

EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT IN ST KITTS AND NEVIS: A MODEL FOR THE CARIBBEAN?

Janet Brown

Senior Lecturer

Caribbean Child Development Centre

School of Continuing Studies, UWI, Mona

There are two kinds of activities that appear particularly salient for our species. The first is work.... The second is the way in which we raise our young....At this point in history, we... have developed a pattern in which these two centrally human activities are placed in conflict with each other....At the present time, less by decision than by default, we are allowing our families, and our children, to pay the price.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1981)

This quotation from the well-known child psychologist Bronfenbrenner was cited as the introduction to a proposal from the Government of St. Kitts-Nevis to USAID in 1981, a proposal to fund a joint project of the Ministry of Education's Early Childhood Unit and the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, based in Ypsilanti, Michigan. This was almost a dozen years before High/Scope gained worldwide attention with its Perry Preschool longitudinal study — research which followed up a group of at-risk inner-city children enrolled in a quality preschool experience 27 years later. The results of that study have been instrumental over the past 6 or 7 years in convincing major funders like the World Bank, USAID, and the Inter American Development Bank, as well as many governments, to up their investments in early childhood interventions in anticipation of the potential accrued benefits.

What were the compelling results of the High/Scope study? The experimental group (125 African Americans) had 1/5 to 1/3 the number of arrests of the control group, received less welfare assistance in their adult lives, had higher school achievement and literacy scores, had 1/3 more numbers graduate from high school, made more long-lasting marriages, had fewer out-of-wedlock births and displayed greater social responsibility.¹ Such rigorous long-term studies are few and far between, but there is growing and sound evidence in developing as well as developed countries which corroborates the High/Scope study's findings that early childhood programmes of *quality* [please note the emphasis] constitute investments with major payoffs, at least in the long run.^{2,3} The more recent early brain research has brought scientific evidence to bear on what early childhood practitioners have known to some extent for decades — that "experience is the chief architect of the brain".⁴ Children who are rarely touched or played with, who experience forms of neglect or abuse, develop brains that are 20% to 30% smaller than is normal for their age. These effects can be irreversible.

It was this mounting evidence, along with the years of experience of early childhood programming efforts by many colleagues throughout the region which resulted in CARICOM Heads of State, in July 1997, adopting as part of their Human Resource Development Strategy for the Caribbean, the six-year Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education, Care and Development. This Plan was drafted by CCDC consultant Sian Williams with the support of UNICEF, reviewed and revised by delegates from 20 Caribbean countries at the Second Caribbean Conference on Early Childhood Education in Bridgetown Barbados in April 1997, and has largely framed the region's work in this area over the last three years. Of course St. Kitts-Nevis was a signatory to this Plan of Action.

In the limited time I have for this presentation, I will try to paint a picture for you of why it is timely for St. Kitts-Nevis to turn some serious research attention to the considered (if not always considerable) investments it has made in early childhood development since the major USAID-supported inputs of 1981-83. That initial three-year project set a course for St. Kitts-Nevis early care and education that has distinguished it in a number of ways from

early childhood developments of the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean. What do I mean by this? A quick review of the history of early childhood care and education in the Caribbean is necessary for context. For this I will draw heavily on the historical review prepared for the same 1997 conference by Rose Davies, the early childhood specialist within Mona's Institute of Education, UWI.⁵

Historical Review

Traditionally early care of children in the Caribbean remained within the family and its extended family networks of support, and was almost exclusively the purview of mothers, grandmothers and aunts. As industrialisation and other economic pressures led more and more women into work settings further from home, churches and other charitable institutions as early as the 1930s responded to demands for child care with the establishment of custodial care facilities which ensured that children were kept safe, fed and clean while their primary caregivers were working. By the '50s, child development research in the more developed world was pointing to the needs of children beyond just physical care and safety, and particularly to the advantages of pre-primary preparation for formal education, seen as a critical platform for advancing the region's people socially and economically in the pre- and post-colonial periods. There was early evidence suggesting that these advantages were even more important for children living in conditions of poverty and disadvantage.

The region's governments of the 1960's, many moving towards independence, had to tackle a range of social and economic problems. Most were reluctant to add early care or education to government budgets already stretched for education, health and social services. The private sector remained the primary source of support for childcare services, which were largely unmonitored and unregulated by governments.

