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**TRENDS IN TRANSITION POLICIES IN INDIGENOUS, RURAL  
AND BORDER COMMUNITIES IN COLOMBIA, CHILE,  
PERU AND VENEZUELA:**

**CASE STUDIES**

**(BOOK II EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)**

**Organization of American States (OAS)**

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**Bernard van Leer Foundation**

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This publication was prepared by the Office of Education and Culture of the Organization of American States (OAS/SEDI/DHDEC/OEC), directed by Ms. Lenore Yaffee García. It is a product of the "Trends in Transition Policies in Indigenous, Rural and Border Communities" project, sponsored by the OAS Inter-American Commission on Education (CIE) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation of the Netherlands, represented by Mr. Leonardo Yanez, the Foundation's Program Officer, who acted as an OAS counterpart in working on the project. The editing of the publication was carried out by Doctors Sara Victoria Alvarado, Héctor Fabio Ospina and Patricia Reyes, from the Center for Advanced Studies in Children and Youth (CINDE), Manizales. The studies were developed by researchers in each country: Chile: Ms. Emma Maldonado and Ms. Nury Gárate from the National Board of Early Childhood Education (JUNJI); Colombia: Dr. Sara Victoria Alvarado and Ms. Martha Solíz, CINDE; Peru: Master Regina Moromizato Iga from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, and "Children of the Amazon" Project Coordinator; Venezuela: Ms. Ileana Mendoza; and Ms. Elizabeth Segovia from FEPAP. The Executive Summary and translation into English was carried out by Ms. Arelys Moreno de Yáñez, Consultant in Early Childhood Education and Development at the OAS. The style revision of the overall text was carried out by Office of Education and Culture Consultant, Ms. Camila M. Villanueva. The general coordination of the book's preparation, editing and publishing was carried out by OAS Senior Education Specialist, Dr. Gaby Fujimoto.

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## Introduction

The Office of Education and Culture (OEC) of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF) are supporting the "*Trends in Transition Policies in Indigenous, Rural and Border Communities*" research project since 2007. It is associated with the "*Policies and Strategies for a Successful Transition to Socialization and School*" project, which has a hemisphere-wide coverage.

The project on policy trends was designed to further transition issues and develop specific social communication, advocacy and dissemination actions, and to offer other countries the study's methodology and specific publications on the findings identified in the reality of indigenous peoples in the rural and border communities of Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Chile. These five countries were the initial group, and the study has gradually been linking others: Bolivia, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. More countries are expected to join.

The "*Trends in transition policies in indigenous, rural and border communities*" research was planned in three parts: the first to report on **statistics** in the different countries on specific childcare topics focused on rural, indigenous and border communities—topics previously agreed upon by the country teams. A second part reviews the countries' existing **policies** on the issue of transition in rural, indigenous and border communities. The third part aims to advance a **case study** in each country to gain insight into the phenomenon of transitions in a group considered vulnerable.

Book I was published with the reports of the original five countries on the first two topics—statistics and policies—and is available electronically on the OAS website; a brief summary of which is provided in this book.

This second publication presents the results of the case studies conducted in Chile, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. As an introduction and context, a chapter is included (Chapter I, Part A) presenting a summary of progress made in the previous stages, both in conceptual terms and as findings on the issues in question.

The report of the outcome of the case studies starts with an explanation of the general methodological aspects agreed upon by the international team (Chapter I, Part B). Later, reports of each one of the countries are presented. In Chile's case, an analysis of the Mahuidache Community—80% indigenous Mapuche—is made; in Colombia it is the Embera Chamí rural indigenous community; in Peru, the Native Community Teoría, Asháninka ethnicity; and in Venezuela, the Añú ethnic group, residing in the Sinamaica Lagoon (Chapters II to V).

Due to the importance of the communication strategy, one chapter describes some of its progress (Chapter VI). Lastly, the conclusions and lessons learned are presented, and a proposal to develop a communication strategy to improve the quality of early childhood education is shared (Chapter VII).

