short courses and selection based on years of service) is not always consistent with promotion based on merit.

- *Actions suggested:* The OECD team would propose for consideration the development of a professional career line based on merit specifically for those who work in ECEC. Salary and benefits policies should be based on the responsibilities required in particular jobs, and promotion should be based on objective criteria of merit within both pre-school and initial education levels.

17. Promote early childhood professional associations and broaden choices of labour union affiliation

155. *Observation:* The staff of ECEC programmes are restricted with respect to their possibility of choosing among unions and other forms of association. This seems inconsistent with the general tenets of a democratic society.

- *Action suggested:* Seek a policy consensus that would permit ECEC workers to create diverse options to organize themselves to protect their labour rights, and to form associations for professional reflection and exchange of ideas.

Information: Monitoring, Evaluation and Research

18. Strengthen information and monitoring systems

156. *Observation:* The challenges of generating reliable data and of developing adequate evaluation and assessment tools are relatively new in early childhood circles. They underline the shift in public and governmental concern from provision and regulation toward a focus on outcomes, and the need to establish equity and quality standards. In Mexico, the pursuit of equity and quality standards in ECEC provision is affirmed as a central focus by the major early childhood and education agencies. Progress will depend greatly, however, on the relevance of indicators generated in each domain, and on the provision of adequate human and technical resources to undertake their measurement. Although various sources exist that provide valuable information about young children and ECEC programmes in Mexico, these are not always well co-ordinated (among institutions in different sectors; at local, state and national levels, across parts of the education sector). There is a first need to make basic statistics more reliable. Moreover, the ability to monitor the development and learning of children at different levels of the education system is still at a very early stage. System monitoring and evaluation procedures are not well developed. In particular, information about quality and equity is not easily available or remains unsystematized. Much of the data and evaluation information collected informally at classroom and centre level remains unexploited for the system as a whole.

- *Action suggested:* The OECD team recommends that agencies should co-operate in taking the necessary steps to provide at the level of each State, human and financial resources to undertake the collection of reliable statistics, and to generate the data and evaluation tools necessary to monitor early childhood provision and outputs in each region. Ongoing indicator work should be pursued, focussing especially on equity and quality. Indicators of educational quality should include the quality of inputs, e.g. the model of centre governance proposed, the qualifications of personnel, child/staff ratios and the quality of learning environments. In early childhood in particular, quality should extend beyond measuring competencies and the knowledge of children in key learning areas so to include broader learning outcomes, such as children's self-concept, their social skills, their engagement with learning and their overall well-being. General agreement should be sought on the methods and instruments for measuring the competencies that it is thought pre-school children should acquire.

19. Continue research initiatives linked to policy and programme priorities, and support practitioner research.

157. *Observation:* An unusual number of ECEC evaluations have been carried out recently or are in progress. However, a concerted effort has not been made to bring them together and to draw conclusions from similarities and differences in the results. The research competition that has been funded by the Basic Education division of the SEP and which includes ECEC research themes is innovative and useful. Nevertheless, research continues to be seen by some as an academic and theoretical exercise that can only be carried out by pedigreed researchers rather than as a systematic exercise of observing and reflecting upon experience that is well within the reach of practitioners.

- *Action suggested:* Bring together the results of recent evaluations in order to better inform policy deliberations. Continue support to research that is linked to policy and programme priorities and useful for teachers and families as well as decision makers. Organise spaces for researchers and

practitioners to discuss research and evaluation results. Provide financial and technical support to educators who wish to carry out research on their own classrooms and centres, and provide practitioner research as a module in all pre-service teacher training.

20. Increase the availability and use of information

158. *Observation:* A new willingness is evident at national level to utilise research and evaluation results in developing policies and programmes. Nevertheless, the dissemination throughout the system of information generated from within is limited, especially with respect to the evaluation of programmes. The process needs to be strengthened of giving back results to the practitioners who have participated in the studies, in a way that is understandable and relevant to their work at the levels of centres and state subsystems.

- *Action suggested:* In line with a policy of transparency and public access to information, develop an information base providing easy access to key research and the public. At national and state levels, establish a system of systematic and periodic monitoring and evaluation with clear indicators presented to the public in reports from the SEP and the President. Make publishing and giving back results to local authorities and practitioners a part of research and evaluation designs. Organise a system of periodically sharing results with parents of the evaluation of children's competencies, the quality of programmes, successes and lags in implementation and programme finances.

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APPENDIX 1 – THE OECD REVIEW TEAM

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APPENDIX 2 – TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE MEXICO BACKGROUND REPORT

- I. Servicios para la población de 0 a 6 años e implicaciones de la obligatoriedad de la educación preescolar. Clemente Ruiz Durán y Laura C. López Gutiérrez.
- II. Contenidos e instrumentación de los programas destinados a la población de 0 a 3 años. María Esther Rojano.
- III. Características formación inicial y actualización del personal que atiende los programas de educación inicial. Adriana Meza.
- IV. Contenidos e instrumentación de los programas destinados a la población de 3 a 6 años. Benilde García, Ma. Eugenia Díaz, Cecilia Mendiola, Olivia González y Liliana Espinosa.
- V. El personal responsable de los programas de educación preescolar. María de los Ángeles Huerta.
- VI. Investigación y evaluación. Norma A. Castillo Guzmán y Patricia Barrón Coria.

