UNICEF
Persian Gulf Countries

Final Report on the
Early Childhood Care and Development Workshop

Dubai, U.A.E.
November 2 – 6, 2002

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Introduction

The *Gulf News* in the United Arab Emirates reported on November 8 that the UAE Ministry of Education and Youth is distributing a book to teachers that is advocating a change in the role of teachers. It states, “Inside the classroom, there should be a well defined programme to tackle daily problems, ensure continuous cooperation, decision making, greater participation, involvement in criticism, innovative ideas, organization and leadership. The teacher should change his role from a mere communicator of knowledge to a guide and instructor and from an authoritative person to one who creates an atmosphere of freedom of expression inside the classroom.” We believe that the key to this goal of the UAE ministry is captured in the last statement: “an atmosphere of freedom of expression inside the classroom.” It was this which was the primary goal of our workshop. And, more broadly, the UAE UNICEF ECCD Workshop was in full harmony with the general educational goals enunciated by the UAE Ministry of Education.

Basic Description

We arrived in Dubai on November 1st and from November 2 – 6 we conducted a workshop focused on concerns and issues of ECCD for 15 participants. Each of the five Gulf countries was represented. Participants included health, education, and social service personnel. Participants were engaged in developmental activities, informative presentations, and planning sessions. All concepts presented were supported with handout materials. Flexibility in scheduling was exercised to accommodate expressed and perceived needs of the participants. Lyn Vause left the workshop during the last day due to illness. Linda Cameron and Lee Bartel remained an additional day, November 7, to be available for meetings.

Our Workshop Intentions

We believe that in the context of the Gulf Countries, where there are adequate financial resources, well educated leaders, but seemingly intransigent diverse problems related to childhood care and development, the single biggest role of a workshop like this is affirmation
of the leaders and who they are personally, and the provision of inspiration, encouragement and motivation. It was our intent to accomplish this through the medium of relevant content. The content in which we intended to facilitate learning was general concepts of early childhood education and some specific aspects of developmental learning reinforced with enough curricular details to provide illustration. In addition we intended to develop a vision of what might be done in each country and to determine what planning is needed to be done. As a general goal, we intended to develop the capacity of the participants in terms of understanding the complexity of early childhood issues, and the centrality of education of the child, of the parent, of the care-giver, and of the administrative leaders and policy makers in the holistic care spectrum including health and security.

As stated in the TOR we determined to:

- Introduce and process the convention of the rights of the child by exploring: *What is a child?*
- Establish a framework of understanding with respect to the early years of child development by looking at the cognitive, physical, socio-emotional, spiritual and linguistic factors that influence such development.
- Link Understanding and Practice
- Look at Early Childhood Programmes
- Develop a Vision for an Early Childhood Initiative
- Provide constancy on drafting preliminary plans for ECCD in the Gulf Countries.
- Establish next steps and tentative timelines.

**Interpretation/Translation**

We realized in the first sessions for day one that communication in English was going to be a problem. Although all participants spoke some English, the vocabulary, concepts, and speed of delivery caused a communication deficit in many participants. The presence of Dr. Ibrahim El-Kerdany and his ability to translate not only the words but concepts, cultural ideas, and the emotional meaning of the communication became the “lifeline” of our efforts. Sessions where he was not present were diminished in value and effectiveness.

**Pre-workshop Information**

We made an effort to obtain crucial program and practice information from the Gulf Countries through a questionnaire. This information was not obtained and that hindered our preparation and communication to some extent. The resulting session plans and content were not as adapted to existing capacities as we would have liked. It would be beneficial in further situations to have some time to meet with people and visit a couple of sites prior to workshops in order to understand the real needs as well as the current reality. It was difficult to plan on the basis of assumptions. We researched as much as
we could using documents, reports, meeting with people from the area and talking with Stefan prior to the sessions.

