



*The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development*

# CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES: A VIEW FROM SAVE THE CHILDREN

*Coordinators' Notebook No. 12, December 1992*

by Michael Gibbons  
Save the Children

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## *The Limitation of Isolated Training Events*

Training events are often seen—erroneously, in our experience—as the primary input to ECD and other community education programmes' effectiveness. Often, these adult learning activities are conceived of and executed as isolated events to help individual learners improve skills and knowledge, without adequate reference to the requirements and demands of the organisational, programmatic, and community contexts. As a consequence, most training plans for child development staff are concerned with the learning activities during training events. Traditionally, this includes venue, materials, technique, and time. However, in Save The Children's experience of over 60 years of community education, the limitations of this view of training as isolated learning events for individual adults has become very clear.

Two composite examples from real experience illustrate this point-

- **IMPLEMENTORS.** NGO programme staff trained in child development concepts and programming options at a national workshop return to find several key constraints to using their new skills: the NGO director does not see ECD programming as a priority, the programme budget of the education sector has been reduced. No new initiatives can be funded; education field staff are skilled in supervising school construction and distributing school materials but not in child assessment or parent education

- **PLANNERS.** After a regional ECD training workshop for donors, education programme officers, and national ministries, some participants returned to jobs unrelated to ECD programming, the participants from the ministries of health and education found it extremely difficult to work together or design joint activities. The donor staff felt they had no national support for any new ECD initiatives.

Some of the training problems and constraints to success encountered both before and after training events can be summarised as follows:

#### PRE-TRAINING CONSTRAINTS

- Insufficient information about the learners' needs
- Curriculum dictated by outsiders
- Inappropriate and hard-to-adapt concepts or materials
- Unclear learning objectives or training plan
- Difficulty linking training to field activity
- No organisational or family support

#### POST-TRAINING CONSTRAINTS

- Same job constraints after training
- No support for using new skills or information
- Difficulty adapting materials, concepts, and new ideas to the "real world"
- Difficulty monitoring use or results of new skills
- Difficulty assessing programme impact of training

## *Beyond Events: The Continuous Training Cycle*

Many years of programmatic training experience suggest that a broader conception of training, more akin to that of organisational and human resource development, is an appropriate response to the common problems listed above, which are key constraints to successful child development programming. We agree with Lynton and Pareek in their work *Training for Development* (Kumarian Press, New York, 1992, p. ix) when they say "*the kind of education we call training . . . is concerned with **people-on-the-job-in-organisations**,*" that is, people carrying out child development work in organised settings, be they government, NGO centres, community groups, or even families. This first basic idea is to take account, not only of the learner but also of the constraints and the opportunities for applying new ideas in the learner's context. Second, we recognise that capacity building for child development programming is not just a matter of *individual* skill building. Rather, it is often a matter of capacity building for groups and organisations, so team organisation, planning, and work redesign must accompany the skill-building process. Third, successful training is not a series of one-time learning events, but a long-term process of linked assessment, follow-up, and support activities that continuously reinforce learning achievements. Based on these three key ideas, as illustrated in the following figure, training can be envisioned as a cycle, or repeating sequence, of steps that occur before, during, and after the training event itself.

TABLE 1  
THE TRAINING PROCESS

	Why Are We Here?	Vision/Purpose	What Do We Hope To Achieve?		
	<i>Needs Assessment</i>	<i>Planning</i>	<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Follow-up</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
Who?	Written objectives/plans	Active participation	Supervision, assistance, resources, feedback, and support	Indicators of success	
Existing Skills?	Organised activities and materials	Creative methods		Results achieved?	
What Needs?		Proof of learning		Impact? Assessment of new needs?	

The proposed training cycle can be used to organise efforts before, during, and after training events into a well-integrated process of logical steps. The process itself can be blended into the overall architecture of a child development programme, not just as an initial input, but as a core theme of programme support and improvement. For each step in the cycle, there are practical methods and skills that both educators and trainers can learn to improve the overall effectiveness of their training, and consequently, of their programming work.

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# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN ACTION

*Coordinators' Notebook No. 12, December 1992*

by Kate Torkington  
Bernard van Leer Foundation

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For many years, I have been advocating and using active experiential learning methods as a trainer of professionals, paraprofessionals, and trainers of both. Experiential learning refers to the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of the experience of the learner, who is at the centre of the learning process. The active experiential mode of training supports a number of principles that guide the Bernard van Leer Foundation's work with children, families, and communities. Empowering, building on strengths, and developing confidence and a sense of self-determination in people and communities in disadvantaged circumstances are some of these principles. The Foundation's experience indicates that it is only training in the active/experiential mode that has congruence with these principles. This article concentrates on the application of experiential learning principles and practice to the training of those who are concerned with young children—parents, paraprofessionals, professionals, and trainers of all three. Though the training of adults is the major focus of most Foundation projects, the categories of adult learners just described are all trained with reference to the care and education of young children.

## *Experiential Learning and Early Childhood Development Training*

There is an important reason for using active experiential methods in training adults who work with young children. Such methods are likely to produce adults who think for themselves, are creative and imaginative, and have learnt the value of interaction in the learning process. They, in turn, are more likely to work with young children and families in a way that echoes their training. The result will be children who learn better, whose developmental needs are understood, and whose language skills will develop more quickly through improved interaction with caring adults.

When adults are trained through traditional methods, as in many developing countries, the results are inevitable and evident. Preschool classrooms are arranged with the ubiquitous "corners" that are devoted to aspects of children's development, such as the art corner, the building corner, and the reading corner. Preschool teachers, once they have arranged the "corners", frequently become passive observers of the children's activities. What is missing is the vital interaction between adult caregivers and children, the discussion about children's drawings or the pictures they are looking at. The emphasis in these teachers' training has been on the theory of child development. Its practical application has also been dealt with in a way that has allowed no challenge. Trainees come to know exactly the one and only way to arrange a classroom.

Another example indicates how individual creativity and imagination can be discouraged in the training of preschool teachers. On a mission to a developing country, I was asked to act as external examiner for the work of students completing a preschool teachers' training course. Because the trainer was trying hard to ensure that the course had a practical component, each trainee had made toys and learning equipment for the children. Every trainee had made exactly the same collection. When asked why this was so, the reply was that if they all made different things, it would be difficult for the trainer to give marks for their efforts! This is a perfect example of behaviourism taken to its limits. The saddest aspect of all this is that although trainees in developing countries may have very low levels of formal education, they have high levels of creativity and imagination, strong oral traditions and understanding of children's needs, which together provide an ideal base for training and for working with children. These are precisely the qualities that can be drawn on through active experiential training methods. The projects supported by the Foundation are frequently described as offering alternative ways of providing care and education for young children. In that sense, they are innovative and therefore open to exploring new ways of training.