Demand for services continued to grow. External support for expanding and improving services in the region came primarily from UNICEF and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, two international organisations with primary mandates related to child well-being. The Save the Children international network also became active in the region by the late 60's/early 70's. Significant to this period was the UNICEF-supported 1967 Conference on "The Needs of the Young Child in the Caribbean", which highlighted deteriorating social and economic conditions which were jeopardising children's development, and recommended greater regional collaboration in tackling issues of training, advocacy and programme expansion. (The CCDC was one outcome 25 years ago of that historic conference). Also of great significance was the van Leer supported developments out of the Mona campus's Project for Early Childhood Education (PECE), headed by D.R.B. Grant, dubbed the region's "pioneer" of early childhood education for the research and development work undertaken during his tenure. The model for provision of preschool education, which he established in Jamaica, has largely served as the model for provision throughout the region — community ownership and management of schools, paraprofessional delivery supported by regular training workshops, usually by Ministry of Education officers, and an emphasis on coverage that extends to the poorest communities. Jamaica boasts near-universal coverage for 4-5 year olds based on this model.

During the 1970's, Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana and Montserrat led other countries of the region in providing some government support for programmes — in the form of training inputs, some provision of buildings, and limited staffing supports. With external funding, sub-regional training institutions at UWI's Regional Preschool Child Development Centre (now CCDC) in Jamaica, SERVOL in Trinidad, and VINSAVE in St. Vincent, began tackling the need for a more professionalised workforce.

The International Year of the Child in 1980 marked a decade of considerable growth on many fronts in early childhood care and education. The advocacy of IYC goals spurred the development of standards for preschool and day care provisions in a number of governments of the region. However, legislative follow-through has been notably absent in all but a few recent cases. Jamaica's case is likely typical — standards developed in 1984 remain to this day with the legislative drafting office, primarily because of budgetary implications and weak public advocacy.

Private provision remained the norm throughout most of the region, and coverage, particularly for the preschool years, grew steadily in response to demand. Political upheavals, structural adjustment policies, the effects of world price swings and other global forces on the region, left Caribbean governments with very limited resources to address issues of early childhood, still seen by most as the responsibility largely of the family and the private sector. Curriculum development and advocacy for improved programme quality grew in the 80's through the regional activities of CCDC, SERVOL, VINSAVE, and some national efforts, but real quality of provision remained largely elusive. Those day care and preschool programmes reaching even minimum standards of quality were largely available only to families paying high fees; those most in need of early interventions remained largely unserved.

The 1990's

Despite the embrace by all CARICOM and other Caribbean countries of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit Goals for Children of 1990, the early 90's saw little change in overall conditions of early childhood provisions (as summarised by Rose Davies in the September 1995 *Caribbean Journal of Education*, an issue devoted to reviewing early childhood education). By using standards of quality outlined in a position paper of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the U.S. (which has widespread international endorsement), Davies lists the problems extant in the region:

- sub-standard physical facilities
- over-crowding
- low-level of teacher/caregiver training
- unsatisfactory staff-child ratios
- high rate of staff turnover
- inappropriate curriculum approaches and methodological strategies
- inadequate or no appropriate and stimulating learning materials and experiences
- inappropriate child guidance techniques
- unsatisfactory levels of home/school cooperation⁶

The 1997 Plan of Action (for ECECD) spelled out ten overarching goals, which collectively address this daunting list. Not all countries, of course, were at the same starting point when the POA was signed; political will, available resources, and numbers of committed advocates varied. But all government signatories were encouraged by the Plan's framework of specific objectives to address the goals on a phased basis, engaging all relevant partners as necessary. The Plan's ten goals are as follows:

