Roles, Responsibilities, and Needs of a Child Development Professional

The field of early childhood development consists of countless services, which include programs for infants and toddlers, preschool programs, family childcare, childcare centers, kindergarten, and schooling for primary age children. Each has the potential to foster healthy development and learning as well as positively impact children’s lives; however, each of these require professionals to have similar characteristics as they partake in the role of working with children and their families.

The roles and responsibilities of an individual with a career in child development vary depending on the types of setting in which they work. However, one thing is for sure: individuals working with young children need to treat the children equally while providing them with the different needs that they require.

Regardless of your career, you may be responsible for caring for and educating children when parents/guardians are at work or away for other reasons. In addition to attending to children’s basic needs, you may have to organize activities that stimulate children’s physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth and development and assist them in exploring their interests, developing their talents and independence, building their self-esteem, and learning how to get along with others. In addition, you will have open communication and dialogue with parents/guardians.

Center-based Careers

Early childhood professionals have many career opportunities and different types of settings in which they may choose to work. Each opportunity is diverse as to the services they provide and the positions that are available. They also differ according to specific qualifications for positions, the work schedule, the salary and benefits, and how the program is regulated. In this unit we will discuss center-based careers.

Child care centers are facilities where care typically is provided to children in a nonresidential building with different age-group classrooms. Care is provided for less than 24 hours per day. State child care licensing regulations include definitions of the types of child care centers that must meet licensing requirements. These definitions often include a minimum number of children and/or a minimum number of hours the facility operates to determine whether it must be licensed.

Center-based childcare centers may be organized in a number of ways, depending on the sponsorship or ownership. However, it is important to note that no matter what
kind of organization is the sponsor, each must comply with the state and local regulations for the safety and protection of the children they serve. Let’s view a breakdown of the common center-based childcare centers that you will see.

- **Non-Profit Childcare Centers** such as those sponsored by the YWCA or the YMCA, local community agencies, and recreation departments. These types of childcare programs are governed by a board of directors who oversee the program and finances and are usually administered by an executive director and/or a director of childcare. The program is managed financially so that income and expenses are dedicated to the benefit of the children and staff.

- **Faith-Based Childcare Centers** are typically non-profit and are sponsored by a church or other religious-affiliated institution either as a community service or as an educational program for religious instruction.

- **For-Profit (Proprietary) Childcare Centers** are typically owner operated, and the goal of these centers is to provide a service for fees and realize a financial profit. All facility, staff, equipment, supply, and service costs are the responsibility of the owner.

- **Chain or Franchise Childcare Centers** are individually or corporately owned and governed by a corporation that sets policy. Regional or national chains provide guidelines for all aspects of the business with varying degrees of flexibility for individual centers.

- **Employer-Sponsored Childcare Centers** provide on-site childcare facility so employees can visit their child at break times throughout the day for bonding and feeding. Although rare, some employers view assisting employees with childcare as a valuable benefit.

- There are also **Cooperative Childcare Centers**, run by families of children that attend, and Specialty programs, which focus on dance, gymnastics, sports, or a specific teaching philosophy.

Within these settings you will see infant care, toddler care, preschool, nursery school, pre-kindergarten, and before and after school care. Let’s explore them a little. Shall we?

One of the most dramatic increases in recent years has been in infant and toddler care. Daily programs for infants and toddlers focus on the stages of development from birth to three years. “An infant curriculum meets the basic needs of young babies; a toddler
curriculum considers the emerging independence and mobility of toddlers” (Gordon & Browne, 2008, p. 385). Based on this knowledge, the daily schedule must include eating, playing, sleeping, and socializing. Children also need an environment and caregivers that provide warm, affectionate, consistent care with many opportunities for stimulation while allowing them the freedom to explore on their own.

The largest segments of children in early childhood education are enrolled in preschool, nursery school or pre-kindergarten programs. Depending on the state, some preschool programs start at the age of three, whereas others only enroll children that are out of diapers. Programs for these programs have several options. Preschool is for children ages three through four and pre-kindergarten is for children the year before kindergarten. Preschool and pre-kindergarten are typically offered for full days, whereas nursery school is usually part-day.

Before and after school care is an important issue for many families. Approximately two-thirds of school-age children and youth live with a single working parent or two parents who both work outside of the home (Morrison, 2007). Research states that children who are not supervised by adults during their out-of-school time are at significantly greater risk of truancy from school, stress, earning poor grades, risk-taking behavior, and substance abuse (Gordon & Browne, 2008). Children who spend more hours on their own and begin self-care at younger ages are at increased risk of poor outcomes and children who participate in high quality before and after school programs have better peer relations, emotional adjustment, conflict resolution skills, grades, and conduct in school than their peers who are not in programs (Herr, 2002).