### *Some of the Problems*

One of the problems encountered in training adults is the *self-perpetuating characteristics of learning*. In other words, adults have been taught how to learn in the early days of their schooling, and that almost certainly means they were taught in the traditional pedagogic way. When the same traditional methods are employed at a later learning stage (for example, in their training for work in an early childhood centre), then the adults' responses vary from anger, through

withdrawal, to passivity, depending on the level of confidence they brought to their training. Predictably, the level of confidence is lowest in those who have failed in or dropped out of the formal educational system, which includes most of those in Foundation projects in developing countries. In contrast, the experiential methods that have been used in many of the parent education initiatives have been well-received; evaluation of such initiatives always note increased personal confidence, growth of knowledge and understanding, and development of collective approaches to problems.

This is not to say that trainers who want to introduce participatory experiential methods in training early childhood workers encounter no difficulties. The main problem is one of credibility. Pay and status, however inadequate, as well as personal satisfaction, are the rewards for becoming a preschool teacher. If employers are ministries of education, training standards will have to reach a certain level that will be determined according to existing training programmes for teachers. In other words, preschool teacher training programmes must look as much like primary teacher training programmes as possible, with an emphasis on theory, to provide academic credibility. Even where preschool teachers are employed by the community or parents, the pressure for academic credibility to ensure status remains.

A very different problem refers to the large numbers of children in schools and daycare centres in developing countries. If workers are trained in a methodology that emphasises understanding of children's individual backgrounds and learning needs, and also emphasises the importance of adult-child interaction in day-to-day work, then the large numbers of children in preschool classrooms in many developing countries will be, to say the least, daunting.

A final problem relates to the training of trainers. For experiential learning methods to work well, there has to be a transformation in the traditional cycle of "being taught how to learn". Ideally, this transformation would occur by focusing on the *utilisation of experiential methods during the first stages of training*. This may be a long, difficult process at the level of the formal educational system. In a sense, it would mean targeting the trainers at the initial level, and then have those who were trained with these new methods move through the system to eventually become a new generation of trainers themselves. Although there are more possibilities for transformation within the informal educational system, problems of credibility remain.

## *Methodology and Current Practice*

The problems outlined above are real and daunting. In addressing trainers of both professionals and paraprofessionals who will, in turn, work with children, parents, and communities, the message is to proceed carefully. If you really want to introduce active experiential methods into your training, do it at a pace you can cope with. The first thing you have to decide is whether you are able or wish to take on the role of facilitator rather than traditional teacher. The latter allows you to keep distance from your trainees, gives you a clear structure you can conform to, and provides you with a status given to one who "knows the answers." If you believe that your present methods not only result in a good pass rate for your trainees in their final tests but also result in children receiving much more than custodial care, then you may see no reason to change your methods. If, however, you feel less satisfied, then you might wish to design a training course that

encourages the active involvement of trainees by drawing on their own experiences. This means that promoting the trainees' self-development should be seen as one of the main training objectives. This goal includes tasks such as giving encouragement, fostering initiative and creativity rather than conformity, questioning rather than giving answers, and providing appropriate support in the practicum. The following points should help you design a training course using experiential methods:

***Make a decision to make practice the focus of your training.*** Think of practice in the following manner: (a) the practice the trainees have already had when relating to and understanding young children in their everyday lives (*natural practice*) and (b) the practicum that you arrange for them or that is provided by their present situation as a worker in a centre, as a child caregiver, or as a village health worker (*constructed practice*). Your task as a trainer will be to use both these forms of practice in the development of a trainee.

***Begin with a diagnostic approach.*** Find out as much as possible about each of the trainees. Talk to them individually about their experiences as mothers, as sisters, and as children themselves. Show that you value their experiences by drawing on them during the training. If the trainees are already childcare workers, discuss their experiences and discover what they see as their strengths and their weaknesses. Discuss with them the possibility of using their present work situation to set up a supervised and supported practicum. Make group sessions an opportunity for trainees to get to know one another, to share expectations and self-doubt, and build self-confidence as well as confidence in other members of the group and in the facilitator. It is also useful to develop observation skills.

***Avoid beginning courses with theory.*** This approach frequently serves to make trainees feel ignorant and reduces confidence. If you are really confident, you could "inject" theory spontaneously, as the need arises, when analysing or reflecting on practice in the group sessions or during practice supervision or support. If you are not confident enough to do this, avoid placing theory first, followed by practice. Instead, try the opposite strategy and introduce a block of practice first, followed by a block of theory, or find some way to interweave the two.

***Use analysis of practice as the basis of your group training-sessions.*** Discuss in the group what has happened in the practice, think about how things might have been done differently, discuss what trainees have observed about the behaviour or temperament of individual children or what they have learnt when observing how adults relate to children. If you do not feel confident enough to put these into a theoretical context at this point, arrange to have a group session as soon as possible. Hence introduce the relevant theory (as a short lecture if you like) and then, the group will discuss the theory and whether and how it has illuminated their practice.

***Encourage peer support.*** As the training proceeds, there should be greater confidence in trainees, which will allow them to reflect together on their practice. If problems arise in practice, trainees can begin to support one another with ideas and encouragement and even confront problems collectively.

***Spend time with trainees in their practice situation.*** There are difficulties with having to travel long distances in developing countries, but I suggest that one day working alongside a trainee in her practice situation is worth many days of presenting theory. Try always to comment and build on the positive aspects of the trainees' work. If there are negative aspects, rather than dwelling on them, suggest alternative ways of working.

***Be sensitive in your approach to cultural and traditional practices.*** In relation to child development, be clear which traditional practices have a positive effect, which ones have a negative effect, and which ones could be considered neutral. These issues will come up if you work in an experiential way, because the training will be concerned not only with knowledge, understanding, and skill development but also with confronting values and attitudes. Positive practices should always be commented on and used as starting points for discussion of more negative practices. For instance, some Egyptian mothers put fine gauze over the babies' faces to protect them from the sun; others, at a later stage, are so protective of their children that they keep them indoors and the children's health suffers from lack of sunlight. In this case, a positive practice can be linked with a negative practice in bringing out some learning points. If cultural practices are not dealt with sensitively, there will be resistance to learning on the part of those whose culture seems to be threatened or attacked.

