

# THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE PROGRAM

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The Child Development Associate Program (CDA) is a national effort to train, assess, and grant professional credentials to people working with young children. It was initiated in 1972 by the Office of Child Development/Office of Human Development, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, in order to improve the quality and number of child-care personnel in the country.

Unlike the traditional teacher training, the credential of the Child Development Associate is based upon demonstrated competency in the classroom rather than course credits and degrees. While credits and degrees are recognized as having a place in training programs, the awarding of the CDA credential is based upon careful evaluation of each candidate's demonstrated ability to work effectively with young children.

## Definition of a CDA

The Child Development Associate or CDA is a person able to meet the specific needs of a group of children in a child development setting by nurturing the child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs; setting up and maintaining the child care environment; and establishing a liaison relationship between parents and the child development center.

The CDA takes primary responsibility for meeting the needs of a given group of children. The CDA is not an aide to a teacher, but is personally responsible for the day-to-day activities of a group of children. However, the CDA should have guidance from a more highly-trained person, such as a master teacher, who may or may not be attached to the same center.

To become a center director, curriculum specialist, or master teacher, a person would need competencies in addition to those now required for CDA.

## CDA Competencies

The CDA competencies define the desirable abilities of a person who works with children. The competencies are divided into six major areas called the CDA Competency Areas. According to these competency areas<sup>1</sup> a CDA:

1. Establishes and maintains a safe and healthy learning environment
2. Advances physical and intellectual competence
3. Builds positive self-concept and individual strength
4. Promotes positive functioning of children and adults in a group environment
5. Brings about optimal coordination of home and center child-rearing practices and expectations
6. Carries out supplementary responsibilities related to children's programs.

## CDA Training

CDA training is designed to identify the person's strengths and areas of need in CDA Competency Areas and to provide an individualized training program based on these strengths and needs which will lead the candidate towards competency in all areas.

Although CDA training programs use a variety of training models, all must have the following characteristics:<sup>2</sup>

1. Training is based on the six competency areas. Each aspect of training relates to becoming competent in at least some of or all the CDA competencies.
2. Training is organized so that academic and field experiences are integrated.
3. At least half of the training experiences take place in the child care centers.
4. Training is individualized and based on each





trainee's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the CDA competencies.

5. Training is flexibly scheduled. The length of training depends on how long it takes an individual to acquire and demonstrate mastery of the CDA competencies.
6. College credit usually accompanies CDA training.

#### **The CDA Credential Award System**

The CDA Consortium, funded by OCD in 1972 to establish standards for and insure the competence of people receiving the CDA credential, has

developed a formal assessment system that is based on the CDA competencies and is now awarding CDA credential candidates. It is a private, non-profit corporation made up of 39 organizations whose members have direct involvement in some phase of early childhood education or child development. It also includes two individuals with stature in either the educational community or the general community, who are concerned with the well-being of children and are representatives of the public.

The CDA credential is a national professional credential backed by the CDA Consortium. There



are now 500 people who have been assessed, found competent and awarded a CDA credential. This program-year the Consortium and the Office of Child Development are working with the states to gain recognition of the CDA credential in state licensing practices. Currently the CDA credential has been written into the licensing standards of the following states: Minnesota, Kansas, Washington, North Dakota, North Carolina, and Texas.

The credential assessment process is performance-based: evaluation is based on the candidate's performance with children, staff, and parents. The assessment is conducted by a team of four people selected to bring different perspectives to the candidate's performance.<sup>3</sup>

1. The *Candidate* brings a knowledge of self and a perspective on his or her performance with children.
2. The *Trainer* has extended knowledge of the candidate's professional development, experience with young children, and knowledge of child development and early childhood educational practices.
3. The *Consortium Representative* brings a knowledge of requirements established by the Consortium governing the decision process, the benefit of direct experience in center-based programs with three- to five-year-olds, and an academic background in child development and early childhood education.
4. The *Parent-Community Representative* (P-C Representative) shares the viewpoint of the community the candidate serves, and is knowledgeable about the specific center in which the candidate is being assessed.

Each team member gathers data on the candidate's performance. Then the team holds a formal meeting to review the evidence and to decide whether the candidate should be recommended for a credential. The meeting is governed by legal requirements for awarding the CDA credential and must follow these guidelines:

1. All team members have an equal voice, and the team operates as a peer functioning group for the purpose of making the decision.