Now that we have identified some of the settings, let’s identify the positions that early childhood professionals might hold in a center-based career. We will cover the most common career choices which include a center owner/director/administrator, head teacher, and an assistant/aide. The list of choices and the qualifications needed for each is determined by individual states. But let’s explore them anyway.

A childcare owner, director or administrator of an early childhood program oversees all aspects or the program including overseeing staff, curriculum, and facilities. The director is responsible for compliance with state and local regulations and program policies.

He or she has knowledge of educational methods, management, communication skills, personnel management, sales, marketing, and media. A person in this role uses skills such as speaking, reading and writing, organization, critical thinking, social perceptiveness, coordinating others’ actions, and information management. A director has the ability to communicate, motivate, maintain confidentiality, and create a healthy environment for children and adults. Many that become owners, directors or administrators begin their careers as teachers.

The head teacher of a childcare center is responsible for day-to-day operation of the classroom including the physical environment, curriculum planning and implementation,
supervision/evaluation of each child, record keeping, and supervision of staff and volunteers.

A head teacher has a well round knowledge of what a young child needs. Knowledge of child development, health, safety, and nutrition contribute to the children’s well-being. The head teacher uses good speaking and listening skills to communicate and help children develop literacy and communication skills. Critical thinking, problem solving, and techniques of child management are important in the classroom of preschoolers. The head teacher works closely with children, families, and staff.

The teacher assistant or aide working in a childcare program assists in the classroom under the direction of the head teacher. He or she may be assigned to work as a one-on-one aide to a child with special needs and may be responsible for prepping materials, making lunches, feeding, toileting, and supervising children. The assistant or aide should have some knowledge of child development and must know the policies and procedures of the setting. An assistant/aide needs listening and oral communication skills to carry out directions given by head teacher or the director. A strong desire to work with children and reliability are necessary for this position.

Home-based Careers

Just like center-based careers there are many home-based careers too. We will start with family childcare. In most states, family childcare is grouped into either exempt or regulated family childcare.

Family childcare homes are facilities where care typically is provided to children in the provider’s residence. Family childcare homes usually provide care for a small group of children of mixed ages and have one care provider. As with centers, states have definitions of the types of family childcare homes that must be licensed. These definitions are usually based on the number of children in care. For example, several states require family childcare homes to be licensed if the provider cares for at least one unrelated child or the children from one family, but many states also allow homes with three or more children to operate without a license. Many states license two types of family childcare homes—a small home that has a small number of children and usually one care provider, and a large/group home that usually has a larger number of children and a provider and assistant.

Let’s learn a little more about them, shall we?

- In Exempt Family Childcare Homes, individuals provide care in their home on a regular basis for no more than a few non-relative children. Each state mandates a different cap on when a home-based center is exempt, so it is important that those of you interested in family childcare complete your research.

- Non-Exempt Family Childcare Homes are similar to exempt homes, but they are considered more like a business. These homes typically have more children enrolled
and are following state guidelines for licensing. They are also reporting income and expenses to their state and to the IRS.

- **Non-Exempt Family Group Homes** (names vary depending on the state) are similar to that of a family childcare home. The major difference is that more children are provided for and the licensed home provider has an assistant whom works as an employee.

- Childcare is not only home-based career. There are **nannies** and **au pairs** too! Nannies and au pairs are childcare specialists who typically provide full-time care for children in the employer's home. Nannies and au pairs are often confused as babysitters, teachers, or housekeepers. However, unlike other childcare workers, a nanny or au pair usually provides long-term care for the children in one family. These children may be infants, preschoolers, or older. Nannies work directly for a family, not for a school or an organization. Duties and responsibilities vary based on the family’s needs. However, they typically tend to the basic needs of the children they care for, which may include some shopping, cooking, diaper changing, toileting, ironing, supervising play dates, educating, and playing with children.

- What about **homeschooling**? You do not need a degree in child development for this type of opportunity, but having one will certainly benefit your child. What does a homeschool preschool look like? Depending on one's fundamental beliefs about education, a homeschooling parent has many choices on how she or he runs the home learning environment.

- Lastly, let’s not forget **online college professors**! All of your child development courses are taught by early childhood educators who have earned graduate degrees in the field. Although the degree that you are seeking will not give you the credentials needed to be an online professor, it could be your stepping stone. A career as an online professor can be an extremely rewarding one. If you have master’s or doctorate degree, several years of practical experience, and are passionate about learning and sharing then this may be the career choice for you. In addition to teaching college courses, online child development professors conduct research, advise students, create and revise courses, and of course, teach!

**Community-based Careers**

There are so many ways to work with young children and their families, and so many ways to make a difference. While many people choose to teach, you may find that you would like to use your degree and the knowledge you have gained to work in a social service agency, at your local childcare licensing agency, as a parent education program consultant, as a children’s librarian, or as a parent/child teacher.