***Develop your own materials and activities to encourage participatory learning.*** It is important to benefit from the experience and new ideas acquired in training to promote the development of culturally-relevant materials, rather than to work through the activities just as they are. For example, photographs, pictures, and videos are a most effective tool in that they raise discussion on child development issues. They will be doubly effective if the photographs are taken, the pictures drawn, or the videos made in the community where the training is taking place. Visual material is particularly effective when training illiterate or semiliterate people. The same is true of role play, which is one of the most effective ways of getting points across in any situation. In cultures that have strong oral traditions, role play is not only effective but also culturally appropriate.

## ***The Challenge***

In summary, successful training programmes for those who work with young children focus on the learners' strengths rather than weaknesses; apply active and participatory training methods; perceive the trainer as a facilitator rather than a director; and foster a cooperative rather than a competitive training environment. Training programmes that incorporate these components have greater likelihood of developing trainees' self-direction and confidence in problem-solving activities. Although training is moving away from an information-centred approach towards an interactive method of experiential learning, training methods must nevertheless be sensitive to the cultural context. It is also essential that the training offered be a continual process—providing a balanced mix of structured sessions with opportunities for follow-up and individual supervision—that reinforces, supports, and strengthens the learning process. This approach, which is both time- and resource-intensive, is often neglected in the drive to increase coverage. If the goal is to create a sustainable, high-quality system of care, then the training approach described here is essential.

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# MAKING THE LINKS: THE ROLE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME OFFICERS

*Coordinators' Notebook No. 12, December 1992*

by Nancy D. Colletta  
Consultant to Christian Children's Fund

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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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# PARENT EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMES

*Coordinators' Notebook No. 12, December 1992*

by Cassie Landers  
Consultative Group for Early Childhood Care and Development

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In the past two decades there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of the family in the care and education of young children. The current attention on families stems largely from several interrelated global trends. Family structures throughout the world continue to change in response to industrialisation, urbanisation, population growth, increasing longevity, and migration. While these changes have created new opportunities, they have also disrupted familiar cultural practices and survival patterns that families have developed over the years to cope with their multiple responsibilities. One aspect of life affected by these trends is the ability of the family to provide optimal childrearing environments in the context of widespread changes in the social fabric of families, neighbourhoods, and communities. Adding to this concern is increased recognition of families' major influence on young children's social, emotional, and cognitive development.

As a consequence of these changes, among all those concerned with the development of children and families, there is an increased demand for high-quality, community-based childcare services. As a complementary rather than alternative strategy to the direct provision of high-quality child care programmes, this proposal highlights the potential benefits resulting from programmes designed to educate parents and other caregivers in ways that enhance their care and interaction

with the child and enrich the immediate environment. The following discussion sets forth a rationale for working with parents, outlines the basic childrearing tools required by caregivers, and reviews the range of available strategies for providing parents and families access to this information.

## *Parent Education: A Rationale*

Educators have long acknowledged the significant influence of the family on the care and development of the child and the tremendous cultural and familial differences in parent-child patterns of interaction. Research on parent-child interaction underscores differences in the abilities of parents to teach their own children effectively. For example, the realisation that some parental teaching styles, language interaction, and cognitive expectations are not conducive to providing the "optimal learning environment" has stimulated methods to enrich parent-child learning interactions. Thus, recognition of the family as the child's primary socialising agent has been accompanied by periodic calls for monitoring parental performance and by recommendations for providing parents with childrearing information and guidance.

Acknowledgement of the family's role as a major socialisation force has also contributed to the notion that if the positive benefits to the child are to be maintained over time, experience in child development programmes must be reinforced at home. Thus, a second stream feeding the current efforts to involve parents in their children's learning stems from the undisputed failure of almost all intervention programmes without such involvement to sustain the considerable cognitive gains demonstrated during the child's participation in such programmes. Failure to maintain cognitive gains from programmes with minimal parental involvement has been found regardless of the theoretical orientation or intensity of the programme. The conviction that parent involvement remains an indispensable ingredient for sustaining the accomplishments of early child education programmes has led to the conviction that to work with children alone is to invite failure and frustration.

In light of this perspective, it is apparent that a comprehensive redefinition of early education is critical. Such a redefinition leads to a major new objective for professional educators, in order to influence the child's education in the home, in the community, and through the mass media from birth throughout childhood. *"This objective would require that educators involve themselves in training parents and future parents in family care and education skills. ... The ability of the family to care for and educate the child is weakened by stresses and strengthened by support from neighbours, friends, relatives, social groups, and relevant professionals. ... If the education profession could develop new roles they might provide training and experience in childcare and education to future parents throughout the period of school attendance and also provide methods, material, training and consultation to parents of school-age children. Training and support for family care and education of the child before school entrance might be provided by health personnel, by educators, or by a new discipline. Ideally, professional education will provide support for family education of the child. ... Schools are necessary but not sufficient for the education of the child."*

## *Basic Child Development Tools: A Parent's Right*

Since the responsibility for determining the child's best interest rests first and foremost with parents, the doctrine of parental rights is a fundamental premise of parent-education efforts. Some of the basic childrearing tools are listed below.

***Knowledge about child development.*** Parents need knowledge about how children develop. Children's normative patterns and stages in physical, social, and language development, as well as their nutritional and health needs at these stages, should be part of the knowledge base for parenthood. Knowledge of children's emotional needs and typical early social-emotional behaviours may similarly forestall inappropriate parental responses to their emotions and behaviours. Understanding the patterns and processes of early cognitive development could help parents to develop more realistic expectations of the stages of development and the prior skills required for more mature competencies.

***Observation skills and more effective parenting.*** A basic need of all parents, regardless of socio-economic status or educational level, is to learn how to observe a young child. Informal child-watching can help one understand a child's level of development in relation to what one would like a young child to learn or accomplish. In essence, parents need information and observation skills to help them discover the match between a child's ability or readiness and some ways and means to help the child achieve a given developmental goal. Such awareness can help a parent to handle a child's daily frustrations more skilfully.

***Alternative strategies for problem prevention and discipline.*** Parents need insights for managing child behaviours. Knowledge and skills regarding alternative methods of discipline and problem avoidance are basic childrearing tools. Knowing how to implement a variety of positive rewards can help a child to enjoy more fully both the exploration and the struggles required in mastering new skills.

***How to use home for learning experiences.*** Another basic tool consists in knowing how to take advantage of settings, routines, and activities in the home to create learning and problem-solving opportunities. Parents of young children need to know ways of turning household objects into learning materials for children's exploration.

