

Certificate in Child Disability Studies

Module 3

Teaching Communication Skills and Skills for Independence

Section 1 Teaching Everyday Activities

However young children are today, someday they will be adults. A child who is blind or cannot see well, is deaf or cannot hear well, or has a mild or moderate cognitive disability or mild or moderate cerebral palsy can grow up to be a capable, contributing member of the family and community. Like other children, they must learn how to:

- take care of themselves
- help with the family's work
- be independent
- be well-behaved

They will need more help to learn the things that other young children learn much more easily and will have to be taught things that other children usually learn for themselves or from their friends without any teaching from their parents or grandparents.

Helping disabled children develop communication skills and skills for daily living is very important. They can then participate more successfully in family life and in the community, including school if that is possible. Some time within their first five years, most children move from total and absolute dependence on their carers to becoming independent enough to leave the security of home for several hours a day and attend kindergarten or pre-school. For many disabled children this takes a bit longer – and sometimes a great deal longer – but for most children with most disabilities, independence, or near independence, is possible. Even when children will never become fully independent it is important that they learn as much as they possibly can, both for themselves and for their families.

Taking care of themselves

Daily living skills include eating, dressing, using the toilet,

and keeping clean. Children with disabilities, must, if it is at all possible, learn all these skills so that they can take care of themselves. As they grow up, if they can take care of themselves, it will be much easier for them to go to school and earn a living.

A parent or grandparent may say *'It's so much easier for me to feed and dress her. It's going to take such a long time to teach her those things I don't have time.'*

You could reply *'Yes, I know it seems hard now, but think of the time you'll save later. If she can dress herself, you'll have more time to do all the other things you have to do every morning. And think of how proud you'll be when she can dress herself. You don't want to be dressing her still when she is a grown woman.'*

Helping with the family's work

While he will need some help at first, a child with moderate disabilities can learn to help with the family's work, just as all children can. They should be given small tasks at first, so they can feel successful. Then, as they develop more skills, give him more difficult tasks. This makes less work for the rest of the family and shows the child he is an important part of the family and can make a contribution.. This will build his confidence and give him hope for the future.

A young child can begin to learn about farming by planting seeds and caring for the growing plants. Later, the child can go with his father or mother to the fields and help with the planting. He can be taught to follow the rows made by the plough, with his feet if he is blind or has very bad eyesight.

A child should be helped to understand the whole process of a task. For example, explain about a meal — where food comes from, how it is prepared, where dishes are kept, and how they are cleaned after a meal and show her each step

many times. Get her to help by fetching and carrying small things, stirring the food whilst it is cooking, setting out the bowls, chopsticks and spoons or taking the

Being independent

Being independent means that a child has a chance to do things by himself, without help from other people. Sometimes, because families worry about their disabled child's well-being, they protect him too much. Then, when he is older, he will not know how to do things by himself.

It is better to teach a child how to do new things safely than stop him from trying new things. It is important that children with disabilities are not treated like babies. Parents and grandparents should, as far as possible treat a child with disabilities in the same way as they would another child of the same age. The children may take longer to learn things and there are things that some children with disabilities will never learn, but they will grow up, and become adults and if they are to have the best possible lives for them, they will need to be as independent as possible. When the children grow up, their grandparents may be dead and their parents will be much older and so it is also important for all the family that the children learn to be as independent as possible.

Being well-behaved

Children who have disabilities need firm, loving discipline just like any other child. But sometimes people feel so sorry for a disabled child that they do not teach them to behave properly. They do not set proper limits on his behavior, and they let him do things they would not allow other children to do. Families should try to make the same rules for all their children. Parents and grandparents must teach a disabled child to behave properly and to have the same manners that other children learn. For example, wherever possible, a child with a disability should learn the eating

habits used in her community, although, for example, a blind child will have some different eating habits from other children — like touching her food to know what and where it is — she can learn to eat without too much mess. Then she can eat with other people without her family feeling shame.

Eating

Many children with disabilities can learn eating skills at the same time as children. Except when the child has a very severe disability, they should be expected to do most things that other children her age in their community can do.

These ages given below differ from community to community. But many children learn eating skills at about these times:

Birth to 4 months: A baby sucks and swallows. She also learns to open her mouth when she is about to be fed.

