



CHILD FOCUS PROJECT: A Training and Credentialing System from the Caribbean

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Early Childhood advocates have been calling for collective work in the area of training to meet the very considerable need for quality inputs across early childhood services and for meeting the demand for broader coverage. Of particular concern has been the need to develop training for workers with children from birth to three years of age, and to expand and improve delivery to those providing day care. This issue was to the forefront in the advocacy for integrated development of services undertaken by members of the Task Force for Integration of Early Childhood Care, Education and Development Services (1995-1997).

CHILD FOCUS PROJECT

The Child Focus Project, with support from the World Bank, was established in 1996 as an institutional strengthening project by two departments of the University of the West Indies, the Institute of Education (IOE) and the Caribbean Child Development Centre (CCDC). The purpose of the Project is to build the capacity of regional Caribbean Countries to develop:

- a policy framework based on the case of Jamaica, which is integrating ongoing Early Childhood Development structures and programmes island wide, and for
- the curricula, accreditation scheme, and service delivery models most appropriate to take Early Childhood services forward.

INFANT CARE PROJECT

Funded by UNICEF at Caribbean Child Development Centre in 1997, this Project aimed to establish two clusters of day care services (centre and home based), one in Portmore and one in Montego Bay, which could demonstrate improved quality day care provision for the purpose of providing ongoing training of day care workers. The video *Starting at the Beginning* and a curriculum for training workers are also objectives of the Project.

THE COMPETENCY BASED APPROACH TO ACCREDITATION

A number of agencies have been developing competencies as an implicit part of training materials for workers. In some cases competencies are expressed as part of the implied consequences of

training, such as those in teacher training. In others, competencies are expressed as part of proposed service standards, such as in day care. This venture provides us with a nationally agreed system for recognising competencies and for making them quite explicit as an outcome of training and/or experience, or as benchmarks for developing ongoing monitoring supports.

There were three main reasons for developing agreement on competencies:

- **LACK OF NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR STATUS OF TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT BEING UNDERTAKEN BY A WIDE NUMBER OF AGENCIES.** There has been no coherent system at national level for the recognition of competencies of workers in early childhood services. Whilst individual services and agencies have their own expected standards of competencies, whether implied or explicit, there has been no formal agreement among them on those standards. This makes it difficult for agencies to contribute to the development of a professional status for early childhood services as a whole, and for their contributions in training and staff development to be recognised at a national level. The development of nationally agreed competencies facilitates recognition of training being undertaken in a wide number of agencies, and enables the agencies to become formally accredited for the training they provide.
- **LACK OF CAREER AND PROGRESSION ROUTES FOR STAFF IN AND BETWEEN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES.** Workers in early childhood services do not currently have a career structure linked to training to enable or encourage their progression. Also, there has been separation between those who provide care and those who provide education, and very little recognition of the processes of caregiving in education settings and the processes of early learning and development in care settings. There is a particularly high turnover of workers in early childhood services, and little movement between the different sectors. A system of agreed competencies makes it possible to establish clear career structures, accreditation for prior learning and for training undertaken, an accurate description of the breadth of workers' jobs in the different early childhood services, and the levels at which workers can be said to be undertaking similar tasks in different settings.
- **NEED FOR A COORDINATED OR INTEGRATED APPROACH AMONG AGENCIES TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF CARE, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ALL VERY YOUNG CHILDREN.** There has been a lack of a common 'language' or description of the competencies expected by different agencies concerned with the care, education and development of very young children. This inhibited our abilities to develop coordinated or integrated strategies for training of workers with very young children whether they saw themselves primarily as caregivers or educators or both. However, what is clear is that those children who enter school at age 6 who have benefitted from quality care, education and development in their pre school years are better able to progress. Nationally agreed competencies reflecting all the needs of very young children facilitate the process of greater coordination or integration of approaches to promote all aspects of a child's development in the early years.

THE INFANT CARE TRAINING CURRICULUM, CARIBBEAN CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

The Infant Care Curriculum for the training of early childhood personnel working with infants from birth to 18 months of age has been developed with funding assistance from UNICEF (Infant Care Project) and the World Bank (Child Focus Project).