2. Each team member reviews all data presented during the decision meeting.
3. The team documents its decisions.
4. The final decision to recommend credentialing the candidate requires the consensus of at least three of the four team members.
5. The CDAC Representative must certify that the team has followed the process specified by the Consortium. (CDAC Fact Sheet)

### Hawaii CDA Training

CDA training began in Hawaii in March 1973 as one of twelve national CDA pilot projects. It was funded by the Office of Child Development to develop and implement CDA training. Three years later the pilot came to a close after developing and field-testing a training model, beginning a set of curriculum materials (CDA modules), and seeing two of its trainees among the first 34 people in the nation to be credentialed as Child Development Associates.

CDA training in Hawaii now continues through two programs: (1) The Head Start Supplementary Training Program (HSST), under the Head Start State Training Office (HSTO), Curriculum Research and Development Group, University of Hawaii, and (2) The Human Services Department, Honolulu Community College (HCC).

Since 1975, HSST has been responsible for delivering CDA training to Head Start teaching staff in the State of Hawaii; this includes people on the islands of Oahu, Kauai, Maui, Molokai, and Hawaii. In addition, it has been refining and completing the CDA curriculum modules begun by the pilot.

CDA was also initiated in 1975 as one of the training options offered by the Human Services Department at HCC. Their program is designed to provide the necessary training to prepare people working in Oahu-Island child-care settings for assessment and credentialing by the CDA Consortium.

Both training programs use similar training models, which are adaptations of the pilot model. Training is based on HSTO/CDA curriculum modules, which integrate academics with on-the-job experience. These modules are



supplemented by group training sessions and on-site training.

The trainee selects a module to work on and, assisted by a trainer, does as many module activities as necessary to develop competency in the module objectives. Demonstration of competency in all the objectives in a particular module should lead the trainee to a level of competence in that area which will be acceptable to a national CDA credentialing team.

Group sessions (workshops and seminars) are offered to help the trainee acquire competencies. These meetings planned by the trainer, are used to discuss module content and activities. They utilize special resource people and audiovisual materials, and consist of lectures, demonstrations, role-playing, and large and small group discussions.

On-site training is also offered to assist the trainee in acquiring CDA competencies. The trainer observes the trainee in the classroom and holds a trainer-trainee conference. On-site visits usually consist of observations by the trainer, a review of previous training commitments, and the establishment of new commitments. These visits are also used for trainer modeling of classroom techniques and skills, for going over module material, and for completing post-assessments for module objectives.

Both programs offer up to 30 Honolulu Community College credits for CDA training. These credits count towards an A. A. degree in early childhood education from Honolulu Community College and are transferable to the University of Hawaii as lower-division electives. The programs have also been working with the College of Education's Teacher Training Committee on Early Childhood Education to make CDA credits transferable to the University of Hawaii as upper-division credits counting towards a B. A. in early childhood education. It is expected that formal recommendations to the college concerning this change will be made in the near future. A request for articulation has also been made to the Department of Social Services and Housing. It has indicated interest in recognizing the CDA credential, and its licensing committee will be considering the credential with respect to staff qualifications.

Both the Head Start Supplementary Training Program and the Human Services Department, Honolulu Community College, are finding CDA training costly to implement. Yet the elements of the training which are raising the cost — frequent quality contacts between trainer and trainee, on-site training, and relevant individualized training experiences — are producing good results. Trainees are showing observable improvement in the classroom, even those who did not respond to past forms of training.

Those who have worked closely with CDA are enthusiastic about its potential. The CDA program can legitimize field training for child-care staff, provide training to bring experienced workers up to the CDA level of competency, and give professional recognition to workers in the field who are qualified but may not have formal preparation. In Hawaii, where the latest figures indicate that at least 38.1 percent of working mothers have children under age five,<sup>4</sup> CDA can have a significant impact on the quality of child care in the State.

### Footnotes

<sup>1,2</sup>Competency areas and training characteristics taken from *Becoming a Child Development Associate: A Guide for Trainees*. Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (OHD, OCD), 1975.

<sup>3</sup>Role definition taken from "CDA Consortium Adopts Credential Award System," a fact sheet. Washington, D.C.: CDA Consortium, April 1975.

<sup>4</sup>Fukuda, L. *Child Care in Hawaii: An Overview, Report 3*. Legislative Reference Bureau, State of Hawaii, 1973, p. 3.

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