**Country Presentations**

The representatives from the participating countries came prepared to make presentations regarding programs or developments. We were not made aware of this in our planning and had not accommodated this in the agenda. Further, we were not really aware even during the workshop of what purpose these presentations were to have. Since they were made in Arabic, the intent seemed to be the informing of other participants but it became evident later that they were under the impression these were for our benefit. This area became one of misunderstanding and some sensitivity on the part of the participants. The feedback from some participants indicated that they found little relevance or importance in them for the general context of the workshop. Future workshop plans need to rethink the purpose and programming of such sessions.

**Cultural Adaptation and Communication**

We were aware of the cross-cultural challenges facing us in this context and tried to be constantly conscious of the nature of our communication. However, to model a classroom “atmosphere of freedom” and one that is emotionally encouraging, inspiring, “child-like” and motivating does risk some cultural misunderstanding. Consequently, we tried to make explicit the possibility for misunderstanding and invited immediate response and feedback should such occasions arise. We believe as a whole we were imminently successful in our cross-cultural communication, but of course, have things to learn and changes to make. There were definitely some “slips” made in the thinking-in-action nature of the workshop that we will try to avoid in future contexts like this, e.g., the use of three little pigs instead of the intended three bears story. We valued the feedback we received from Dr. Ibrahim El-Kerdany in regards to cross-cultural communication and would find it valuable to be able to discuss future plans with him. We were particularly sorry that one participant took considerable offense at some things and made a public issue out of this. This was an unfortunate “damper” on day four of the workshop, but the group as a whole seemed very forgiving and day five continued and ended in a very positive way.

**Type of Participants**

In this workshop the participants seemed to be primarily government related leaders and administrators. Although these have the potential to take action and to influence others, the lack of real practitioners, especially in education, does affect the general tone and content of a workshop. Administrators and leaders tend to take an abstract, “give me the knowledge” approach that often scuttles efforts at an applied and practical
activities-oriented approach that teaches much more through experience and example. A possible cultural issue emerging at the workshop in relation to this was the question whether it’s wiser to focus on small groups rather than larger groups, and whether the focus should be on “training the trainers” or on involving the practitioners directly. In our opinion, the abstract knowledge approach of government and administrative leaders may short-circuit the implementation of actual appropriate practice since they often do not see the subtleties of the practice due to lack of experience or may transmit the conceptual descriptions without the embodied practice that is key to new approaches in education. We believe that more thought needs to go into decisions regarding this.

Educational Component

The expertise of the presenters was in this area and so the planning and presentations were generally focused on teacher education, child education, parent education and the issues prevalent across all educational sectors relating to the young child. We dealt with matters of the uniqueness of the child: multiple intelligences, learning styles, multiple worlds, various developmental factors, along with identity formation. We looked at early cognitive development using literacy and numeracy as examples but contemplated a broader curricular base. We looked at some program possibilities including parent centers as well as ideal kindergartens. The importance of play as a methodology and philosophy was presented. Teacher education was explored as one place where much work needed to be done in order for effective teaching/learning to occur. Teacher education needs not only to be done in a preservice context but also effective inservice needs to be provided so that teachers grow and develop their professional expertise. We referred to a number of learning theorists throughout the workshop whose work is relevant to ECCD: Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Csikzentmihalyi, Gardner, Dewey and so on. A major presentation was given on the Magic of Teaching based on Linda Cameron’s model of teaching including researching, reflecting and responding, leading to renewal of the curriculum, the teacher, and the child. We examined

Balance to Education

We are well aware of the balance between health, education, and social issues in early childhood. We balanced the workshop toward education because that is our primary specialization, but also because education of parents and children is key to the delivery of other services related to health or security. We attempted to include the balance in project planning.
effective conditions for learning for the young child and what that means for ECCD. Participants were given the power point presentations as hand outs.

**Project Development Component**

Three sessions were specifically planned and conducted to focus thinking and planning on possible projects in each of the five countries.