When you think of career options in the early childhood field, have you ever thought of a community-based career? As you continue investigating career opportunities this week,
keep your current ideas and assumptions in mind but also consider a career in your community. Let’s explore some of these shall we?

- Social work is a diverse field, and there are many career choices that a child social worker can perform. Depending on the state in which you reside, you will find differences in qualifications and certifications. Most social workers have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, and many in this field have master's degrees in social work with an undergraduate degree in child development. After meeting individual state requirements, children’s social workers can work in hospitals, schools, childcare licensing offices, group homes, or even as child therapists.

- With a growing number of children under the age of five enrolled in regular out-of-home childcare, it is important that childcare facilities be equipped to respond appropriately to the health and safety of children. A childcare health consultant is trained to address issues such as playground safety and infectious diseases.

- Children's librarians have the responsibility of selecting materials for the library's children's department, but they also do much more. They are responsible for planning a variety of programs and activities for young library patrons as well. They must conduct outreach, promote upcoming programs, help with reference questions, and create innovative book displays. A librarian who works with children must also be well-versed in children's literature.

- Child life specialists are trained professionals with expertise in helping children and their families overcome life’s most challenging events. Individuals working in this career have a strong background in child development and family systems. Child life specialists promote effective coping through play, preparation, education, and self-expression activities. They provide emotional support for families, and encourage optimum development of children facing a broad range of challenging experiences, particularly those related to healthcare and hospitalization. Because they understand that a child’s well-being depends on the support of the family, child life specialists provide information, support, and guidance to parents, siblings, and other family members. They also play a vital role in educating caregivers, administrators, and the general public about the needs of children under stress.

- Another important career in the early childhood development field is the role of the parent/child teacher working with children age birth through five and their parent or caregiver. This is a great option for individuals who love working with both parents and children, creating an environment that allows parents, children, caregivers, etc. to spend quality time together while at the same time, providing an opportunity for age appropriate learning through play! As a parent/child teacher, one gets to help facilitate this relationship in a fun environment, encouraging parents to interact with their child in a healthy way. The object of a parent/child class is to have the parents stay with the child in the classroom having circle time, centers with art activities, dress up, science, imaginative play, building, and age-
appropriate floor activities which could include puzzles, games, sensory activities, etc. The hope is to allow parents, children, and/or caregivers a chance to enjoy each other in a relaxed and fun environment that allows for tickling, laughing, physical play, imagination, creativity, building, etc.

Public and Private Schools

When you think of career options in the early childhood field, have you ever thought of working in a school? Public school teachers must be licensed, which typically requires a bachelor's degree and the completion of an approved teacher education program whereas private school teachers do not always need to be licensed but may still be required to hold a bachelor's degree. Many states offer alternative licensing programs to attract people into teaching, especially for hard-to-fill positions.

Teachers must have the ability to communicate, inspire trust and confidence, and motivate students, as well as understand students' educational and emotional needs.

Kindergarten children learn by play and hands-on activities, and academics begin to take place during this year. Letter recognition, phonics, numbers, and awareness of nature and science, which were introduced in preschool, are now being investigated further.

Kindergarten, along with first, second, and third grade teachers play an essential role in the development of young children. What children learn and experience during their early years can shape their views of themselves and the world and can affect their later success or failure in school, work, and their personal lives. Kindergarten and early elementary school teachers introduce children to mathematics, language, science, and social studies. They use games, music, artwork, films, books, computers, and other tools to teach basic skills.

Let’s look at some schools, shall we?

- **Public schools** – Every community has a public school and public schools are the largest of all educational programs. Public schools are free and are required to follow their state Department of Education laws.

- **Religious Schools** – The Catholic Church is one of the largest sponsors of private schools but many other denominations and religions also sponsor schools to teach the principles of their doctrine in the context of a general education.

- **Special Education Programs** – Children with a disability may require a separate environment that is designed to meet the child’s needs for early intervention or comprehensive services. Special education teachers and assistants along with specific therapists such as physical and occupational therapists, and speech pathologists are employed by the school along with social workers to support the family.
• **Charter Schools** – These are schools set up by individuals or groups funded either by public or private funding or a combination of funding sources to provide parents and students with alternative, innovative choices to public education.

• **Boarding Schools** – Children are cared for 24 hours a day at residential private schools. Tuition charges include the cost of education plus room and board.

• **Residential Facilities** – Education is provided in residential facilities for children housed there for a variety of reasons: disabilities, emotionally unable to be in a home and school situation, or as an alternative to foster care.

• **Schools Abroad** – Schools around the world recruit teachers from the United States to provide education for children of US citizens living in a foreign country such as armed services personnel or a company’s employees. Teachers are also recruited for private schools abroad who offer students an education in English in addition to their first language.

References:


Herr, J (2002). *Working with young children*. Tinley Park, IL: Good Heart-Willcox