1. Legislate for services to children from birth to school entry, within national legislation for child as a legal entity [*legislation, monitoring, enforcement systems*]
2. Entitle the child from birth to school entry living in at risk situations to targeted resources. [*data systems crucial to targeting*]
3. Ground public and parenting education and children's programme in local cultures [*starting where children and families are, with what they know*]
4. Educate for parenthood before adulthood [*HFLE, life skills*]
5. Support the parent and the child in the year after a child's birth [*breastfeeding, health and sanitation supports, nutrition, care & stimulation practices*]
6. Develop the child within the family in the years before preschool [*link child health, day care and parenting educational support*]
7. Promote the child's learning and development in all preschool settings [*issues of quality delivery-- programme design, curriculum inputs, learning materials, etc.*]
8. Implement integrated approaches for ECECD for children from birth to school entry. [*issues of government sector/NGO/private sector cooperation, coordination and convergence; issues of integrated management systems*]
9. Designate budget allocation for ECECD services and plan investment [*issues of budget equity, costings, sources of funding, sustainability*]
10. Improve quality in monitoring, evaluation and training support in ECECD. [*requires assessment of effectiveness and quality of settings, attention to transition needs, record keeping, research, training programmes with career path for teaching and management in ECECD*]⁷

It will not be fully known until the July 2000 Regional ECECD Caribbean Conference convenes in Jamaica how far all the signatories (and other countries attending) have advanced within or alongside the Regional POA, as all countries which attended the Barbados conference are invited to come armed with reports. St. Kitts-Nevis will of course report its progress on that occasion. However, some very specific developments are worthy of note, and will bear on my remarks about St. Kitts-Nevis progress shortly.

UNICEF, the European Commission, and the World Bank have financially supported technical assistance and other developments in support of national activities since the adoption of the regional POA. Grenada, St. Lucia and Dominica have developed legislation within the new OECS Educational Reform programme that brings early childhood education formally into education sector planning, and new sector standards and regulatory frameworks have been developed/adopted. A World Bank loan to Trinidad and Tobago contains major infrastructural improvements, training and monitoring supports to a national preschool delivery system. A grant from the World Bank to CCDC and the Institute of Education at the UWI supported the development in Jamaica of national occupational standards for early childhood workers, and a certification system for these workers,⁸ along with other policy initiatives.

Baseline surveys of services have been conducted in Grenada, Dominica and St. Vincent, and a St. Lucia survey is underway. This baseline data is informing the development of data maintenance systems in order to more effectively plan and target services. The EFA regional reporting exercise (assisted by UNICEF and UNESCO in preparation for the Dakar Global EFA Decade Review, April 2000) indicated how critical such basic data systems are for providing accurate pictures of service provision and system needs.

In addition, assessments of the *quality* of pre-primary provision of care and education services have been conducted in Dominica, Grenada, and St. Vincent. These assessments have trained local teams in the use of an internationally validated tool called the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS).⁹ The adaptation of this tool for local conditions has proven to be very effective in providing a snapshot of strengths and weaknesses within local services, and the results are being used in policy and programme planning workshops to debate and propose solutions for the problems thus exposed.

St. Kitts-Nevis ECECD Developments

Now what of St. Kitts-Nevis? Earlier, I noted that St. Kitts-Nevis created in 1981 a somewhat different path of ECECD development than that of other countries of the Caribbean. What has that meant in measurable terms? Where does that place St. Kitts-Nevis when reporting on its progress within the regional Plan of Action?

Let's first look at a set of general indicators over the period since 1981 (Table below) that provide a context for further examining indicators of progress specific to early childhood provisions.

SELECTED ST. KITTS - NEVIS INDICATORS

	1981 ^a	1990/1 ^b	1994 ^c	1998 ^d	2000 ^e
Population	SK: 34,048 N: 9,571		43,520		
Children birth up to age 5	5,171		SK 3691, +N 860 = 4,550		
Infant Mortality/1000		19.7	24.2		
Malnutrition: Mild Moderate Severe	45% 10%		Mild to Mod. 4.2% 0.2%		
Gross Nat'l Product-GNP		EC\$417.8M		\$EC699.9M (+67%)	
GNP per capita		\$EC10,000 (US 3704)		\$EC17,180 (US 6363) (+72%)	
National Budget		\$EC93.2M		\$EC301.7M (+223%)	

EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT IN ST KITTS AND NEVIS:

Expenditure in Education		\$EC 14.5M 16% of Nat'l		\$EC 28.1M (+94%) 9% of Nat'l	\$EC 34.2M (+6.1%)
ECECD EXP. (Capital Exp. not included)		\$EC 230,000	\$EC 966,000 ^b (320%)	\$1,581,000 ^e (+64%)	\$2,942,000 (+86%)
ECECD as % of Education		1.58%	4.59%	5.61%	8.6%
Government Centres ^f	4% of children ^g in need of care		3 nurseries 11 preschools		15 SK: 12 N: 3
Private Centres ^f	12% of children in need of care		27 nurseries 37 preschool		100 SK: N:
Children under 5 at home or other	84% of children in need of care		Both types enroll 46% of age cohort		Both serve 76% [ck] of age cohort

^a Consortium Reports, High/Scope-MOE Projects, September 1983.