The first session on the second day was entitled “Seven Trends in Data Acquisition and Knowledge Development.” The purpose of the session was to develop an understanding of key “new realities” in research and evaluation (both crucial links in the process of project development and design, monitoring, and evaluation). The central “message” that there is an increasing complexity in: (1) the nature of the important phenomena; (2) the ethical considerations; (3) methodologies involved; (4) data gathered; (5) analysis required; (6) the way knowledge is represented in communications; and (7) the way results are disseminated. The intended outcome of the session was a personal recognition in each person that any question or concern involving people has multiple dimensions and inter-related and inter-dependent facets, to the extent that simple information on a single variable has little meaning: there are no simple problems and no simple solutions. Interest in the material presented seemed keen and engendered considerable discussion and interaction.

The second session, held on the fourth day, was entitled, “Put Children First” drawing its title from goal one of the United Nations “A World Fit For Children” goals document. The intent of this session was to let participants work actively on analyzing the significant concepts or constructs in several goal statements, identify the complex links and dimensions, and to decide what forms of data would needed to be acquired to develop a clear understanding of the phenomenon. What participants did was focus on the objectives most important to them, an important step in zeroing in on a project area. On the urging of Dr. Ibrahim El-Kerdany, all participants were asked to work on the Aids/HIV goal for some time. Although all were actively engaged in the session, the tendency was to try to address solutions rather than analyze the concepts in detail.

The third “session” essentially filled the last day. The intention was to take the participants in country groups toward the formulation of a project concept and some initial project proposal decisions, strategies, and time-lines. The day began with the description of a health-based but holistic concept already formulated by Bahrain but still lacking in “proposal” or implementation details. To add some greater understanding of how a project could be designed, the UNICEF education project in Central Asia and Kazakhstan was described. Participants then were asked to work on identifying 2 or 3 things in relation to Providing
Quality Education, Promoting Healthy Lives, and Protecting Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Violence. Each country group reported to the whole group on this in some detail. This step proved to be one of the most valuable aspects of the day. Each country’s list of problems was duplicated and distributed to the group at the end of the day (all were translated into English. A copy was left with the UNICEF office at the Workshop). The final working session requested each country to select one or two specific problems and shape a concept of what needs to be done. In addition, they were asked to think about how they could take action to achieve the desired concept and what possible steps were needed. The identification of an action concept was pursued, but it became very evident that there was considerable lack of capacity in thinking about “project,” about the step-by-step procedures needed to move from concept to implementation. Some potential proposals were evident: from Kuwait in relation to the 0-3 years nursery program; from Qatar in relation to the need for enhanced Social Worker capacity and role in schools or the addition of a psychology service to the schools; from United Arab Emirates in relation to a mobile training program for kindergarten workers; and from Saudi Arabia in relation to the problem of very small schools. Bahrain came with a possible project and they seem to need some assistance in creating a proposal. As well Bahrain wanted to address a deficit in capacity to train trainers of kindergarten workers but had insufficient time to form an adequate concept to address the need.

SPECIFIC NEEDS IDENTIFIED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

Simultaneous Interpretation at Future Workshops: Although all participants spoke English to some extent, there was a tremendous range in ability. Also, the ability in English was perhaps adequate for certain topics or certain discourse but inadequate for others. For example, some of the medical participants found that although their English was fully functional for medical topics, it was quite inadequate for educational topics. Consequently, interpretation is necessary. Although alternating interpretation is possible, it does slow proceedings tremendously. Consequently, we recommend that future workshops provide simultaneous translation for those who need it.

Honoring Country Capacities: One of the frustrations at this workshop was the expectation of countries to report on their programs. It was valuable for us as consultants to hear what the state of programs was. More of this could be helpful. However, other participants
found the sharing detracted from the flow of our workshop. We recommend that in future workshops, greater opportunity be given for country participants to share “best practice” or and to take some significant role in the workshop honoring their capacities. Perhaps some “panel” like dialogue could be designed on specific topics so the consultants merely present one view. Possibly a workshop could begin with a day of the country (or countries) doing a set of over-view, status reports. If time and communication were adequate, some cooperative sessions might also be possible.