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Chapter I.**

#### **Summary of Book I, Conceptual Advances, and Case Study Findings. Methodological Aspects**

It is organized into Part A and Part B. Part A presents a summary of some elements of the comprehensive study, progress made, countries involved, some of the most important conceptual elements that have provided a framework to guide both, information searches and the analysis of results. It also presents some general conclusions. Part B presents the methodological aspects of the case studies.

Special attention is paid to various aspects related to transitions: definition, analysis of successful and unsuccessful transitions, incidental factors. Then, the findings from the statistical analysis about early childhood and policies on transitions are discussed, including a list of general recommendations to reverse the current situation.

As for the case studies, an interpretative methodology was used, placing children in transition processes (home-school-children's center) as the unit of analysis. Within this qualitative working methodology, direct observation was used, in-depth interviews and projective techniques as exploration instruments.

Each country has a study with the same elements of analysis: background and context of each location, the description of the lives of children between the ages of zero and eight, the transition process from the perspective of children, families and communities, the conclusions and lessons learned to formulate educational policies.

### **Chapter II.**

#### **Colombia Case Study**

Embera Chamí rural-indigenous community, located in the municipality of Riosucio, Caldas department, Colombia. The central axis focuses on the educational transitions that children make between home and preschool and between this and primary education. The study explored supportive actions to promote appropriate transition process—from the home to preschool, and from preschool to first grade of basic education—and critical points present in the transition process between family and school.

The study aimed at making an analysis from the perspective of the comprehensive human development of children. Transitions were examined from three main categories: actors, settings and practices, from which to explore the interests and issues facing indigenous children in their educational transitions from their own representation, that of their families, teachers, educational managers and other institutional actors.

Stakeholders reflected on the daily practices that promote this transition process. Likewise, coordinated work was reviewed from the analysis of the existing relationships between school, family and community, and the relationships between initial education, preschool and elementary school.

After presenting a series of conclusions related to the actors, settings and practices, some lessons learned for educational policy are shared.

#### ***Lessons learned from and for educational policy***

- Families are key players in facilitating the transition process, but require a process of awareness about the importance of transitions for the holistic development of children.
- It is necessary to support the development of proposals of the proper education in which communities are working.
- It is necessary to promote national policies and coordination mechanisms between the ICBF centers and schools, and among pre-school and first grade of basic education.
- Generate proposals for specialized early childhood education teachers training to support the transition process of children, with emphasis on rural, indigenous and border communities.
- Boys and girls are not seen as actors able to contribute and participate in their own transition process, which limits their overall development and the configuration of social purposeful subjectivities.
- The family, community, school and institutional actors, involved in educational transitions, do not have the coordination levels required to adequately support the processes experienced by children belonging to the Lomaprieta Cañamomo indigenous reservation.
- It is important to learn from the processes of coordination that are managed on a daily basis by mothers, caretakers and teachers, and from there to establish clear guidelines to support these transitions with better conditions for the coordination and continuity in the settings and actions of transitions.
- Vertical transitions are seen as specific events rather than structural periods in which support should be given to children to achieve educational transitions.
- To strengthen the bonds between family, ECD Center and school is a vital explicit strategy to strengthen the processes of educational transition.
- The training of caretakers and teachers should be strengthened to the highest levels since it might determine that children make appropriate processes of transition and school adaptation, thus reducing the dropout and repetition.

### **Chapter III. Chile Case Study**

Briefly describes the context of the Mahuidache Mapuche community, language skills, existing organizations and major sources of income. Rites and beliefs, family characteristics and child-rearing patterns are provided, as well as a description of the kindergarten and participating school.

From the actors' perspective on the transition process, different meanings of kindergarten: education, training, freeing time for mothers, recruiting and training principals and teachers, and children's sense of play are explored. Later, the meaning of school as well as the expectations and facilitating and hindering transitional aspects of child centers and schools are examined.