^b StKN Ministry of Education/ECU report to Consultant Leon Charles for Regional EFA Report, 1999.

^c Teachers College evaluation of early childhood care/education sector for Early Childhood Unit, 1994.

^d Same as footnote (b)

^e Interview with Vanta Walters, coordinator of Early Childhood Unit, April 2000.

^f Government and private centers can be for only children to age 3, for children from birth through 5, or for children only age 3 to 5.

^g Data for 1981 from Consortium Reports, (a) above. "In need of care" = 2600 children under age 5 with mothers working full-time (80%) or part-time (20%).

It is clear from this chart that the Government of St. Kitts-Nevis has steadily increased its investments, both in dollar terms as well as in percentage of its Education budget, to the early childhood sector. In 1999 and 2000 budgets it has also committed \$EC 4 million to capital expansion of early childhood provisions. It must also be noted that the chart does not reflect the significant and consistent inputs for training, equipment and materials from UNICEF, and to a lesser extent, other external funders in supplementing Government's investment.

Why has this investment grown so consistently? To what indicators is Government responding? Why did the Early Childhood Unit's budget grow by 86% from 1998 to 2000, while the Education budget, from which it comes, grew by only 6% that year? On these questions I can only speculate, having not had opportunity to explore these questions with the government officials who made these decisions.

But I do have some ideas, which I will share in the few minutes remaining, and with a call for research to change speculation to fact, in the hope of providing some of the hard evidence we need in the region to strengthen support for this foundation sector of our Caribbean societies.

The Curriculum

My speculations begin with the 1981-83 project, which introduced training for existing and new early childhood programme workers in the use of the High/Scope curriculum. The concept of *Active Learning* for children is at the heart of this curriculum. Active Learning puts children in charge of their own learning in very concrete ways, and more consistently throughout the programme than in other methodological approaches common within the region.

In an Active Learning environment, a range of activities are laid out in specified areas of the preschool centre daily by the teacher-activities related to language and literacy, music, numbers and measurement, "home" activities, construction activities, manipulative for small motor development, and equipment for large muscle development, usually outdoors. The children then individually plan what they will do for a portion of the day, select the area in which to do it, and then do the activity, either alone or with others selecting that area. The teacher's role during this period is to support the learning activities which the child chooses, through questions, comments, but not instruction *per se*. The teacher can also assist in helping children resolve any conflicts or issues, which arise in their interaction with each other. After this period, the teacher and children in a group *review* together what each child has done during their "work" time, giving each child opportunity for individual self-expression. While there

are other small and large group times during each day in which teachers may take a more directly instructive role, the heart of the Active Learning approach, and the key to its effectiveness when implemented faithfully, is the "plan-do-review" activities of the children which encourage choice, self-direction, self-confidence and pursuit of individual learning goals.¹⁰

To be successful the approach requires *teachers trained and committed* to this approach, *LOTS of materials available* to individuals and groups of children for their exploration, manipulation and enjoyment, and a *low staff-child ratio*. St. Kitts-Nevis has in fact been operating for a while at *below* the staff-child ratios stipulated in government's regulations, but it is only within the last year, with the addition of teacher aides to government's staff complement, that the ratio has dropped within closer reach of international (and High/Scope) standards for quality provision. For most of the rest of the region, these key quality indicators remain at considerable distance.

Commitment to Upgrade Teachers

The curriculum adapted from High/Scope is the first unique aspect of SKN's early childhood provisions. Another aspect, though not totally unique in the region, is the salary support of all teachers (within the government system) at the same level as teachers within the primary system for *similar qualifications*. This helps ensure that teachers who have obtained training beyond their CXC's (at SERVOL or in other courses) are retained within the early childhood system.