***Parents need language tools.*** How does a parent respond to a baby's unintelligible babbling and misshapen early words or simplify explanations to make sense of the world for a preschool child? How does a parent ensure that words are not used mainly to give orders or express irritation? The parent who has learned to give names to the things a child notices, to the actions a child carries out, and to the feelings a child expresses has a powerful tool for enhancing the child's language skills.

***Parents need support.*** Most of all, parents need to understand the tremendous impact they have on their children's lives. Through their attention, expressed pleasure, listening, and interest, the child's growing sense of self is nourished just as his or her body is nourished through food.

Moreover, the opportunity for parents to find pleasure and interest in their relationships with their own and other children should be understood and clarified.

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HEAD START: A PROMISING MODEL FOR INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

The *Head Start Programme*, a governmental programme launched in the United States in 1965, is a comprehensive early childhood programme committed to involving parents in the education of their children. Targeting four-year-old children and their families, the programme was initially designed as a compensatory programme that would provide enriching experiences and would enable the children to compete with their middle-class peers in kindergartens and elementary schools. Since its inception, Head Start has proved to be one of the most successful programmes of the "War On Poverty Initiative", and it is based on two main principles: first, that children benefit from interdisciplinary programmes to foster their development and remedy their problems and, second, that the entire family and community must be involved in the child's learning development. In Table 1 is a description of the different roles parents can play in Head Start and the benefits for the parent and child.

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TABLE 1  
THE FOUR ROLES OF PARENTS

	<i>Decision-Makers</i>	<i>Volunteers</i>	<i>Planners</i>	<i>Partners</i>
<i>What</i>	Making policy decisions in the programme	Participating in the programme and classroom	Planning workshops, projects, and events	Linking the centre to the home
<i>How</i>	Through: Centre committee Policy committee State, regional and national associations	Through: Classroom visits Parent Meetings Volunteer Work Employment	In: Community action Health and safety Career development Education and training	Through: Home visits by teachers, family-service workers, nurses, etc. Newsletters, menus, information, and materials from the centre to be used at home

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<i>Why</i>	Parents need to show their children a style of life that is responsible and committed.	Parents need to be actively involved in the world of <i>Head Start</i> .	Parents need to be actively learning and discovering new ideas to improve their lives, their children's schools, and their community.	Parents need to recognise their children's <i>Head Start</i> accomplishments and support more growth.
	Children need to see their parents' concern about their world.	Children can take pride in their parents' activities in the programme.	Children can see their parents also learning while performing activities to improve their lives.	Children can see that their whole family is involved and interested in <i>Head Start</i> friends, activities, and experiences.

## *Parent-Education: Programmes and Strategies*

Programmes designed to promote parent involvement, education, and support can be examined in relation to their type, their format, and their goals and objectives. A programme's degree of parental participation, its location (home, community, school), and its overall theoretical perspective are also useful dimensions for describing the formal relationships between parents and other child care providers. In this section, general programme types will be presented along with the content area they most often address.

***General parent-education.*** The delivery of information and childrearing advice on a wide range of topics characterises general parent-education programmes. Child development, behaviour, learning, and care guidelines are often presented during group meetings. Media materials, such as books, magazines, newspapers, films, and television, can be placed in this category, since their goal is to provide parents with information and advice. General parent-education is expected to enhance children's development and behaviour. The assumption is that an informed parent can respond more skilfully than an uninformed parent can to the range of child-rearing activities and responsibilities.

While the specific content of general parent-education programmes varies widely, fostering the child's physical wellbeing and normal development tend to be the predominant themes. In social service settings, family relationships within and outside of the home are usually emphasised along with role responsibilities, cultural differences in childrearing patterns, and appropriate use of community services. By far, the predominant sources of general parent-education information and advice are mental health authorities. Mental health and learning-oriented programmes frequently include a focus on the child, family, and school-related behaviour, as well as on the early identification of problems and the techniques for managing children's needs. The normal

developmental milestones and sequences of growth are often presented. Detailed exercises might be outlined for improving parents' abilities to deal with behaviour and learning. Such programmes have focused on communication, intelligence, values, problem solving, behaviour control, and parent-child interaction.

General parent-education, then, is characterised by efforts to advise, teach, and inform parents and other primary caregivers. The populations served by these programmes may vary considerably—high school students, special groups of teen-aged mothers, high-risk parents, parents' groups for schools for the handicapped, new parent-groups, participants of community projects.

***Parent training.*** Sometimes the child or parent needs to gain detailed information and clearly defined experience and skills. It may be that an infant must be physically handled in a particular way, that a family wishes to know exactly how to teach a set of skills, or that a mother will benefit from seeing modelled some specific language and social interactions that will help her baby learn and develop normally. Typically, parent-training programmes are more focused and formal than those of general parent-education. Parent-training programmes contain a series of instruction goals and procedures and are usually conducted by trained professionals. In each case, the curriculum content makes it distinctly different from general parent-education.

Special education programmes have recently placed a great deal of emphasis on building parents' abilities to handle their handicapped infants and toddlers within their first year of life. Such early intervention is thought to prevent or reduce the degree of later difficulties that can be the cumulative effect of early medical problems, developmental delays, physical deficiencies, and non-stimulating environments. In this type of programme, parents are taught how to hold and feed their child, how to create learning activities, and how to work with professionals. Training programmes are critical to prevent the problems resulting from risk factors that have been identified as effecting early development. These factors include premature birth, illness, malnutrition, parenting failures, maltreatment, and stressful home environments.

***Parent participation and observation.*** Parents have assumed responsibilities in the daily activities of many early child development programmes. For example, they may participate as assistant teachers or volunteers, or they may observe the programme directly or through meetings and newsletters. The distinguishing characteristic of this kind formal or informal parent involvement is that families are the direct participants and observers in the programme. They contribute in some way to the child's school experiences and see firsthand the child's activities, environment, and relationships. From this involvement, parents often become familiar with teachers, learning objectives, activities, and policies.

***Parents as policy-makers and advisors.*** Parent boards are one example of how parents can participate in the design and implementation of early child development programmes. In some programmes, parents are involved in staff selection, financial management, evaluation, and curriculum design. Parents' role as "policy-makers" is considered by many to be at the highest level of parent/school relationships. Family members who formally provide advice or influence programme administration through committees fall into this category. Educating parents

regarding their roles as advisors and policy-makers is a broader goal than educating them regarding general information or specific skills. Parents learn to deal with schools as systems and with programmes in terms of what they are seeking to achieve across several years of education. Such insights are quite important if schools are to be responsive to the real needs of children and families growing up in a particular time and place, with a set of cultural norms and priorities.