#### ***Conclusions***

- The transition process should not be left to chance.
- It was observed that the Mapuche culture is not in favor of separating children from their family group or from contact with their mother at an early stage. As a child rearing practice, they prefer to be with their children during the first three years, incorporating gradually housework and fieldwork, where they learn from modeling, playing when working and working while they play.
- There are cultural elements and child rearing practices of the Mapuche community, important to know, consider, incorporate or take into account when facilitating the transition to the center.
- There is a general concern for preserving the Mapuche culture and promote the indigenous identity of the children attending the center, but in the classroom that concern is not noticeable.

- The study made clear the need to generate more contact with families.
- With regard to the passage from the center to the school, the study revealed that there is motivation and willingness of teachers of both levels to articulate the transition in the best possible way for children, but there is no formal space of time to do it in a proper way, which causes a deficit of transition actions and a lack of joint provision of the organizational work of the teaching team.

### ***Lessons learned from and for educational policy***

- It is essential to support early transition processes through clear guidance from the teacher training. This involves inter-institutional coordination for establishing orientations and guidelines leading to the development of a transitional policy and the implementation of concrete and relevant actions.
- The interest shown by parents in the educational process of their children, and their demonstrated ability to perform actions on that line, suggests the need to strengthen the role of the family as educational agent, creating and/or permanently reinforcing the coordination of actions between family and center.
- It is necessary to strengthen the coordinated work of teachers that take place in a single educational space, so as to achieve more efficient work, developing the training and exchange of knowledge, reflect on practice and produce new knowledge from reflection.
- The specific policy should consider ways to encourage motivation in teachers working in remote areas to conduct refresher courses in education.
- If you want to strengthen indigenous identity in children of school gardens or embedded in indigenous communities and reinforce bilingual learning, there is a need for intercultural education agents who handle the language and culture in an expeditious manner.
- The guidelines should be directed to the review of the methodologies used in the first year and look for more subtle ways to incorporate other methodologies different from "notebook, pencil and eraser," reinforcing the use of appropriate materials for working with children from the first year of basic education.

## **Chapter IV. Peru Case Study**

The study is qualitative transversal exploratory-descriptive, with an interpretive approach. Information was collected through qualitative methods (observation of events, interviews, projective techniques), which has allowed a characterization and understanding (as far as the limits allow) on the dimensions and variables selected for the study.

A conceptual review about transitions is performed, and the context, settings and actors in the community are explored: socio-economic and cultural family traits, child-rearing, involvement of family members, and perception of education. Next, the characterization of care and educational programs is reviewed: coverage, teacher training, infrastructure and teaching methodology.

Together with the stakeholders a reflection was conducted on the characteristics of the children of the community at different levels of care and education as well as internal and external factors that characterize successful transitions.

The findings are based on the elements discussed in the first book on the definition of transitions in general and of educational transitions in particular. Other conclusions are derived from the cases studied in the Teoría Community.

### ***Some lessons learned and recommendations for education policy***

Teachers do not have enough tools to develop a proposal for education in rural areas, especially if they are rooted in primitive a-graphic societies, apart from the complexity inherent to bilingualism or multilingualism.

- The little consistency and continuity among the purposes and methodologies used at different levels of education do not help children build learning.
- The educational infrastructure is poor and lack materials that can support the development of classes to help in the development of symbolic function, as a prerequisite for the internalization of learning can promote the development of thought.
- The absence of an overall look on the reality of education in these populations requires schools to be institutions to convene and support intersectoral action and parents' involvement.
- Lack of an efficient teacher accompanying system, especially for those who due to distance cannot have access to information.
- The disorder in the educational system dragged for years, helps to deepen the educational gaps between urban and rural, between public and private.
- The economic constraints of families constitute a factor that alienates children from schools.
- Working with families should be nuclear in the educational processes, especially in those contexts where the sectors involved must put more efforts to reach families in a coordinated way and with uniform criteria of information.
- The educational system must, in practice, recognize families as key partners in achieving school learning, overcoming an instrumentalist approach.

Finally, a number of very positive aspects seen in indigenous contexts that can help improve education are mentioned. A list of demands that society and government must be able to resolve is provided.

## **Chapter V. Venezuela Case Study**

The research team selected six children from the Añú people, living in the Sinamaica Lagoon, Zulia state, for the Venezuela case study, in order to comprehensively learn about the transition process experienced by children between the ages of zero and eight belonging to these communities.