6 months or older: Along with breast milk, she begins to eat soft, mashed foods, like cereal or rice. She may begin drinking from a cup.

6 to 12 months: She begins feeding herself small bits of food with her hands. She should still be breastfed whenever she wants it.

9 months to 1 year: She begins to eat mashed foods and to use some eating tools, like a spoon.

1 to 3 years: She learns to use eating tools and a cup more skillfully

3 years: She can eat most adult foods.

A child who cannot see well, or who cannot understand very well, or has some physical difficulties, will learn to feed herself more quickly if she eats about the same time every day, in the same place, and with other people. This helps her learn that eating is done in a certain way. She will also learn the names of foods more quickly if everyone in the family uses the same name for the same food.

To prepare a child to eat by herself

Before a child begins feeding herself, her mother can help her prepare to learn these skills. When nursing the baby, she should give her a sign, like touching her cheek, to let her know that her mother is about to feed her. As she feeds, place the mother should place the child's hand on her breast. This helps her learn where the milk comes from.

When her family start feeding the baby soft foods, They should tell her when they will be putting food in her mouth and let her touch the bowl and keep her hand on the hand of the person feeding her as they bring the food to her mouth. They should describe what she is eating and how it tastes, and encourage her to touch and smell the food. If she spits out the food, they should keep trying. She needs to get used to eating in other ways than sucking on a breast. Parents or grandparents should encourage the baby to try different kinds of food. When she can eat mashed foods, they should feed her the same foods that adults eat. Then she is more likely to want these foods as she gets older. If she does not like foods with different textures, keep trying. Eating different foods will help her learn to swallow well.

Families should let the very young child touch the food before they feed her. If the baby cannot hold her head up, the person feeding her should hold her in her lap and

support her head with her arm.

The child should be told that each spoonful of food is coming and asked to open her mouth.

When she is learning to drink from a cup her carer should let her hold the cup and smell the liquid as they guide it to her mouth. They should encourage her to take a sip of liquid and finally, help her set the cup back down in the same place.

When the child begins to pick up foods with her hands, they should let her feel and smell the food. At first she may need a lot of help putting the food in her mouth, but slowly she will be able to do more herself. They should help the child learn to use eating tools — spoons, or chopsticks. They should teach her how to hold the tool, how to pick up the food, and how to bring the food to her mouth. Slowly they should give less and less help. They will have to be patient. The child will be messy at first. It usually takes a year or more for a child to become good at these skills. The child will eat best if she is sitting up straight. The child should eat with the rest of the family so she learns that eating is a social time. Encourage everyone to include her in what is happening.

If necessary the carers should help the child learn to bite off pieces of food with her front teeth and chew with her back teeth. They may have to show her what chewing is by putting her hand on their jaw as they chew. If she does not follow their example, they should gently move her lower jaw up and down to show her how chewing feels.

When the child can hold a jug or pitcher, someone can help her learn to pour her own water.

Dressing

Children learn dressing skills at different ages, depending on

local customs. Many children, however, learn dressing skills at about these ages:

Less than one year old:

Baby does not help at all.

1 year:

Child begins to help when being dressed. The one-year-old will typically begin to help cooperatively when being dressed or undressed. He will be raising his arms as a top comes on, a pushing of legs into trousers, or a shifting of position as clothes are pulled round.

2 years:

Child takes off loose clothing. Taking off is easier than putting on, so a child learns this first.

3 years:

Child puts on loose clothing.

4 years:

Child fastens large buttons.

5 years:

Child dresses alone except for difficult steps, such as difficult fastenings

A disabled child will learn to dress herself more quickly if she dresses in the same place every day. It also helps if family

members use the same word for each kind of clothing, and if they give the same instructions in the same order each time. It is best to teach dressing skills when the child needs them — for example, when taking clothes off for a bath or putting clothes on before going outside. This helps her understand why she takes her clothes off and puts them on.

***To prepare a child to dress and undress by herself
(Advice for families)***

Let the child see or touch what she is about to put on. This helps her get to know the feel of the clothing and how it is shaped before she puts it on. Describe the clothing and what color it is. As you dress the child, tell her the name of each piece of clothing and the part of the body it goes on. Ask the child to help as you dress her. This will help her learn that she plays a part in getting dressed. For some children it helps them get their clothing on the right way round if you mark the back of the child's clothes (with a knot, a small piece of material, or a safety pin) so that she can tell the difference between front and back. It can also help if you mark one of her shoes, so that she can tell the difference between the right shoe and the left.