*Parents as home-school liaisons.* Perhaps the most traditional view of family-school relationships is that in which parents function as liaisons between the child and programme. They interpret and in some cases help to maintain goals and activities the child has experienced. They provide a communication link between home and school, teacher and child, society and family. As they fulfil this role, parents become informed and experienced in managing the relationships that directly benefit the child. They learn to examine the needs and priorities of each and to determine how to help one or the other in achieving particular goals. The teacher who, at a conference, points out the child's interest in counting, and the parent who informs a director about the child's previous school experience, are maintaining the continuity between home and school that sustains and supports the educational process.

## *General Parent-support Programmes*

The orientation of this approach to parent education is towards helping families to provide stable, nurturing, and healthy environments for children. Parent-to-Parent materials are particularly important as resources for mothers and fathers in the ongoing tasks and challenges of parenthood. Information shared among parents provides them with emotional and social support as they, in turn, help their children to grow and learn. Parents come to feel that they are not rearing their children in isolation, that there are people and programmes to which they can turn for information, and for a shared sense of the challenges and satisfactions surrounding child and family development.

Whether or not they include a formal set of parent-oriented activities, childcare programmes are an example of parent support. Families rely on early child development programmes for a variety of child and family assistance. This might include, for example, health care guidelines and advice on child learning and behaviour. Centres are meeting places for mothers and fathers and provide a peer group for children. The children's centre thus provides parent support as a by-product of its childcare and educational role. Staff members can expand this function by arranging for parents to meet regularly with one another or to utilise resources that keep them informed about common interests.

## *Summary*

The challenges inherent in the design and implementation of successful parent-education programmes should not underestimate the rapid changes occurring in the past two decades in the world's societies. Major transformations at the structural, cultural, and economic levels have had a great impact on women, men, children, families, and communities. Although the themes of partnership and family support are not new to the field of early childhood, current family

arrangements, functions, and roles present challenges not previously addressed. Time available to families for nurturing their children has diminished, and economic pressures on families cause children to receive inadequate care and to be placed in non-family environments at earlier ages. Furthermore, much more is known about the patterns and critical periods of early learning and the quality of the environment required to foster children's development. Thus the need for a range of supportive child development programmes and activities is no longer questioned.

In spite of continuous change, children are still being raised in families, communities, childcare programmes, and schools. Caregivers in this setting are responsible for meeting children's developmental needs and preparing them for a future in society. In the early years, from birth through the lower primary grades, children's social, emotional, and physical learning requirements are managed by parents, with supportive efforts from professionals. Each contributes to the understanding and skills of the other, making parent education one of the most fascinating specialities in early childhood and primary education. There is a belief in the potential of the early years as a time when families can aid the developmental and educational processes. We have come to a turning point in our work with families and children, and programmes can make a significant contribution to the child's growth, learning, and development and to the family's functioning.

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*Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.*  
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Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

# TRAINING FOR CHILD CARE WORKERS IN INDIA

*The Coordinators' Notebook No. 12, December 1992*

by Mina Swaminathan  
Action for Child Care and Education Services

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## *Historical Overview*

The history of early childhood education in India dates back to the 1890s, when the kindergarten was started in the country. Later on, during the decades before independence, some pioneers—like Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak—struggled to establish a number of educational institutions for young children and training centres for teachers. Badheka worked extensively in Dakshinamurthi in the Gujarat region, while Modak launched the *Nutan Bal Shikshan Sangh* (New Child Education Society) in Bombay during the 1920s. Also, Maria Montessori's work in India during the war stimulated not only the growth of early childhood education at centres organised around her philosophical principles but also the establishment of training centres. Despite these initiatives, early childhood education activities remained scattered, concentrated in urban settings, restricted to certain regions in the country, and confined to those who could afford such services.

It was not until the creation of the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 that the national government started playing a role on a broader scale. The board sponsored voluntary agencies that would set up *balwadis* (child gardens) for the children of the less privileged. The objective of the programme was to shift the focus towards rural areas and the poor and to emphasise the integral development of the child rather than preschool education alone.

### ***The first breakthrough: Bal Sevikas***

By this time there were a number of training institutions concentrating on early childhood education. But the rapid growth of the balwadis revealed the need for well-trained workers who could foster the growth and the integral development of the child and who were willing to work and live in the villages. As a result, the concept of the *bal sevika* (one who serves the child) was coined, and the Bal Sevika Training (BST) programme was launched by the Indian Council for Child Welfare in 1961. Since then, the programme has been implemented in numerous training centres throughout the country under the sponsorship of the council.

The main objective of the BST Programme is to educate a worker capable of responding to the various needs of children from birth to 16 years of age. In practice, however, the greatest emphasis has been on the 0-6 age group. The basic guidelines of the programme are health and nutrition, preschool education, and community organisation. Over the years both the content and the methodology of the programme have been revised in response to changing circumstances. For instance, since the 1970's, in an attempt to overcome the more static approach of child psychology, child development issues have been given more attention in the theoretical section of the course. During the earlier years, the course was mainly theoretical and the practical section was restricted to some field visits for observation and demonstration and to a few activities such as cooking nutritious foods and preparing educational aids. At the present time, greater emphasis is placed on practical aspects, including field placements and opportunities to acquire skills by practice rather than by observation.

Although the BST programme is a valuable initiative, because of the size of the country and the complexity and magnitude of its problems, the programme did not contribute much. In fact, during the early 1970s it was estimated that there were only 2,000 balwadis in the entire country. Two main problems could be pointed out. First, most of the balwadis were still located in urban or semi-urban areas or tended to service the more affluent sectors within the rural communities; it was apparent that the poor and the isolated sectors of the population had hardly been reached. Second, the balwadis provided a diluted version of child development with an emphasis on formal basic education. This was opposed to the growing concern on the introduction of nutrition and health issues in the curriculum that dominated the thinking of planners throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. The time was ripe for the next breakthrough.

### ***The second breakthrough: Integrated Child Development Services***

In 1974, the national government launched the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), which has become the world's largest attempt to provide a package of services to the most vulnerable sectors of the population. The initiative started with 33 modest projects reaching about 150,000 young children. Today, it has expanded to nearly 2,000 projects for 13 million children aged 0-6 and 3 million pregnant and lactating women. To date, there are 250,000 centres that employ 500,000 paraprofessional workers. The programmes concentrate on urban slums, tribal areas and the more remote and backward rural regions of the country.