The chapter presents a brief description of the context of this community, language skills, existing organizations and major sources of income, rites and beliefs, family characteristics, child rearing patterns and a description of the Angelito Añú Multihogar, and the Bolivarian School New World and Sinamaica.

The meaning of the Children's Center and School, as well as expectations and facilitating and hindering aspects of transitions was explored, from the perspective of the transition process stakeholders.

### ***Conclusions***

- The Añú children in the study receive support from parents and other significant adults in the community to attend the educational institutions. These children like the school and their teachers.
- The socio-cultural and economic conditions in which families in the Sinamaica Lagoon live—despite hindering the transition processes of children in the study—are compensated by



- the presence of a loving, but little-trained, teacher who provides recognition of children's demonstrated capabilities and who stimulates their desire to learn.
- The family context and the expression of its dynamic as socio-productive unit, is another mediator for a successful transition from home to the center and from this to the school.
  - Children's registration to schools is positive because they evoke children's households using small decorative objects made from "enea," the main raw material in the area for weaving, and other household items.
  - It is perceived in families of children in the study, particularly mothers, a high degree of support in the accompaniment to the education of the children, also reinforced by older siblings, regardless of their educational level.
  - The presence of native teachers, in the case of the Children's Center, guarantees the socio-cultural recognition and respect of children's needs, resulting in their adaptation to school.
  - Some motivating factors offered by the school to engage their Añú children to develop learning abilities are: 1) Size and lighting of interior spaces. 2) Social interaction, for the exchange of children. 3) Promote non-traditional games. 4) Use of school uniform (donated by the state). 5) Transfer by boat with outboard motor, since not all children have opportunities to use it. 6) Food (breakfast, lunch and snack) offered by the school and day care centers is also an attraction for children, parents or relatives.

### ***Lessons learned from and for educational policy***

- The family daily activities within their own indigenous culture represent for children meaningful opportunities to acquire experience and knowledge for future adult life. Individual learning experiences are capitalized by the school, to ensure greater socio-cultural relevance of the curriculum.
- The figure of the family in their role as educational agent is very important for its influence, and so should be re-conceptualized by policy makers.
- There is a lack of policy guidelines aimed at developing and strengthening capacities of the child and family to address and resolve unfavorable situations.
- There is a need to create synergy between the different educational actors in search of training activities that benefit children younger than eight. To do this, it is necessary to convert the school into a community whose members become apprentices in constant interaction, guided by the principles of social co-responsibility and lifelong learning for the benefit of younger children.
- Policies should consider developing and updating training plans for teaching and teachers to provide them with better and more tools for quality early childhood education. It is also necessary to create awareness and train principals and teachers on the topic of transitions as a strategy to minimize the phenomena of repetition, school dropout and frustration.
- Bilingual Intercultural Education (BIE) requires the look—for many years focused on primary education—to the level of initial education for the benefit of younger children. At the policy level, this would translate into greater complementarity of curricula, new instructional strategies and appropriate care, child care, new and more effective, relevant and useful ways to make a kind of education that takes into account the child rearing patterns of indigenous peoples.

## **Chapter VI. Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

### ***Conclusions***

There is awareness in adults—parents, teachers—of the importance of actions to achieve successful transitions, although usually they are not faced with planned actions.

In Colombia, for example, even though the policy states important programmatic link between the Homes of Family Welfare, serving in education and care for infants from zero to five years, there are no guidelines that in practice bring them closer to institutions in the education sector. Although there are some advances in vertical coordination between preschool and primary education, there are still no specific guidelines, nor are there special approaches to indigenous communities.

The experience of the case study in Colombia suggests that in all settings, stakeholders perform practices supportive to the transitions with different levels of formalization and structure. Indigenous communities themselves incorporate in their culture practices that facilitate the transition process. Such is the case of the Mapuche Community studied by Chile and the Añú from Venezuela, where certain customs are clearly supportive to successful transitions.