APPENDIX 3 – PROGRAMME OF VISITS

1° de diciembre de 2003

HORARIO	ACTIVIDAD
09:00 – 10:00	Entrevista con M. en C. Lorenzo Gómez-Morin Fuentes, Subsecretario de Educación Básica y Normal
10:00 – 12:00	Análisis y discusión del Reporte Nacional Con la asistencia de Lic. Dulce María Nieto de Pascual Pola, Coordinadora Nacional; Lic. Jesús Álvarez Gutiérrez, Director General de Investigación Educativa de la SEByN; Dra. Benilde García Cabrero y Lic. Norma Castillo Guzmán, Consultoras.
12:30 – 14:00	Revisión de la agenda de “La Misión” (precisión de visitas de campo – organización de equipos de trabajo - situación de las entrevistas con instituciones, autoridades, investigadores).
15:30 – 16:00	Traslado a SEByN
16:00 – 18:00	Entrevista con Directores Generales de la SEByN: Dirección General de Normatividad Dirección General de Materiales y Métodos Educativos Dirección General de Investigación Educativa Dirección General de Educación Indígena Coordinación General de Actualización y Capacitación para Maestros en Servicio
18:00 – 18:30	Revisión de las actividades del día por “La Misión”

2 de diciembre de 2003²⁵

HORARIO	ACTIVIDAD
Por la mañana muy temprano	Viajes a las entidades para realizar las visitas de campo
08:30 – 09:30	Entrevista con el Secretario de Educación de la entidad y con los responsables de educación inicial y preescolar
09:30 – 14:30	Visita a programas ²⁶
14:30 – 15:30	Comida
15:30 – 18:00	Entrevistas
18:00 – 19:30	Entrevistas

²⁵ La agenda precisa de las visitas a las entidades está siendo definida con las autoridades educativas locales.

²⁶ Se considera la organización de la visita entre los siguientes programas a seleccionar: preescolar general urbano, preescolar general rural, preescolar privado, preescolar indígena, preescolar comunitario, preescolar migrante (u otra modalidad local), comunidad donde opera PRODEI, CAIC, Guardería, CAPEP, CENDI, estancia infantil privada, escuela normal de educadoras.

3 y 4 de diciembre de 2003

HORARIO	ACTIVIDAD
Durante la mañana y durante la tarde	Visitas de campo a programas educativos

5 de diciembre de 2003

HORARIO	ENTREVISTAS
Durante la mañana	Visitas de campo a programas educativos
13:00 – 14:00	Entrevista de cierre con el Secretario de Educación y/o autoridad correspondiente
14:30 – 15:30	Comida
15:30 – 18:00	Sesión de evaluación de las visitas de campo – mucho tiempo? Le aconsejo terminar a las 17.00 para regresar.
18:00 en adelante	Regreso a la ciudad de México

8 de diciembre de 2003

HORARIO	ACTIVIDAD
08:30 – 09:00	Traslado a centro del Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF)
09:00 – 10:00	Estancia en centro DIF
10:00 – 10:30	Traslado a SEByN
10:30 – 12:00	Mesa redonda con investigadores
12:30 – 14:00	Mesa redonda con instituciones oficiales: Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS), Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF), Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (ISSSTE), Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL).
15:30 – 16:00	Traslado a SSEDF
16:00 – 17:30	Entrevista con Dra. Sylvia Ortega Salazar Subsecretaria de Servicios Educativos para el Distrito Federal, SEP
17:30 – 18:00	Traslado a SEByN
18:00 – 18:30	Revisión de las actividades del día por “La Misión”

9 de diciembre de 2003

HORARIO	ACTIVIDAD
08:30 – 09:00	Traslado a guardería del Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS)
09:00 – 10:00	Estancia en guardería IMSS
10:00 – 10:30	Traslado a CONAFE
10:30 – 12:00	Entrevista con Directores Generales del Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo
12:00 – 12:30	Traslado a DGPPyP
12:30 – 14:00	Entrevista con Lic. Ramón Cárdeno, Director General de Planeación, Programación y Presupuesto, Subsecretaría de Planeación y Coordinación, SEP
15:30 – 16:00	Traslado a SEByN
16:00 – 18:00	Entrevista con organizaciones sociales
18:00 – 18:30	Revisión de las actividades del día por “La Misión”
18:30 – 19:00	Traslado al hotel

10 de diciembre de 2003

HORARIO	ACTIVIDAD
08:30 – 09:00	Traslado a jardín de niños
09:00 – 10:00	Estancia en jardín de niños SSEDF
10:00 – 10:30	Traslado a SNTE
10:30 – 12:00	Entrevista con Representante del Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación
12:00 – 12:30	Traslado a SEByN
12:30 – 14:00	Entrevista con Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos, Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, Consejo de Normalización y Certificación de Competencia Laboral.
15:30 – 16:00	Traslado a CGEIB
16:00 – 17:30	Entrevista con Dra. Sylvia Schmelkes del Valle, Delegado nacional OCDE y Coordinadora General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe, SEP
17:30 – 17:30	Traslado a SEByN
18:00 – 18:30	Revisión de las actividades del día por “La Misión” y preparación del cierre
18:30 – 19:00	Traslado al hotel

11 de diciembre de 2003

HORARIO	ACTIVIDAD
09:00 – 10:30	Evaluación de “La Misión” con la asistencia de Lic. Dulce María Nieto de Pascual Pola, Coordinadora Nacional; Lic. Jesús Álvarez Gutiérrez, Director General de Investigación Educativa de la SEByN; Dra. Benilde García Cabrero y Lic. Norma Castillo Guzmán, Consultoras.
10:30 – 12:00	Trabajo del equipo OCDE
12:30 – 14:00	Sesión de cierre de “La Misión” con la presencia del M. en C. Lorenzo Gómez-Morin Fuentes, Subsecretario de Educación Básica y Normal