In 1994, 28.5% of the 112 preschool teachers in St. Kitts-Nevis were "fully trained", meaning the one year full-time course at SERVOL in Trinidad, followed by a two-year internship back home 58% of the preschool teachers received the two-week full-time local orientation training, plus monthly one-day workshops. Fifteen remained untrained. For the nursery schools, only 1 person at the time was fully trained; 88% of the rest received the 2-week orientation training plus monthly workshops, and 10% remain untrained.¹¹

In 2000 there are 144 early childhood personnel. Their present levels of training are as follows:¹²

	SERVOL TRAINING	OTHER
PRESCHOOL PERSONNEL:	29 WITH 1 YR + 2 YRS INTERNSHIP	4 (UK ECE DIPLOMAS) 1 (CANADA ECE DIPLOMA) 1 (CANADA, MONTESSORI)
NURSERY PERSONNEL:	15 WITH 2 MONTHS ATTACHMENT	1 ICS DIPLOMA, CHILD CARE MGT. 1 B.ED. (ECE, USA)
TOTAL	44	8

The rest of both sets of workers receive the full-time two-week orientation training, plus monthly workshops. All local training is offered to government and preschool programmes free of charge, and the monthly workshops serve as an informal national association of early childhood workers. The numbers of preschool personnel have grown over the six year period by 28%, but the sector seems to have been able to maintain the percentage of persons fully trained as well as increase the pool of qualifications overall.

Discussions of a local early childhood course at the St. Kitts-Nevis Teacher's College are at present germinal, as are suggestions for a regional distance education course that could meet the needs of several countries at once, particularly for the training of supervisory personnel for the early childhood sector.

Material and Equipment Supports

Perhaps because of the critical requirements of the child-directed High/Scope curriculum in use throughout the system there has been consistent energy spent by the Early Childhood Unit on supplying both government and private centres with essential outdoor and indoor equipment, and quantities of literacy supports and manipulatives. Local parent groups and management committees are urged to supplement what cannot be provided through government or external funds. The Early Childhood Unit assists parent and centre groups by placing bulk orders for them thus accessing the duty-free concession for all imported early childhood materials. The High/Scope curriculum, however, places strong emphasis on the development and use of learning materials produced from low- or no-cost throwaways or natural products from within the children's environment. On quick visits to six centres in April this year, I saw many such home-made supports for children's learning.

Licensing for all Early Childhood Centres

Perhaps the most encouraging and unique aspect of the SKN programme is that this is the first government within the English-speaking Caribbean to have passed legislation and established a working system of regulations which LICENCE all pre-primary services. Other countries are posing this change, but St. Kitts-Nevis is the first to have it in place and working. In this SKN is unquestionably a model for the rest of the Caribbean. In fact later this week Mrs. Walters, the present Coordinator of the Early Childhood Unit, will be with me in St. Vincent to lead the early childhood sector players there in a workshop on regulation and monitoring systems.

Although registration of centres had been required for some time, and certain standards had to be met for initial registration, general standards of provision had begun to slip. The evaluation of the programme undertaken by the Early Childhood Unit with assistance from UNICEF in 1994 confirmed some of this "slippage". In 1994 the enabling legislation was passed to establish an authority to regulate and license childcare facilities, interpreted in the regulations to include all out-of-home care for children prior to primary school enrollment.¹³ Standards for effective provision were developed along with an assessment process, and in November 1997 all centres received notice that they would have to re-register, thereby having to meet the basic standards required for registration.

There was some resistance and anxiety at first, understandably. Private centres, particularly, had some worries about the intrusive intentions of government into their personal businesses. After discussions with the Early Childhood Unit's Coordinator and 4 resource teachers, I understand why this resistance was short-lived. The team members see their monitoring role as primarily encouraging and persuading — not as punitive. At first visit, all areas needing improvement were spelled out in writing and a timeframe for making the improvements was agreed to on both sides. Then at second visit, if all improvements had been completed, a license was recommended. Getting up to the mark became almost a competitive exercise, and the ECU team has used this impetus very resourcefully.

