

Early Child Development: A Critical Investment

REFLECTION JOURNAL



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

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Dear Policymaker,

This reflection journal is intended to give you the opportunity to record personal insights and ideas, answer questions raised in the videos, and review scenarios presented. You can use it to reflect on your learning experience, engage critically and analytically with the content, and remember ideas that resonate with you which may inspire you in your work. Your journal is private, and just for you.

Documenting your thoughts as you go along will help you to remember the content and make it personally meaningful.

The journal begins with a page for you to take notes and is followed by sections organised as you find them in the virtual workshop, by module number and lesson number and title.

Module 1

Lesson 3: Reflection on “The long reach of early childhood”

What is your initial response to this video?

In your opinion, what are the key messages of this video?

How do the key messages relate to circumstances for children and families where you live?

Module 2

Lesson 2: Bernard van Leer Foundation | The Beginning of Life - Babies learn from birth

Are there programmes and policies in your context supporting ECD from infancy onwards?

How are these programmes addressing cognitive, physical, linguistic, and socio-emotional development of children?

How do you think underdevelopment in one key area, may impact development in other areas?

What types of things should a policy or decision-maker know about child development to make informed choices?

Lesson 4: Why is it important for policymakers to understand nurturing care?

Sarah's morning

Early in the morning, nine-month-old Sarah is being breastfed by her mother out on the porch. There are many breaks in the feeding, as her mother talks and smiles at her, and Sarah gurgles and laughs in return. After the feeding, she ties the baby to her back while she tends the animals. Sarah is tied on quite loosely, so that she is able to pull herself over to the side and peer under her mother's arm, watching as she feeds the goats. Then when her mother squats to scrub a large copper pot, the baby's legs are able to reach the ground, and she flexes them up and down as she reaches for stones on the ground, and watches what her mother is doing. Later, while her mother is away washing clothes, Sarah sits on the porch on some rags, playing with some of the coloured clothes. Various children, her own siblings, and neighbours, take turns holding and amusing her by talking and giggling with her. After a while her mother picks her up and takes her into the house to clean her up, and then she sits on her grandmother's lap. Her grandmother sings a soft lullaby and Sarah drifts off to sleep.

Samuel's morning

Susan's grandson, Samuel, is 11-months-old. His mother, who is deaf, goes out to work in the fields every day and leaves Samuel in the cradle, tied between two posts on the verandah, with his great grandmother. The great grandmother is very old and cannot move about much. When Samuel cries, she rocks the cradle, while doing something else with her other hand and says nothing. Samuel cannot see out of the cradle. From 6 a.m. until 11 a.m. he stays in the cradle – sometimes sleeping, sometimes crying. During this time, he is given nothing to eat. The researcher asked the great grandmother, when she had eaten her food, "When is it time for his food?" The great grandmother said, "When he is hungry, he cries. Then I will give him food, otherwise there is no need to feed him." Later on, Samuel cried, and she fed him plain rice.

Sarah is having a rich physical and emotional experience. How is her development being supported?

What is Samuel's experience? What stimulation is he experiencing? What about his emotional development?

If you were to encounter Sarah and Samuel at age three, do you think you might notice any developmental differences? What might they be?

To what extent might their circumstances be outside the control of their families?

What programmes/policies might make a difference in these children's lives, particularly Samuel's?

Module 3

Lesson 2: Bernard van Leer Foundation | The Beginning of Life - The evidence behind investing in the early years

This video underscores the importance of early brain development and how it is supported by loving care from the adults around the baby.

How well do you think this is understood where you live?

What might be the role of policymakers in spreading this message?

How does the information in these videos relate to the story of Samuel and Sarah?

Lesson 9: Linking brain development to nurturing care and policymaking

Take a few moments to reflect on the videos “Importance of caregiving” and “The beginning of life – Why does responsiveness matter”, what you’ve learned about how the brain develops and the links between brain development and nurturing care.

Write down 3 simple everyday things a caregiver can do with a baby that you think nurture the baby’s brain.

What are 2 or 3 key messages you take from the videos that you think are important to parents/caregivers?

What are 2 or 3 messages you think are important to policymakers?

Lessons 11: Science of Early Child Development | Bhutta – Examples of investing in ECD

Lesson 12: Science of Early Child Development | Awiti – Invest in women

Lesson 13: Science of Early Child Development | Warner – Social benefits of early education

What is your main takeaway from the three videos?

Bhutta gives some examples of governments that acknowledged they had a problem and decided to tackle it and find solutions. How well do you feel the importance of investing in ECD is understood by the politicians in your country?

Awiti stresses the importance of investing in women. How do you think the electorate would respond where you live if investing in women was part of a political platform?

Warner discusses a radical shift in the traditional thinking of governments towards viewing financing social welfare programmes such as ECD as an investment (positive) rather than expenditure (negative). Do policymakers in your in your context think that investments in children and families are expenditures? If so, do you think that the evidence on the economic returns of investing in early childhood might change their thinking?

Module 4

Lesson 2: Science of Early Child Development | Beyond surviving to thriving: Optimizing child development through integrating ECD into health programmes

Lesson 3: Science of Early Child Development | Educate your child: Cuba's integrated early childhood program

How do the examples from Kenya, Mozambique and Cuba apply to your context? Is this something that is happening in your context? Could it be done and perhaps even better in your context?

What are the main strengths of the approaches shown in the videos?

What would be the main challenges of implementing a similar approach in your country or community?

Lesson 6: All sectors working together

Equal but is it equitable?: Jorany and Chantrea

Jorany and Chantrea, both aged 7, are from the same village. In 2005, their government adopted a universal access to primary school and removed fees for schools and school uniforms. Jorany has been attending the school in his village regularly and is quickly learning to read. Chantrea is not doing as well. She has a hearing deficit which has not been addressed and misses much of what the teacher and other children say. She tries copying letters on her slate but is often confused and isolated. She is starting to avoid school and often leaves early to go and help her grandmother.

Are Jorany and Chantrea being treated equally? Do they benefit equally? Why or why not?

Children with additional support needs, including children with disabilities have rights equal to those of any other child. Is Chantrea’s right to education being met? What could be done to support equity?

Lesson 7: Supporting the most vulnerable

What are the opportunities for children with disabilities and those in emergencies where you live? Are they equitable?

What kind of policies are in place to protect the rights of children with disabilities and/or emergencies? What improvements could be made?

Lesson 8: What next?

The 5 key messages in the nurturing care framework provide a foundation for action-planning.

These are:

1. Ensure that all pregnant women have timely access to high-quality and respectful care before and after childbirth.
2. Ensure continuing access for all children to high-quality essential primary health-care and nutrition services.
3. Support parents and caregivers to take care of their physical and mental well-being, so that they can better provide nurturing care for their children.
4. Enable health workers to safely identify and respond to signs of stress, isolation, and poor mental health among parents, caregivers, and children.
5. Develop and enhance health system mechanisms to ensure safety and security of children and their caregivers.

What is your country's, programme's, or community's status with these five points now?

Who needs to be involved in strengthening or implementing the points?

How can you improve nurturing care within existing resources?

Write down a minimum of 3 key concrete actions your government or organisation can take within the next year and with existing resources that would advance nurturing care where you live.
