



The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

MAKING THE LINKS: THE ROLE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME OFFICERS

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When we talk about training project officers who plan child development programmes, we are talking about working with people who have been in the field for 5, 10, maybe even 15 years. They have worked with or for dozens of international, national, and local organisations and have weathered crisis after crisis involving young children. Dare we go to these seasoned workers and tell them it is time to come back to the classroom and learn about child development? Rather than suggesting a traditional educational approach, training may be conceived of as a process of establishing *links* between the rich experiences that programme officers have amassed, the new information that may be available to them, and the perspectives that may be gained on the developmental needs of children.

In general, we can think of such training as being composed of three elements: providing information, guiding field-based experiences, and suggesting how-to methods and approaches that are drawn from or adapted to local situations. Since training programmes are most often designed to be used across cultures or subcultures, each element must be considered at both the general, or cross-cultural, level, as well as the cultural, or situational, level. The steps outlined in the following table suggest how training in child development may be broken down into five topic areas at the general and specific levels and then linked together in the process of programme planning. Over the past two years, this “linked” approach was used in a child development training programme with field officers in the 25 countries where the Christian Children's Fund works.

Table 1
Establishing the Links

	<i>Child Development Needs</i>	<i>Matched to Caretaking Practices</i>	<i>Suggest specific Activities</i>	<i>That are Modified for Children with Special Needs</i>	<i>And are Developed by Various Programme Models</i>
<i>General or Cross-Cultural Level</i>	Universal needs in physical, emotional, and cognitive development	Gives a broad outline of what we need to do to encourage children's active growth and development	Broad activities that are sequenced developmentally	–Street children –Working children –Abused and neglected children –Emotionally distressed children	–Home-based –Centre-based –Child-to-child –Parent education
<i>Cultural or Situation-Specific Level</i>	Specific variation within development or across cultures	In specific settings we ask: How are needs met in this setting? Under what conditions are they not met?	Activities that must be adapted: –For cultural appropriateness –For developmental needs	Methods of working with highly distressed children and children with special needs	As applied to settings around the world

The first column of the table headed "Child Development Needs," conveys the assumption that although there is a great deal of variability from child to child, development proceeds in predictable steps or stages. The belief that development is an understandable process is crucial. It allows us to identify universal needs in physical, emotional, and cognitive development. While we begin with general, or cross-cultural, statements about development, we must then move to observations on a culture-specific or situation-specific, level. For example, when talking about emotional attachment, we might start with the observation that all children need to form a close emotional tie to at least one caretaker during the first years of life. At culture-specific levels, we can then describe the wide variations in how this attachment need is met by mothers, fathers, and other family caregivers and suggest ways of observing how this need is met for the children we work with. Once child development patterns and needs are identified, we can consider forms of developmentally appropriate care that matches to specific needs.

The table's second column, headed "Matched to Caretaking Practices", broadly outlines conditions and behaviours that have been found to encourage children's active growth and development across widely dispersed cultures. Believing that there are countless acceptable ways of rearing children, caretaking practices are brought to the specific level by studying local childcare practices. In a time-honoured method, we ask, Which children are developing well in this setting? What practices have been used to encourage their development? Within any setting, no matter how deprived, we are able to find some children who are resilient and parents who have been able to foster this resilience. Once successful local practices are identified, we can transfer the information from parent to parent within the setting.

The third column, titled "Suggest Specific Activities", deals with activities being sequenced developmentally, that are part of cultural traditions, and matched to the child's developmental needs. Activities are important for both the caretakers and the children. Knowing that there are special things they can do to help their children gives families hope and an increased sense of engagement with the children. While parental hopefulness and engagement may be the most powerful forces we can marshal for children, the activities themselves provide children with the extra stimulation they so often need.

The fourth column headed, "Modify our Activities for Children with Special Needs", includes those children who live under exceptional circumstances (on the streets, refugee camps, or under violent conditions), who have been abused and neglected, or who are showing signs of emotional distress.

Finally, we survey various programmatic models to provide ourselves with a framework for understanding options. We survey the criteria for programming, define the types of programmes, and look at examples of how others have implemented each type of programme. While our linked framework has proved to be a useful training tool, training officers' experiences indicated some points that have to be taken into account when implementing a training programme.

Select participants to form a team of advocates for child development programming. Most countries have a limited number of people with experience managing these types of programmes, particularly programmes for children from birth to 3 years of age and programmes making use of a home-based model. To draw together local expertise and experience, it is useful to invite representatives from international, national, and local agencies, including policymakers, programme designers, and implementers. During training the emphasis may then be placed on participants serving as resources for one another in the process of advocating, planning, and implementing programmes.

Start with information that the group feels a compelling need for. If one is to provide highly experienced workers with information on children, one must first convince them that the information is both new and immediately useful in their daily work. Enthusiasm and attention are more likely to be engaged and sustained if you begin with topics that have been requested or issues you know participants are struggling with. The information not only must be immediately relevant but also must have obvious implications for practice. If you are to avoid the "So what!" response, academic theories have to be avoided, and generalities need to be brought down to the

specific level. Often, through guided discussions and field observations, the group must be helped to draw its own principles for practice.

Base programme planning on field experiences or demonstrations. Participants can try out their new learning in a variety of ways: guided observation, demonstrations, or applications to their daily lives. Effective observations have included comparisons of the behaviour and development of well- and poorly nourished children and their caregivers. The observations are then the basis for a group discussion of the types of intervention that would be most useful in designing a programme to ease the caregivers burden and foster children's development. Useful demonstrations include arranging for very young children from an orphanage or group home, as well as for those who have been reared in a family, to be observed while they are interacting with adults and with peers and while they are being helped with developmentally appropriate activities.

Provide examples of material used in development programmes. Even the most enthusiastic participant feels overwhelmed by the number of things that need to be done to start a child development programme. When reassured that they do not have to reinvent the wheel for themselves but can adapt local or standard materials, beginning a project seems more feasible. Given the opportunity to see books and materials and to watch the materials being used by children, makes programme planning concrete, immediate, and exciting.

Address the necessary distinction between early childhood education and child development programming. Participants are most familiar with early childhood education in preschool centres where three- or four-year old children sit at desks learning to count, colour, and recite. Child development programmes are more broadly conceived of as serving children from infancy onward, most often in community centres, with family members participating with the child. Child development programmes are also less likely to be freestanding programmes and more likely to be added onto existing programmes, making use of the structures in place and family involvement.

Have a special goal in mind. Participants seems to move toward programme implementation when training sessions use a format that allows plenty of time for group interaction and when the group has a specific project to accomplish by the end of the sessions.

Support initial training with technical backup. The enthusiasm generated by a training programme often turns to frustration if participants lack the support they need to proceed. Necessary ingredients include advocacy for local agency cooperation; knowledge of funding possibilities; avenues for gaining access to information, materials, and curricula; and networks of technical experts who can attend ongoing workshops and provide information.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C. : World Bank, 1999.