For example, the approved licenses are presented once a year, during a high-profile Child Month of activities; the licenses are presented personally by important officials at a prestigious hotel event. Those who didn't measure up one year are going to be sure to be seen on the podium the following year! Secondly, the proceeds of all fund-raising events during Child Month (organised by the Early Childhood Unit) are used for supplying the needs of centres to enable them to reach required standards. Third, encouraging parent and management committees, to tackle some of the centres' needs was also salutary. Parents in the process were made more aware of the standards themselves and the reasons for them; cooperation from the parents has generally increased. (I saw several examples of parent contributions during my short visit.)

The Unit reports that standards have risen remarkably overall since the institution of the re-registration and licensing exercise. And, licensing renewal is required annually. Unit resource teachers, responsible for monitoring centres, report that communication with centres has also greatly improved, because the licensing exercise has made very transparent what is expected and what must be sustained in order to provide early childhood services in St. Kitts-Nevis.

Licensing is also used as a tool for enforcing parent involvement and development of parenting education at each centre. If centres don't have monthly parent meetings, they don't get licensed — simple. And the parent meetings can't be just about centre business and fund-raising. At least 50% of each monthly meeting must be on a topic of interest for the parents themselves. Parents cannot miss three meetings in a row, either, or they can lose their child's space at the centre. Thus government licensing underscores the critical importance of the partnership between centres and parents in mutual responsibility for their children.

Research and Documentation

Finally, I think all the above factors in the St. Kitts-Nevis scenario would not have been as compelling to government and to external supporters of the early childhood sector had it not been for the research and documentation which has buttressed the sector ever since the major programme was launched in 1981. A consortium of well-known international experts under High/Scope's direction undertook the baseline studies which provided the kick-start for this programme. These five studies provided the government a wealth of data on the current and projected demand for day care and preschool services, growing at that time exponentially because of the shift from agricultural earnings to small manufacturing enterprises. Small manufacturing represented 11% of total employment in the twin-island state in 1970; by 1980 it was 22%, and 85-88% of this employment was female.

When Mrs. Vanta Walters took over the Coordination of the Early Childhood Unit in 1990 from Mrs. Leonie James, she was determined to build on the strong foundation already laid. She made herself familiar with all the archival documents, and renewed the commitment of the Early Childhood Unit to the High-Scope curriculum and training for all St. Kitts-Nevis schools. Although unable to secure funds to take the High-Scope training herself, Mrs. Walters sent for recent High/Scope publications and training videos, and has faithfully used them in training activities. She has continued assiduously to document the Unit's work, and was quietly proud to say that the Unit has been commended repeatedly by the Ministry for its transparency of records and stewardship of accounts.

The 1994 Evaluation of the national early childhood programme, compiled by a consultant from the local Teacher's College for the Early Childhood unit, has provided a further bank of information — documenting specific needs within the sector for which re-registration was undertaken, as well as the need for expanded services to meet demand. The study also recommended outreach efforts to those children unable to access an early childhood programme, as aspect of the programme in its early days. Since 1997 the "Reaching the Unreached" programme of the Early Childhood Unit has been able to extend stimulation and education activities to over 350 children via a temporary afternoon programme in Basseterre for children who haven't yet obtained a centre space, and a home visiting programme on referrals from a range of sources for parents of children from birth to age 3, unable to otherwise access group care.¹⁴

So, I have offered you my *speculations* as to why investments in early childhood programmes in St. Kitts-Nevis seemed to have risen steadily. I'm sure the Early Childhood Unit would not want me to suggest that they have all the support they need. As of 1999, the early childhood portion of the national expenditure budget has yet to reach above 1%, a familiar pattern around the region.

If the level of support is to be sustained and increased to represent investments in solid high-quality provisions, I urge partnerships of Government, the University Centre, the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College of Further Education, the St. Kitts-Nevis Teachers College, other funders and interest groups, to undertake research to replace these speculations with facts. There are a number of questions that come to mind that local research could answer:

For instance, St. Kitts-Nevis has one of the highest levels of CXC passes in the region. How many of the children with passes started out in the country's early childhood programmes? Could there be a correlation? Ten years ago just under half the age cohort was in any group programme — waiting much longer to study this question will mean the loss of an "ideal" experimental and control group situation for study.

St. Kitts-Nevis was the first English-speaking country of the Caribbean to do away with the Common Entrance (11+) exam in 1966. How have the 30-plus years in between affected perceptions about the role of early childhood preparation for formal learning? Have the reforms reduced parental pressures on early childhood educators to push for early academics, the bane of such educators throughout the rest of the Caribbean? How well has the High/Scope curriculum fitted its "graduates" for the requirements of the primary system?