It is easier for a child to take her clothes off than to put them on. So first teach the child to take her clothes off.

To help a child learn to put on pants, first help her find the front of her pants. Then help her put them on.

'Put your right foot in the right pants leg. Push it until your foot comes out. Then do your left foot....then sit down and pull them up. Now stand up and pull your pants right up.

To help a child put on a shirt, explain that there are 3 holes and that the largest one is for her head. Then help her gather up the shirt so she can get her head through the large hole.....and put each arm into a sleeve and pull the shirt down.

Help the child learn to unbutton buttons. It may be easier to try this on adult clothes first, since the buttons are bigger. When she can unbutton, teach her to button. Teach the child to put her clothes away in the same place each time. That way she can find them easily and will need less help. When she is a little older teach the child how clothes are washed and dried.

Using the toilet (toilet training)

'Toilet training' means helping a child stay clean and dry.

A child is toilet trained when:

- she knows when she needs to use the toilet and has learned to wait so she does not dirty her clothing or the floor.
- she goes to the toilet by herself, asks for help cleaning herself, dresses herself, and gets rid of the waste (if necessary).

The age when children become toilet trained varies from child to child. It also varies from place to place, depending on local customs. With help, many children can stay dry by age 2 or 2½. Disabled children may take longer to become toilet trained than other children. Some very severely disabled children can never become toilet trained but parents should be encouraged to try and toilet train all children.

When the child can stay dry for about 2 hours, she can begin to recognize the feeling of needing to go to the toilet. This is the time to begin toilet training.

To prepare your child to learn toilet skills (Advice for families)

When changing a child who is wet or dirty always use the same words to describe the difference between wet and dry

Family members should take the child to the toilet with them and describe what is happening. They should use the same words each time and make sure everyone in the family uses the same words. They should always use the same route to go to the toilet so the child will learn the way.

To help a child learn to use the toilet on her own

The person caring for the child should notice when the child usually wets and take her to the toilet just before this time. They should do this throughout the day, at the times she is most likely to be wet (for example, after eating, before sleeping, and before going to bed at night). They should teach your child to tell them when she needs to use the toilet. She should learn to use a certain word or sign (if she cannot speak) to tell them. They should teach her how to squat on the toilet (or sit on a chair with a hole cut in it which is placed over the toilet if she cannot balance to squat) and clean herself. They should praise her when she does well. At the beginning someone should stay with the child while she uses the toilet until she is not afraid to be. If the child wets herself before getting to the toilet, they should take her to the toilet and change her clothes there. This way she will learn to connect having dry clothes with using the toilet.

Keeping clean

Most disabled children need to learn to wash their hands, take a bath, brush their teeth, and comb their hair, just as all children do.

To teach a child how to keep clean(Advice for families)

Help your child learn about keeping clean and why it is important. For example, as you wash and dry your hands, describe what you are doing and the parts of the body you use. If the child is blind let her feel your movements, the water, and the towel. Help your child do the

activity herself. Work from behind and help her by putting your hands over hers. Use the same words and the same motions each time you help her. Give less and less help as she earns to do it by herself. Do these activities at about the same time each day. This will help your child remember to do it. Keep the things your child needs in the same place, and teach her to return them to this place when she is done.

Chaining

A particular approach to teaching self-help skills is called 'chaining'. This means breaking down a complex task down into the simple links of a chain, progressively teaching link by link until the child can manage the whole task.

For example, pulling off a sock. At first, the carer could pull the sock right down to the toe, and encourage the child to pull the sock off the toe, an easy action. This gives the advantage that the child has actually completed the last part of the task independently and the carer can celebrate and praise their achievement.

Then, a day or two later, they could pull the socks down to the middle of the foot; the child again pulls the sock off but this time it is slightly more challenging. Again, they finish the task 'all by themselves'. In later stages, the carer can pull the sock to half-way over the heel, then just down to the ankle, and eventually they can encourage the child to do the entire process.