The ICDS Package consists of the following basic services:

- Supplementary nutrition
- Immunisation
- Health check-ups and referral
- Preschool education for children aged 3 to 6
- Health and nutrition for women

The focal point for the delivery of these services is the *anganwadi* (courtyard garden), a term borrowed from the simple child care centre, developed by the late Anutai Wagh, which could be run in the courtyard of any village home. The *anganwadi worker*, the key worker and first paraprofessional in the child care service, is usually a local woman. She is considered a community worker earning a small honorarium for the services she renders to the community.

The *anganwadi worker's* training is planned as a "job training" and consists of a four-month course conducted at the training centres—many of which had originally been BST centres. At first, the *anganwadi* training was a summarised version of the BST course, intended not only to be completed in shorter time but also to train women with lower educational qualifications. The content of the course was heavily oriented towards health and nutrition problems and paid cursory attention to the skills needed to promote cognitive, social, and emotional development of children. As in the case of the BST training, the early overwhelming emphasis on theory has gradually been reduced while more attention is being given to the acquisition of practical skills and experience.

Since the *anganwadi worker's* duties include home visits and parent education, the acquisition of communication and interactive skills is strongly encouraged. However, there is little time left during the formal training period to develop these skills or to learn them by observing role models. Besides, the *anganwadi* must devote an enormous amount of time to learning record-keeping and administrative procedures which take up much of the training time. Therefore, it is not surprising if the *anganwadi worker* does not fully acquire the necessary skills to perform her varied tasks.

If the *bal sevika* can be described as the first-level professional, and the *anganwadi worker* as the paraprofessional, another term should be found to describe the role of the ubiquitous helper—who can perhaps be called the para-paraprofessional. Within the context of a hierarchical society, the helper is present at every centre in India and often performs all the menial tasks and the daily chores at the childcare centre. The helper fetches the children from and to their homes, cleans the centre, fetches fuel and water when needed, prepares the meals and washes the utensils, helps children wash themselves and puts them to sleep, comforts the little ones and cleans up after them, maintains relations with the mothers, and dispenses traditional lore and wisdom. The helper, who is usually an older woman or a widow, is generally illiterate or lacks formal education and, hence, is unable to keep written records. However, she can be found managing the entire centre in the absence of the *anganwadi worker* or *bal sevika*.

Yet the helper—the pillar of the system—has remained underpaid, underestimated, and neglected as far as training is concerned. Occasionally she is given a one- or two-day orientation, but few serious attempts have been made to involve her in the centre's activities and make the best of her knowledge and skills, or to develop strategies for training people with poor education. Motivating, training, and involving the para-paraprofessionals, who form the bedrock of the system, remains one of the greatest unmet challenges ahead of us.

In addition to these two major tracks described above, there are several other kinds of training, though most of these alternatives have limited range and availability. These include courses for pre-primary and nursery training, vocational training at high school and diploma courses, and some initiatives that integrate training for both pre-primary and primary education.

## *Constraints and Opportunities*

Throughout India's long involvement in the field of early childhood development (ECD), several recurrent constraints continue to challenge both the structure and the content of India's ECD training scheme. Issues related to the quantity, levels, contents, quality, motivation, certification, and sufficiency of the available personnel are briefly presented in this section. In addressing these challenges, three innovative training programmes—mobile creches, the Vanasthali Rural Development Centre, and Mahila Samahkya Gujarat—illustrate a range of alternative approaches.

**Quantity.** The question of quantity regarding first-level professionals or paraprofessionals is not so much a question of *number* as it is of range and *scope of coverage*. Graduates of training institutions in urban settings often remain unemployed or work for appallingly low wages. Although there are other, rural employment sources, the graduates are unwilling to live and work in rural areas. On the other hand, owing to the low levels of female education in rural and tribal areas, it is difficult to find rural girls or women with a high school education who can be trained as anganwadi workers or bal sevikas.

**Levels.** In absolute terms, there is a tremendous shortage of training courses at graduate and postgraduate levels that could be suitable for supervisors, trainers, heads of school, and other middle-level officials. The ICDS offers its own "job-oriented" courses for middle-level supervisors, and while a number of universities now offer postgraduate courses in child development, there are hardly any graduate courses or undergraduate diplomas in early childhood education. The absence of training opportunities for workers at the bottom of the ladder has already been noted. Thus, there is a peculiar lopsidedness, and shortsightedness, in the entire training structure, which is bulging in the middle but weak at both extremes.

**Content.** The content of early childhood care and education (ECCE) training usually pays lip service to the notion of the child's "integral development". However, in practical terms it tends to focus almost exclusively on either health or nutrition. A third area of concern is a type of formal preschool education heavily inclined towards group activities, with little emphasis on play,

developmental tasks, spontaneity and individuality. Cultural differences and the social situation of children in poverty also tend to be ignored or overlooked.

**Quality.** Quality can be measured in terms by which the objectives of the training programme are fulfilled. A participatory approach, with a flexible decentralised curriculum that is adapted to the cultural background, needs, and abilities of the trainees and that uses innovative training and communication strategies may become the hallmark of thoughtful pedagogical planning. Yet this participatory approach is rarely found in mainstream training programmes, which tend to rely on a rigid central curriculum, an authoritarian relationship between the trainer and the trainee, and a dependence on traditional “chalk and talk” methods of teaching. Teaching strategies that are more knowledge-oriented than process-oriented encourage memorisation and obedience rather than problem solving and creativity.

**Motivation.** Most of the training programmes, concentrating on the cognitive and psychomotor dimensions of human development, focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Few programmes attempt to address the emotional aspect of development. Yet, change in attitude, or the internalisation of different attitudes, is one of the key elements in training, especially under difficult circumstances of poverty and survival that generate apathy, lack of interest, and lack of motivation on the part of the workers.

**Certification.** Although a number of training courses in ECCE is now available, an overall system of certification has yet to be developed. The lack of such a system has led to restrictions in job mobility for ECCE workers, depriving them of social recognition and opportunities for career advancement. Eighteen years after its inception, the ICDS training continues to be regarded as “job training”, and anganwadi workers are not eligible for any other kind of job. Bal Sevikas, however experienced and skilful, cannot teach in primary schools, whereas primary teachers, who often lack the necessary qualifications, are sometimes obliged to work with young children. Helpers, paraprofessionals, or teachers cannot aspire to higher-level jobs or improve their qualifications. The resulting educational and job stagnation they suffer has an adverse effect on the quality of their work and on their professional status.