The presence of native teachers in the communities plays an important role in helping children in their process of adjustment to school environments. Teachers are aware of the importance of incorporating in the room decoration some elements of the indigenous communities to use for playing or as educational materials, but in practice are seldom used, except in the Añú Community (Venezuela). Teachers are not specialized in early childhood education, and in some of the communities studied not even in the indigenous culture of the group they serve.

Overall in the families studied, there is particular interest in the adaption of their children to daycare homes or schools and they try to facilitate it. They do it in an affectionate and intuitive way, with the collaboration of also affectionate teachers.

In Peru, children whose parents have clear and high expectations on their children's education and positive personal relationships and good communication, not only show good processes of transition, but high school achievement. Children from the Peruvian indigenous community studied show poorly developed skills in urban settings: physical control, assuming responsibility and cooperative work from an early age, "reading" information for weather changes from observation, among others.

In the case of Venezuela, teachers and parents are loving and concerned with their children's development and education, which counteracts poverty. The selected children respond with adaptive capacity and take the challenge to actively participate in their development and learning.

In the Añú culture, in Venezuela, it is evident the close relationship of the mother to the child until he or she is four years old, which contributes to self-reliance and the development of various cognitive skills to solve problems, getting them ready for major moments of change in their life.

In the communities studied in Peru and Venezuela, an important role of older brothers was found, since consciously or unconsciously, they support their younger siblings and become role models, thereby facilitating transitions.

In the community homes or day care centers, or "gardens" in Colombia, mothers who work there take their own household practices and those of the community to the school context, creating a warm environment that facilitates the process of adaptation of children.

### ***Lessons learned from and for education policy in the four countries***

- The interest shown by parents in the educational process of their children, and their demonstrated ability to perform actions on that line, suggests the need to strengthen the family role as an educational agent, creating and/or strengthening permanent transition actions family–center.
- Parents need more information on education and child development, to help establish development goals for their children based on positive expectations. Working with families should be nuclear in educational processes, especially in these contexts. The sectors involved should put more efforts to reach families in a coordinated way and with uniform criteria in the information. It is vital to strengthen ties between family, center and school as an explicit strategy to strengthen the processes of educational transition.
- As the researchers point out in the Peruvian case, there is a need that the educational system recognizes families in practice as key partners in achieving school learning, overcoming an instrumentalist approach.
- One aspect to consider in policy is the inclusion of guidelines aimed at developing and strengthening capacities of the child and family to address and resolve unfavorable situations.
- The family daily activities within their own indigenous culture represent for children significant opportunities to acquire experience and knowledge for future adult life.
- It is important to learn from the processes of transition that are daily managed by mothers, caretakers and teachers, and from there to establish clear guidelines to support these transitions with better conditions for the association and continuity in the settings and actions of transitions.
- It is essential to support early transition processes through clear guidance on teacher training activities so that they can implement the appropriate procedures at the right time. This involves coordinating inter-agency guidelines and directives for the implementation of concrete and relevant actions.
- It is necessary to strengthen the joint work of teachers that take place in a single educational space, to streamline work, promote training and exchange of knowledge, reflect on practice and produce new knowledge from that reflective action.
- To strengthen indigenous identity in children of centers or schools embedded in indigenous communities and reinforce bilingual learning, it is necessary to have intercultural educational agents who handle the language and culture in an expeditious manner.
- It is not enough that children from the centers know and visit the school and its rooms, as the offset occurs at the turn of one methodology to another and from there the transition process is broken. The guidelines should be directed to the review of the methodologies used in the first year of basic education. It is urgent to find more subtle ways of incorporating other methodologies that are not "notebook, pencil and eraser," reinforcing the use of other materials suitable for work with children of this grade.
- The disorder that often affects the educational system and that has been dragged for years, contributes to deepen the educational gaps between urban and rural, between public and private. It is urgent to address this issue.
- Lessons should be learned from the organizational capacity of indigenous communities: they have a system of participation in decision making and it is through this system that often they find answers to their problems.
- The rural context offers endless opportunities for development and learning of children and these communities have a diversity of environments and natural resources, i.e. they are a learning laboratory for the open field. However it is not used or exploited by the educational system, which insists that education occurs within the four walls of schools.
- Bilingual Intercultural Education (BIE) requires the look—for many years focused on primary education—to the level of initial education, to benefit younger children. At the policy level, this could mean a greater coordination of curricula, new instructional strategies

and appropriate care and childcare as well as new, more effective, relevant and useful ways to develop education by taking into account the child rearing patterns of indigenous peoples.