Can the policies against corporal punishment in early childhood centres, coupled with "compulsory" parenting education sessions in all centres, be seen to have impacted on the overall sanctioning of corporal punishment within the broader society? Have the monthly parenting sessions, or the elective 12-week parenting courses offered by the Early Childhood Unit had any other measurable effects on parenting practices? Could these be studied systematically?

The "Ideal Caribbean Person" cited in CARICOM's Human Resource Development Strategy is one who knows how to make personal choices, knows and uses conflict resolution techniques, is self-confident and self-expressive. The High/Scope curriculum, as practiced in St. Kitts-Nevis, promotes these values through the plan-do-review approach with the children and in the encouragement of independent and critical thinking in children. Are these values maintained throughout the St. Kitts-Nevis primary system then through secondary schooling? The Early Childhood Unit has been working more closely over recent years with primary teachers on such issues of transition to primary education. Are these values maintained in the transition? Or is there a washout effect under more traditional modes of instruction?

As noted earlier, three countries of similar programme size (100 - 120 centres) in the region have undertaken quality assessments and baseline data surveys that have greatly aided those countries in planning and targeting interventions within the overall regional Plan of Action. The tools are already tested regionally. It would not take much to replicate these studies in St. Kitts-Nevis, and thus provide further regional data for comparison and mutual assistance purposes among neighbours with similar goals.

You will think of other questions for investigation. Our speculations may or may not be supported by the research.

But I believe that because of the considerable amount of archival and present documentation on the early childhood programme in St. Kitts-Nevis, this country is singularly positioned to provide the rest of the region with leadership, particularly if further hard evidence of effectiveness can be recorded systematically — and soon.

In closing, I wish to record my gratitude for the gracious cooperation and information provided by the two pioneers of St. Kitts-Nevis early childhood education — Mrs. Leonie James and Mrs. Vanta Walters — and to the team of the Early Childhood Unit who gave not only their time but their vision so vividly during my recent visit. I have enjoyed this exercise, and look forward to seeing further fruits of informed investments in the foundation years of the citizens of St. Kitts-Nevis.

Footnotes

¹ High/Scope Educational Research Foundation (1964/1992) *Study of 123 African Americans born in poverty*, summarized in Williams, S., "Why do children of the Caribbean need programmes of Early Childhood Education and Development?", ECE Conference, Bridgetown, April 1997.

² Myers, R.G. *The Twelve Who Survive: Strengthening Programmes of Early Childhood Development in the Third World*. London, Routledge.

³ Kagitcibasi, C. et al (1995) A multi purpose model of non formal education in Coordinators Notebook, The consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, N.Y.

⁴ Perry, B. (1997) Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, in *Time Magazine*, 10 February.

⁵ Davies, Rose (1997) A historical review of the evolution of early childhood care and education in the Caribbean, Conference Report, pp. 64 – 68.

⁶ Davies, R. (September 1995) *Early Childhood Care and Education in the Caribbean: An Overview of Issues and Concerns*, in *Caribbean Journal of Education*, Vol. 17, No. 2. School of Education, UWI

⁷ Caribbean Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education, Care and Development, 1997 – 2002 (in Report on Second Caribbean Conference on Early Childhood Education, Bridgetown, Barbados, April 1997).

⁸ In collaboration with the National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Standards adopted March 1999; certification system being tested in CCDC pilot programme 2000. Curriculum for certification to be published 2000.

⁹ Harms, T, Clifford, R.M., Cryer, D. (1998) *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*, Revised Edition. Teachers College Press, Columbia University, N.Y.

¹⁰ Hohmann, M. and Weikart, D. (1995) *Educating Young children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programmes*, High/Scope Press, Ypsilanti, Michigan.

¹¹ Evaluation report, Early Childhood Unit, 1994.

¹² Data from Early Childhood Unit, April 2000.

¹³ The St. Christopher and Nevis Probation and Child Welfare Agency Act, 1994.

¹⁴ Programme documents from Early Childhood Unit, April 2000.

URL <http://www.uwichill.edu.bb/bnccde/sk&n/conference/papers/JBrown.html>

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