**A trainer cadre.** The key to a sound training system in ECCE is the development of a qualified cadre of trainers. The set of factors discussed above hinders such a development. Low-pay, low-status, job insecurity, and poor working conditions have rendered the trainers’ job both unattractive and negligible. At the same time, lack of certification and poor training for trainers have resulted in a shortage of good trainers. Often, trainers are selected on the basis of their academic qualifications in disciplines such as education, psychology, sociology, or medicine (more recently, it has been qualification in child development, nutrition, and public health). But all too often, trainers lack the experience of working with children and communities and do not possess the necessary skills to guide trainees. At the same time, supervisors—who may have practical skills and experience to offer—are rarely involved in training except as occasional resource persons.

## *Training Innovations: Three Case Studies*

This section reviews how three small-scale initiatives have tried to address issues of quality, relevance, practicality, motivation, and renovation and how new training programmes are being developed. While each initiative has unique characteristics, the three of them also show some common features that differentiate them from mainstream efforts. These common characteristics may be summarised as follows:

- Flexible structure and organisation that shifts away from one central fixed curriculum.
- Innovative training strategies and pedagogy adapted to varying educational levels and cultural backgrounds.
- Emphasis on practical, field-based experience.
- Emphasis on partnership—rather than on hierarchical roles—with a more inclusive approach to parents and community.

The three training initiatives are the mobile creches—a programme for low-income working women; the Vanasthali Rural Development Centre—village balwadis run by the community; and Mahila Samakhya Gujarat—a programme to promote women through education, skill-training and community organisation.

### *The Mobile Creches*

Childcare services provided by this programme are directed to children of low-income working mothers. Children stay at the creches for the whole day, or at least during the mother's working hours, and the services provided integrate health, education, nutrition, play, and community work. This comprehensive care is adapted to the needs of the child according to different age groups, as follows:

- Creche (from birth to 3 years of age)
- Balwadi (from 3 to 6 years of age)
- Nonformal care (from 6 years)
- Family groups (adults)

In some situations, such as in the case of families of migrant labourers, children are unable to attend school, and some elements of formal primary education have to be included in the programme.

The daycare worker plays the roles of substitute parent, preschool and primary teacher, health worker, paramedic, nutritionist, adult educator, social worker, and community organiser. As a result, the training programme at the mobile creches was established as an attempt to respond to the multiple needs of the young, untrained workers. From the beginning, emphasis was placed on attempts at finding solutions to practical problems, learning by experience, and calling in for specialised counselling when necessary. As a result, early training courses consisted of

problem-solving sessions during which both trainers and trainees tried to find solutions to the daily problems they encountered while at work in the day-care centres. Later on, workshop sessions were designed to introduce practical teaching, discuss theory and create teaching aids and materials.

Under its present form, this is a two or three-year training course that has the following characteristics:

- *The training is competency-based.* The main objective of the programme is to help caregivers acquire fundamental skills. The trainee is evaluated according to *standards of performance* that reflect skills as well as attitudes towards the children and their families.
- The method is *experiential, pragmatic, inductive and participatory*. The main methodological assumption is that skills are acquired by practice and experience.
- *Trainers and supervisors work closely together, and their roles should become interchangeable.* All trainers are also supervisors responsible for programme implementation. At the same time, all supervisors are trainers responsible for guiding trainees.
- *The more-skilled persons teach the less-skilled ones at every level.* In a sense, all workers are field-trainers, and every member of the group is a learner. Teaching proceeds by *demonstration, role modelling and personalised guidance*. Learning requires *observation, imitation, and practice*.
- *Trainers are practitioners.* The educational qualifications of the trainers and supervisors vary considerably. However, a minimum of five years of experience in the field is required.
- Theory is taught only in *relation to practice*.
- A prerequisite for the training model is the existence of a network of field centres for *supervised placement*.

### ***The training programme also includes different stages:***

1. The **orientation** is based on personal observation of the field programme. During this period, trainees carry out routine tasks and discuss some theoretical principles.
2. The **supervised practical experience**, the most important stage of the process of skill acquisition, consists of a series of demonstration sessions by experienced practitioners, followed by repeated practice under close supervision.
3. The **awareness of rationale**, or introduction to theory, is achieved through the analysis of common problems and everyday experiences that provide the rationale for the guidelines and activities of the programme. This analysis usually takes place in group discussions.
4. **Individual study sessions** include specific assignments, readings, research work and questionnaires.
5. **Practical exercises** include making and utilising different teaching materials, group exercises for designing activity programmes and implementing teamwork, and organising community programmes.
6. During the **internship** period, trainees plan and carry out programmes independently, which are subsequently evaluated by the supervisors.

The content of the training course has been divided into different units:

- Infant care
- Preschool education

- Nonformal education (optional as required for the implementation of specific programmes)
- Health, hygiene, and nutrition
- Administration and community work
- Adult Education

These units are scheduled in a flexible way and may vary according to the individual trainees' study plans, attendance rate at workshops, and ability to complete the assignments. A checklist of skills is provided for each unit, and trainees are expected to acquire a pre-established minimum level. Although each unit may be completed in three months, more time is given to the trainee so that failures can be avoided and a minimum level of skill acquisition may be achieved.

The final evaluation is performed by a committee of specialists, supervisors, and trainers. Rating consists of a five-point scale divided into observation of fieldwork (50 marks), individual assessment (20 marks), written examination (15 marks), and a viva voce (15 marks). The individual assessment includes self-evaluation; informal evaluation by peers, children and their parents; and systematic evaluation by supervisors and trainers.

## *The Vanasthal Rural Development Centre*

Although 80 percent of India's population live in rural villages, most of the rural communities have suffered from constant neglect and abandonment. As a result of large-scale and rapid urbanisation, rural migration to the cities has been massive and is increasing at an ever faster rate. Owing to increasing poverty and lack of resources, life in rural India continues to be extremely difficult.

Among these difficulties, the lack of nursery schools (*balwadi*) in rural regions constitutes a long-standing weakness of the country's educational system. In an attempt to address this problem, a group of social workers, established the *Vanasthali Rural Development Centre* (VRDC) in 1981. Since increasing awareness is urgently needed to enhance the quality of women's and children's lives in rural India, the programmes of the Vanasthali Centre are directed to rural women who already have some formal education and are willing to work with children. The main objectives of the Centre are:

- To promote pre-primary education in rural regions by having a balwadi in every village and a trained teacher in every balwadi.
- To promote the education of rural girls and women.
- To train balwadi teachers to acquire diverse skills and qualifications, so the value of education, family planning nutrition, health, and child care could be communicated to rural families and communities.
- To enhance the quality of education and performance of rural balwadi teachers by implementing enrichment training programmes.
- To publish a bimonthly newsletter to disseminate the work and the educational principles of the Vanasthali Centre, and to provide rural women with updated information and with an opportunity to write about their life, work, and activities in their communities.