This approach can be used for teaching and undressing for trousers and jumpers or any other activity that the child needs to learn

Practical Activity

Write out a 'chaining' check list for a carer trying to teach a

child to:

- Take his pants off
- Put his pants on
- Write his name
- Walk to the shop

Section2 Teaching and Encouraging Communication

As we discussed in Module 1 language development is essential to cognitive development and is vital for communication, both so the child can communicate with others and others can communicate with him. Language can be in many forms. Babbling, no words for years to suddenly talking in sentences, signing, using symbols, giving pictures, taking someone by the hand and showing you what they want. All are forms of communication, ways of letting someone know the child needs and wants.

To encourage a disabled child's language development all those in contact with the child should be prepared to use anything the child responds to. Don't be afraid to sign to a child as this gives the child the knowledge that signs are ok to use and gets them what they want. It is a myth that signing delays speech; it can encourage a reluctant communicator to communicate and eventually learn to speak. Symbols and pictures of objects can encourage a non-speaking child to 'tell you' what they want by giving you the picture or symbol of what they want. For example, a cup when they want a drink; a bowl when they are hungry or a piece of paper when they want to use the toilet.

If the child has tantrums for no reason it may be due to something that they can not communicate. By finding a way

for the child to communicate you may find a big drop in the number of these tantrums.

Emotional development is often an area of delay for children with disabilities. A child's age may be 5 but their understanding and emotional state may be less. Most parents are able to tell whether their child's behaviour is because of a 'want' i.e. 'I want that toy NOW' or a difficulty to communicate 'I need the toilet'. If behaviour is the 'want' tantrum they should not try to negotiate or talk through the issues, when they wouldn't with a 2 year old. They would talk crossly at a 2 year old to ensure they know how their parents feel and what they have done is wrong. The same goes for a child at the emotional level of 2 even if he is older.

Families should not to laugh at their child's misdemeanours. It may be cute for a 4 year old to stick their tongue out but not for a 15 year old. Children with cognitive difficulties do NOT grow out of habits. They have to be taught that an action is wrong. Always keep in mind that the child, however young now, will be an adult one day and plan to teach them as many of the things that they can learn that will make life easier for you all when that time comes.

Communication Skills for Children who do not speak or who speak very little

In Module 1 we discussed normal language development and some of the main reasons why the communication skills of a disabled child may be impaired. This section is about teaching children to communicate in different ways

Signing for deaf children

The following information on Chinese finger spelling is available on the internet:

Chinese finger spelling started well before pinyin, so the first system was based on Visible Speech, a system of phonetic notation devised by Alexander Melville Bell (father of Alexander Graham Bell). This Chinese finger spelling system was called 赖恩手势.