**Building Capacity of “Trainers”**

One approach to projects in this region may be the need to more directly identify a set of “trainers” and then to build their capacity through a set of workshops. For example, there was clear expression of desire on the part of trainers of kindergarten teachers to develop their own ability. Perhaps an ECCD workshop series might address this need with some specific connection to their work with the teachers – where the consultants observe them work with their teachers, work with the trainers, observe them implementing their new abilities, and so on.

**Building Capacity in Project “Thinking” and Proposal Writing:**

One of the areas in which capacity needs to be built is in conceiving “projects” and then formulating the step-by-step plans needed to realize these projects. The ability to write proposals could be addressed directly in a workshop designed for this. Such a workshop would be particularly appropriate for all leaders like those involved in our workshop.

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**Nursery School Project in Kuwait:**

The project described by the participants from Kuwait was to create a play-based activities program (curriculum) for nursery schools for 0-3 year old children. The Kuwait participants indicated the need for consultation in the process of creating this program. However, the project needs to be described and a proposal created first.
ADDENDUM 1 – HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND SECURITY PRIORITIES OR GULF COUNTRIES

This is a list of each country’s most significant problems or needs related to: Providing Quality Education, Promoting Healthy Lives, and Protecting Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Violence

Saudi Arabia

Promoting Healthy Lives
- The pilgrims spread viruses during Hajj season.
- Spreading of Aids disease
- Spreading of drugs
- The unavailability of family health programs to face hepatitis
- Spreading cancer disease

Providing Quality Education
- Increase in small-sized schools
- The lack of growth in the number of kindergarten schools
- The low number of teachers in comparison with the high number of students (one teacher for every 13 students). There are more students in cities and less in rural areas
- The unavailability of accurate statistics on new born babies in the Ministry of Planning

Protecting Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Violence
- The unavailability of education centers for parents
- The unavailability of a place to refer abused children
- Depending on servants and home maids for raising their children
- The increasing number of car-driving children
- The increase in car theft

The Kingdom of Bahrain

Promoting Healthy Lives

Currently available services:
- Immunization programs
- Breastfeeding and baby friendly
- Child nutrition
- Child survey programs
- Health education
- Dental prevention programs
• School health
• Adolescent programs
• HIV programs

Current Needs
• Child assessment center
• Application of adolescent clinics
• Anti smoking campaign

Providing Quality Education
• Shortage of trainers
• Applied curriculum
• Idea building

Protecting Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Violence
• Need legislation laws
• Need coordination of services

United Arab Emirates

Promoting Healthy Lives
• Free health (treatment for all)
• High level health centers are available in rural areas
• Awareness programms for children and adults on contagious disease
• Establishing centers to provide services to children who catch cancer disease
• Providing health services within schools and kindergartens

Providing Quality Education
• Establishing centers to train male/female teachers as well as management and technical staff
• Developing sharing programs between schools and parents
• Developing English language programs for all school levels
• Developing the education curriculum which does not only concentrate on the academic part, but also on all faces of growth

Protecting Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Violence
• Preparation of guidance programs to protect children in their houses, schools and on the road
• Preparation of programs to protect children from violence, abuse and family separation
Qatar

Promoting Healthy Lives
- Developing health centers
- Breastfeeding
- Healthy foods

Providing Quality Education
- The teachers skills
- The psychological guidance in schools
- Parents participation
- Learning difficulties

Protecting Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Violence
- Divorce (family separation)
- Psychological abuse
- Drugs

Kuwait

Providing Quality Education
- Providing a curriculum for children in kindergarten stage (from one month to 3 and a half years)
- Assessing the development curriculum for kindergarten (4 to 6 years)
- Educating English language for children in kindergarten stage
- Training the supervisors working in kindergartens

Promoting Healthy Lives
- Establishing clinics for healthy children
- Children’s malnutrition
- Children’s obesity

Protecting Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Violence
- Lack of information on family violence
- Child’s moral abuse and negligence
- The unavailability of a mechanism to face the child’s abuse and violence
- The necessity to provide a protection committee to follow up with the concerned authorities