The role of a rural balwadi teacher is different from the role of the same teacher in an urban setting. The balwadi teacher constitutes an important source of information to the rural community and can play a role in transforming values at this level. Since much of the shortage of educators and workers in little villages is due to the harsh living conditions in rural areas, the VRDC decided to initiate training courses for rural women and girls who had received partial education (between 7th or 9th grade of standard education). The salient features of this training programme are the following:

- It is a training programme moving from one village to another and, wherever it is possible, organising courses. Participation by community members or local authorities is strongly encouraged.
- On completion of the training programmes, trainees are helped to start a balwadi in their respective villages in collaboration with the local authorities, the community members, and other primary school teachers. For this purpose, the training course includes a series of lectures on how to obtain the support and cooperation of the trainees' communities. Strong emphasis is given to practical training, and internship at existing balwadis is an essential component of the training programme.
- At the end of each course, a public demonstration class (valedictory function) is held, so the community can evaluate the performance of the students. Members of the community, local school teachers, local and state authorities, and the students' parents are invited to the public class. Also, an exhibition is organised to display the materials prepared by the trainees during their course work.
- In addition to being instructed as balwadi teachers, the trainees are oriented to work with parents on questions related to nutrition, hygiene, childcare, family planning, and health. Finally, they are also taught other skills and crafts (such as kitchen gardening or tailoring) that they can, in turn, teach to other women villagers.
- During summer and winter vacations, five-day summer courses are held in cities for trained balwadi teachers. The objectives of these summer courses are to expose the balwadi teachers to a different milieu, to bring them up to date with new developments and techniques in pre-primary education, and to inform them about existing institutions that provide services for women and children. Trainees at these summer courses have to participate in group discussions and attend lectures specially arranged for them. Participants in the courses regularly amount to 300, and all of them are balwadi teachers or trainees.

As of March 1992, the VRDC was running 153 balwadis in different regions, such as Pune, Nasar, Satara, Sangli, and Kolhapur. Although the initiative has contributed to enhance the development standards for hundreds of young children, the VRDC programme has faced several problems. One of the main obstacles to the expansion of the programme is the lack of motivation on the part of the families and communities. Due in part to rising poverty and illiteracy rates, parents still would rather not send their children to the centre than pay small fees—between 3 to 5 Rs a month—for their education. A second set of problems includes the shortage of financial resources, inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and poor facilities.

However, children attending the balwadi regularly show a remarkable change in the various dimensions of their development. Also, with the collaboration of the VRDC, many young women have been able to improve their economic status and enhance their contribution to their households. Education, training, and small financial incentives have all brought self-confidence and a new sense of autonomy to the rural women.

## *Mahila Samakhya Gujarat: A Child Care Programme for and by Rural Women*

Mahila Samakhya (Women's Equality) is a programme aimed at helping poor women to develop their potential fully through education, skill-training, and self-organisation. Although the programme is sponsored by the government, the specific activities are chosen and managed directly by the women's groups, or *shangas*. Currently in operation in three states—Gujarat, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh—the project is specifically targeted to helping low-income women find practical solutions to their needs by such means as the establishment of child care services, health facilities and financial support for their own economic activities.

In Gujarat, for example, the Department of Human Development and Family is collaborating with *Mahila Samakhya Gujarat* to develop innovative models of childcare that would address the intersecting needs of women and their children in three selected regions. Since many of the women expressed an urgent need for childcare services, *Mahila Samakhya* organised a data collection survey that would evaluate the situation. Rural women themselves conducted the survey, analysed and discussed the results, and tried to find practical solutions to their problems.

Most of the women in Gujarat work in the fields, and during peak seasons, all the members of the family must work to earn enough to tide over the lean months. Then, young children are either taken along to the fields or left behind at home with the older family members who cannot labour hard. Sometimes, the older sister has to care for the younger children as well as do the household chores—such as fetching water and fuel, cooking meals, cleaning the house, and tending the animals. As a result, opportunities for these girls to go to school are slim. The survey conducted by the village women revealed the costs that child care duties implied for girls and young women, and discussions led to the necessary steps being taken to establish a creche or childcare centre with the help of government funds and the technical assistance of *Mahila Samakhya*. Soon after, it was also perceived that training was needed urgently at two levels. First, the members of the shangas had to acquire specific skills to run the centre. Second, training was necessary for the future childcare workers and educators.

### *Methodology and contents*

Although the contents of the training programme vary according to the needs of each group, a single methodological approach was adopted for both groups. The primary concern of the trainers was to adapt to the needs of childcare services in the village as well as to the problems encountered by the women. Most of the village women had very little education or were illiterate. They would have little patience to sit still listening to lectures in a classroom setting,

they did not like to remain inactive for long periods of time, and because they could not leave behind their family duties and household chores, they were only able to attend short sessions in the evenings. Therefore, the training programme had to be designed within these constraints.

A series of two- and three-day "training retreats" was developed. These retreats gave the women the opportunity to get together, share experiences, have a break away from their daily chores, relax, and learn together in groups that bore little resemblance to the traditional classroom environment. The learning strategies were also innovative and deeply rooted in the traditions and culture of these women, making full use of their own forms of expression and communication. Popular songs, games, drama, art, and crafts played a central role in the training process. For example, drama and role-playing, drawing, and traditional techniques of pattern-making were used as means to elicit women's perceptions about issues, such as how children learn, what children of different ages do, what they themselves did as children, and what activities are appropriate for enhancing children's development. Various types of games—traditional and modern games, riddles and puzzles, guessing and team games, relay races, matching and pairing games—were utilised to introduce new concepts, and to practice diverse activities. Songs and drawings were used to reinforce, recapitulate, and memorise what had been taught. In this way, each exercise was intended to become both a learning experience for the trainees and a methodology trial for the trainers. Thus, training was perceived as an ongoing process by all concerned. On each occasion, the women came back with new challenges, and new training techniques had to be developed to help them solve their questions and problems. At the same time, the supervisors went through a similar process, learning how to teach, where to find the resources, how to supervise the training process, and relearning what the trainees are learned.

Although this experience is still being developed as small-scale project, it has great potential. Not only is it an alternative model for child care services, but it also constitutes a sophisticated approach to training. The most innovative characteristic of this programme is that it draws on the strengths of both traditional wisdom and modern knowledge and combines participatory development with a process-oriented pedagogy. The most valuable component of the programme is precisely what it has to offer to the academic world and to the women and children in the villages of Gujarat.

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*Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.*  
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