***Some recommendations:***

- 1 . Improve education decentralization mechanisms seeking more closeness to the population.
- 2 . Improve intersectoral action: although there is one sector responsible for education, problems are multiple and complex factors
- 3 . Increase the capacity of teachers to plan and manage education with a long-term perspective and vision.
- 4 . Achieve a National Alliance for Education, especially for the benefit of the most vulnerable populations, and invest in more research in order to have solid underpinnings for the construction of "thoughtful "educational proposals.
- 5 . Review and strengthen strategies for teacher training and support from a holistic approach.

**Chapter VII.**

**Communication Strategy for Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Education**

The development of the communication strategy is based on all the research and scientific findings on early childhood. Therefore, the communicative approach is taken from a cultural perspective, which means that the interaction processes are loaded with meaning and undertake the field of everyday life, social and cultural dynamics, the public sphere, the sensitivities and collective identities.

The messages issued by the various media groups in each country from this strategy were developed from an action plan which aimed to identify clear objectives in order to consolidate the target set in the communication component.

The aim of the strategy was promote and publicize the importance of quality education in early childhood through communication campaigns to raise awareness, advocate, mobilize society and support the generation of public policies and actions for early childhood.

Designing the strategy involves thinking in its scope. This relates to the levels of involvement and participation that the target audience gives to the project. With these references, the communication strategy established and executed three components, each of which has objectives, activities and products. These three components are: Information dissemination; Capacity building and Advocacy.

***Some progress in the areas of communication***

The meeting with communicators from Spain, Nicaragua, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago was held from 25 to 29 May 2009 in Chile, and allowed to reflect on and analyze the paper that conceives the conceptual guidelines of the "Communication Strategy for Improving Quality of Early Childhood Education, " presented by the OAS.

After three working sessions, the group reached the following conclusions:

- Communication should be viewed as a discipline that crosses the whole concept of early childhood. This approach is reflected in the document presented by the OAS.
- The objectives proposed in the strategy were endorsed by the participating countries. It was agreed to implement the three components of the strategy taking into account the actions taken by countries. It is suggested to do a tracking of the experiences.

- As for the communication products, reference was made to the communication campaign "Seven is Too Late" from Turkey, and the experience of Guatemala through the International Children's Fund (now Christian Children Fund), to be high-impact experiences in each country.
- The duration of the strategy was assessed; the group agreed that it was a suitable time to meet the objectives proposed (three years of the project).
- The delegates of the countries expressed interest and commitment to the development of the strategy. They promised to contact the journalists who can lead this process in each country.
- Regarding the actions included in the communication strategy, the group of communicators from different countries agreed on the need to strengthen the database as dynamic collaborative networks that allow communication to flow.
- Regarding the site of ECD, it was considered an initiative of great significance because it allows projection and channels information not only to the recipients but also to the same issuer.
- It is essential to coordinate the communication strategy to the various activities being developed by the countries.

After consolidating their commitment, willingness and need to carry out this strategy, the delegates of the countries made specific contributions to each process. They also participated actively in the development of the cards that would allow strengthening perceptions about the strategy, the communicator profile and actions of each country. These actions were associated with other project on the use of networks and technologies.

### ***Experiences in implementing the communication strategy in some countries***

Regarding the case studies within the "***Trends in transition policies in indigenous, rural and border communities***" research project, countries that have been linked to the study have begun to advance some actions foreseen in the overall communications strategy and in the resulting documents containing details of the recent meeting of communicators in Chile, in May 2009. In the corresponding chapter the proposal developments and achievements in the goals of the communications theme are presented for three of the study's countries: Colombia, Peru and Chile.