SUMMARY

During the last twenty years the importance of early recognition of child-rearing problems in families has been generally accepted. In consequence social as well as scientific interest for early intervention in child-rearing problems was excited. One of the forms of early orthopedagogic intervention is the Portage Programme Netherlands (PPN), which was originally an American programme for families with children in the developmental age-group of 0-6 years, that has been adapted to the Dutch situation. The programma is intended to support families with (imminent) child-rearing problems, that may or may not be connected to a developmental problem in the child. One of the principles of this programme is that the support will have the best results if it is given in the home-situation with active cooperation of the daily caregivers. It is assumed that a systematic and cyclic method would be most suitable. Furthermore the method is based on behavioral principles. In this study attention is given to the results of the Portage-project Groningen, in which the clinical relevance and the effectiveness of this programme over the last eight years was studied in two target-groups. One target-group is made up of families with a child with an serious mental handicap; the other target-group is made up of families with moderate child-rearing problems that are not connected to a developmental problem in the child. In these families the child-rearing problems are usually related to the daily interaction between the parents and the child. In the project the PPN was developed into a form of orthopedagogic home-support, focussed on child-rearing.

In Chapter 2 the child-rearing framework is elaborated. Child-rearing is considered to be a transactional process in which the various components of the child-rearing situation interact. The child-rearing situations of both target-groups are described as aggravated or tense, in which the competence rather than the willingness of the caregiver to rear the child is threatened. In such an child-rearing situation it is expected that the caregivers will be concerned and dedicated enough to warrant support by the PPN. The term support was chosen to emphasize a cooperative relationship between the home-teacher and the caregiver, in which each can contribute their own expertise to solving or lessening the (imminent) child-rearing problem.

Chapter 3 describes the development from the American Portage Model to the PPN. Points of departure, the intervention model and the Portage-materials
are explained. Similarities and differences between the two programmes are discussed.

In chapter 4 the focus is on the study of the effects of orthopedagogic home-intervention in general and on the effects of the Portage Programme in particular. Various methodological problems and the solutions usually chosen for them are discussed here. It is emphasized that the question of effectiveness can best be answered by analyses with instruments not taken from the programme. Next, various foreign and Dutch Portage effect-studies are considered in a general manner.

In chapters 5 and 6 two quasi-experimental studies are presented which focus on the effectiveness and the clinical relevance of the PPN. Both studies are sub-studies of the Portage-project Groningen. One study (1989-1991) concerns 21 families with a child with a serious mental handicap. The other study (1991-1995) concerns 46 families with moderate child-rearing problems. It was concluded that it is less easy to (permanently) influence the development of the child than the child-rearing problems in the family. To what extent the detected changes are due to the support is discussed with some reticence. Parents and home-teachers are for the most part positive about the method and the effects thereof. The clinical relevance of the programme can be demonstrated in both studies.

In chapter 7 a review of the Portage-project Groningen is given. The results of both studies are summarized, the deficiencies and the methodological problems are discussed, and the objectives are evaluated. Next, attention is paid to the implications of the study results for the practice of orthopedagogic home-support. A few conditions for implementing the PPN successfully in families are discussed. Merits as well as possible pitfalls of the programme are mentioned. The importance of the child-rearing perspective is emphasized here, because the programme can wrongly invite too much attention for the child's developmental progress. Reticence in the use of the programme is advocated for two reasons: on the one hand because the effectiveness of the support cannot be demonstrated in all cases and for all relevant variables, on the other hand because unnecessary professionalizing of child-rearing should be avoided. Finally some reflections on future studies are discussed. It appears that many questions remain unanswered and that various new questions have arisen. It is indicated that the present study does not shed enough light on the (long-term) effects of the support on the development of the child, on the child-rearing competence of the parents, and on the quality of the relationship between the parents and the child. Also the problems of attuning deserve more attention, because only one method of home-support could be studied within the scope of this study. Further study into the use of the
systematic and cyclic methods of the programme with other target-groups is also important.