

CHILD DEVELOPMENT TRAINING *NEEDS ASSESSMENT*

Intent

In private child care settings the availability of well-trained teachers is key to achieving positive outcomes for preschool children. However, early childhood teachers face many barriers in furthering their education, including cost, time away from work and family, and location of the education program. We intend to develop a computer-based training for Early Care and Education (ECE) Providers that focuses on child development, how children learn, and identifying developmentally appropriate practices. The training will be targeted to those with little or no formal education. The goals of this course will align with the goals of the Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program, a major national movement to improve the quality of child care.

Needs Assessment Strategy

We used the following strategies to gather data for this Needs Assessment:

- Interviewed and/or surveyed three Subject Matter Experts in the area of Early Childhood Education.
- Surveyed and/or interviewed 3 child care center directors and teachers
- Surveyed 28 high school students who are currently taking a child developmental class
- Reviewed our own personal experience, both as a teacher of child development and as an Early Childhood Education provider

Through this research we strived to answer the following questions:

- *What is the ideal?* If the world were a perfect place, what knowledge, skills, and attitudes should all ECE providers have?
- *What do we know about the learning task?* What strategies have teachers used in the past to teach child development? What topics did the learner find the “easiest” to grasp and which did they struggle with (and therefore need more time and attention to)?
- *Who are the learners?* We made a lot of assumptions in our initial plan about who our target audience is. Were we correct in our assumptions?
- *What are our resources and constraints?* In answering this question, we focused on the resources and constraints of the target audience as opposed to *our* resources and constraints in developing this training. For the purposes of this project we are assuming that we have some funding to pay for the development of the actual training program and some infrastructure to print and disseminate the final product.

The Instructional Problem

Content

Based on our interviews with subject matter experts (SMEs) and our personal experience, we determined that we are basically on target with our intent to develop a computer-based training on child development. The SMEs agreed that ECE Providers need more child development knowledge and additional skills in applying developmentally appropriate practices.

However, when we initially developed the idea for this training, we intended on focusing on the four child development areas exclusively. But our SMEs all reiterated that it is just, if not more important to learn about how children learn in addition to the developmental ages and stages. So while beliefs on how this knowledge should be ordered differs among the SMEs, they agreed that two main knowledge areas should be a part of the training:

1. How children learn
2. Stages and milestones of cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development

As for the skills that they need to apply this knowledge, the SMEs stated that observation, the ability to implement developmentally appropriate practices, and the ability to build quality relationships with children in their care are essential. On the same note, our research also made it clear to us that any training on child development for ECE providers must have a component built in where the learner can be observed in their interactions with children. For more on this, please see Teaching Strategies.

Our research also uncovered additional topics that would be important to a comprehensive curriculum on Early Childhood Education. If we were developing such a curriculum, SMEs thought we should include modules on the following: 1) Factors that impact child development, such as attachment, the family, culture, and experiencing trauma; 2) Working with families, including cultural competency; and 3) Environments that promote development. And while we agree that these are important topics for an ECE provider to study as a part of their professional development, due to the time constraints of the project, we have decided to limit this particular training to how children learn and ages and stages of child development and use the additional topics listed above for a follow-up training or an additional module of a subsequent training program.

Teaching Strategies

When we asked both the SMEs and reviewed what we know from experience about teaching the subject of child development, we concluded that observations of children and modeling through videos and so forth are very useful tools to teach this subject. This feedback was consistent with our original assumptions.

However, both the SMEs and child care center directors we spoke with also highlighted the importance of having someone – whether it be a teacher or a mentor – observe the student and how they interact with the children in their care. Respondents to our surveys noted that in early childhood teaching (as in all teaching) what is true in theory is often different in practice and it is important to see how the learners actually applied the knowledge they are gaining in their interactions with children. For this reason, we have decided to restructure our training and include a mentor component where the mentor, whether it be a teacher who is implementing the

training or the learner's boss our supervisor, can observe the learner in his or her interactions with the children in their care, see how they are applying the information they are learning, and provide the learner with feedback.

The Intended Learners

All of our research reinforced what we already knew about the learner that we are targeting. Respondents to our surveys and interviews confirmed that most ECE providers who would need this training – meaning those with no previous training in child development – probably have little formal education. Our research also confirmed that the Child Development Associate credential is an important career goal for this population, both in terms of their professional development and their salary levels. In addition, our research indicated that most child care center directors would be motivated to have their staff achieve the CDA credential. For more information on our learner, please see the Learner Profile below.

Learner Profile

- **Age:** The age of early care and education (ECE) providers varies drastically, from 16 to 65, but for the purposes of this project we will focus on the younger age group, assuming they have less experience than their older counterparts. We will target this project towards learners from age 15 to 25.
- **Sex:** The majority of ECE providers are female.
- **Educational level:** The instructional materials in this course will be geared towards learners with little formal education, mainly those without a high school diploma, with a G.E.D, or with a high school degree.
- **Prerequisite knowledge and skills:** This course will be targeted towards people who work with children on a regular basis in a center-based early care setting or students in a child development class. Participants will need to have regular access to children so they can conduct observations as a part of their coursework. As far as technical skills are concerned, learners will need a basic understanding of how a Windows-based computer works, how to use the Internet, e-mail, and send electronic files.
- **Socioeconomic background:** The ECE providers targeted in this training will primarily fall into a low- or low-to-middle-income bracket (mainly because child care jobs do not pay well, especially when you don't have a college degree), however, the content would be available for any socioeconomic background.
- **Learning style and preferences:** Students who take this course need to be independent learners who have a high verbal and spatial intelligence. They prefer to work alone or with small groups.
- **Motivation:** Learners who take this course will have a part of the necessary skills and knowledge to complete the CDA Assessment. Earning the CDA Credential has many advantages. For example, it can motivate caregivers toward educational pursuits, and

provide leverage for professional and career opportunities. Many view the CDA Credential as an instrument for career advancement in the early care and education profession.

The Learning Context

Resources and Constraints

To achieve our goals we need to consult and research new ideas regarding Child Development. Our biggest obstacles are going to be developing a curriculum that the students will be able to complete in a small time frame. Along with time, we need to try to build into the curriculum the ability for the student to observe and interact with children. We also have to consider the end cost to the student for taking this curriculum and their ability to have a mentor/teacher to facilitate some of the learning. Finally, we have to take into account our students comfort level using computers. Some students do not have the abilities that we originally thought they would.

Goals

Goals for Project

- To develop a quality curriculum that will allow for students to have a basic understanding of child development.
- To develop curriculum that will allow for students to practice their knowledge and gain feedback from a mentor teacher.
- To develop a curriculum that can be delivered through Computer Based Training.

Goals for Curriculum

- The student will be able to comprehend how children learn and ages and stages of cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.
- The student will be able to observe children, from birth through age 8, looking for the different stages of development and produce an observation report.
- The student will be able to practice applying the knowledge gained by responding to a situational question.
- The student will be able to detect developmentally appropriate practices.
- The student will be able to apply child development practices in interaction with children.