The Curriculum has been developed following Infant Care demonstration activities in two day care centres, Portmore and the Montego Bay Womens Centre. The video *Starting at the Beginning* was made by Dr. Kerida McDonald at the conclusion of the demonstration activities.

THE FORMAT OF THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum follows a modular format devised by the HEART NTA Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Resource Centre. It serves as an instructional manual, to be put into the hands of trainees and as far as possible to be self explanatory. Consultants working for Infant Care were trained by TVET Resource Centre curriculum unit staff prior to commencing work.

Our choice to use the TVET modular format was made for two reasons:

1. Child Focus Project has been collaborating with HEART NTA Standards Unit at the TVET Resource Centre to devise occupational standards for early childhood workers at levels one, two and three. (A description of levels one and two and the workers to whom they apply follows.) We wanted to develop a curriculum which would be linked with the only certification system available to early childhood workers in Jamaica (with the exception of teaching certification).
2. Twenty functions, or areas of competency, have been devised for early childhood workers of which *Providing stimulation and care for infants* forms Function Two. Function Two is divided into 13 elements, of which 8 apply to workers at level one and 5 apply to workers at level two. For an early childhood worker to be certified at level one or at level two, he or she will have to demonstrate competency (knowledge, ability and skill) in each element in the function at the appropriate level. We felt that taking this approach would enable workers to be certified not only in terms of their performance in training but in terms of their prior learning and working experience.

In producing this curriculum, we have provided the materials needed for a worker to become competent at levels one and two of Function 2, *Providing stimulation and care for infants*.

Each Unit of the module at level one and at level two follows the same format. The performance and knowledge requirements are listed. An information sheet follows. The text then covers in detail what workers need to know and show that they can do. Job sheets follow against which their performance can be assessed. Each unit concludes with a checklist.

At the end of the curriculum, between *pink* pages there is a reference section and further background information, including the other nineteen functions and elements in the early childhood certification system.

LEVELS ONE AND TWO

At Level ONE, workers need to have competency in a range of varied work activities. Activities range from simple/routine to others which are more complex involving some responsibility and autonomy. Collaboration with others through work groups or in teams is often a requirement. Substantial supervision is required especially during the early months evolving into more autonomy with time.

Access to Level ONE should be for persons who have completed Grade 9 at High School. Realistically in the current early childhood services for infants, especially in home based day care, persons are working and have been working for years without prior attainment of this level of education. Thus materials need to address in clear language what persons need to know and demonstrate without assuming a Grade 9 competency as the baseline. In order to complete level ONE, HEART requires that workers reach Grade 9 competency through the access courses HEART organizes.

At Level TWO, early childhood workers will have progressed to performing work activities most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility, autonomy and control and guidance of others is often required. Their educational base would not necessarily differ from those at Level ONE, but they may have achieved some CXC passes. Certainly if they are progressing to level Three they will need to achieve success at CXC level.

Although workers at this level work under the supervision of workers at Level THREE in larger day care or early childhood settings, realistically many are in charge of small day care centres and home based centres and therefore have to be able to cope with responsibility and autonomy.

EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKERS

Early Childhood Workers who work with infants, performing at Level ONE and Level TWO competence, are probably working in one of the following contexts:

- As a visitor to parents with young children at home. *This is the setting in which childcare promoters, home visitors or roving caregivers* work. Their task is to bring child rearing messages to parents and to provide them with support and encouragement in the role of parent. Generally the children range from birth to three years of age, but may be older. Workers who visit the home generally work throughout the year.
- As a worker based in a home or institutional setting. *These settings are those in which caregivers, household helpers, nursery assistants, attendants or nannies* work. Their work involves responsibility for children in place of the parent, either with or without other colleagues, for a defined period of time. Some work alone, some work under the guidance of a supervisor such as in a Children's Home or Day Care Centre, and some work shifts over a 24 hour period. Workers generally work throughout the year.

NOTE: For the full document on the CCDC accreditation system please check the Library of the *Early Childhood Counts* CD-rom. File name: gd1eccec.pdf

WITH THANKS

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Lead Group, Occupational Standards for early childhood workers, CCDC, 1997.

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