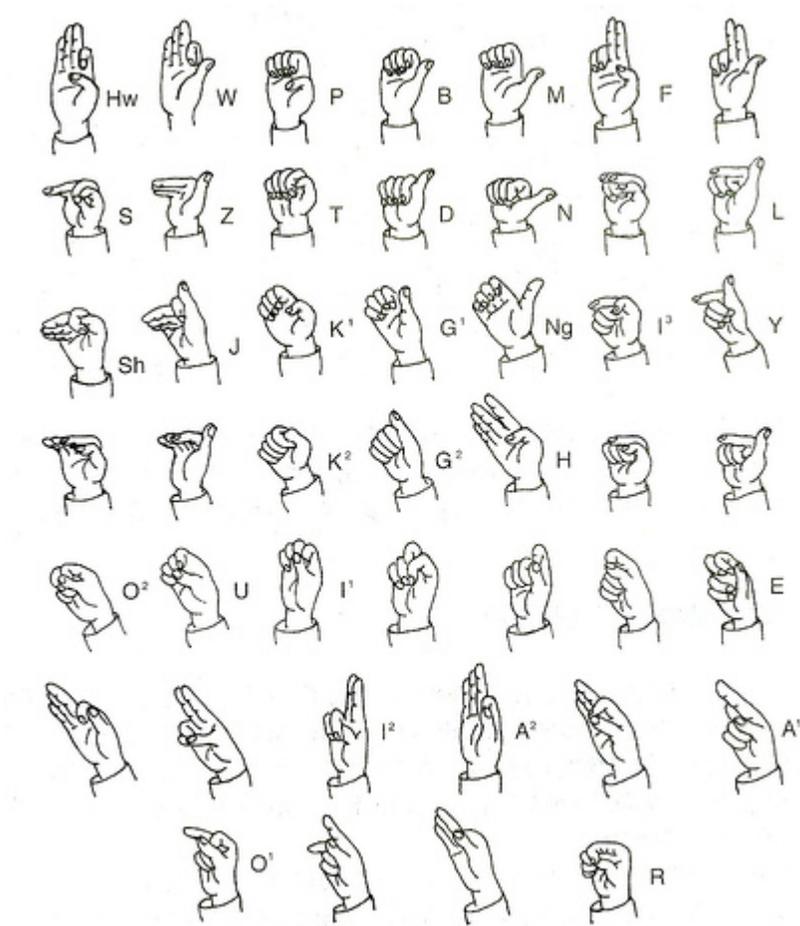


图5 赖恩手势图中未注字母的是启瘖初阶上未用到的

If you compare similar sounds, such as B and P or D and T you can see how one detail holds phonetic meaning. In those cases, a movement of the thumb signifies aspiration. This is effective from a linguistic perspective, although probably not the most practical system, because P and T (or B and D, or B and M, etc.) look pretty hard to tell apart!

Below you can see how the finger spelling signs combine to make syllables (spelled on the chart in *zhuyin*).

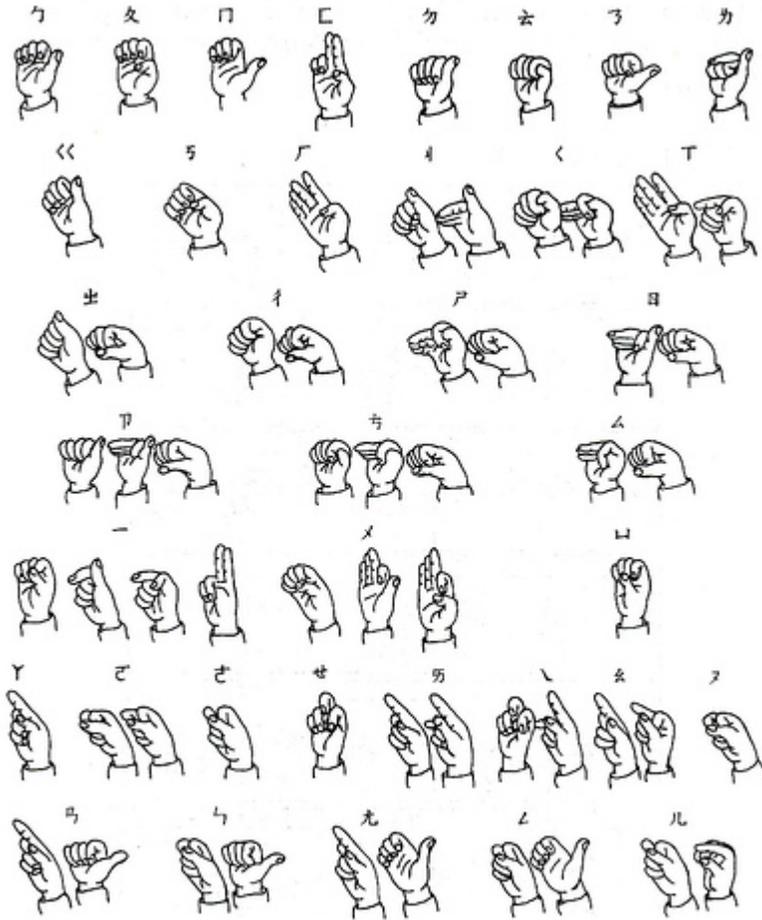


图6 赖恩氏手切

To help cope with the problems of the above system, a zhuyin (注音 finger spelling system was developed in 1930.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ㄅ | ㄆ | ㄇ | ㄏ | ㄏ | ㄏ | ㄏ |
| | | | | | | |
| ㄐ | ㄑ | ㄒ | ㄓ | ㄔ | ㄕ | ㄖ |
| | | | | | | |
| ㄗ | ㄘ | ㄙ | ㄚ | ㄛ | ㄜ | ㄝ |
| | | | | | | |
| | ㄞ | ㄟ | ㄠ | | ㄡ | |
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| ㄩ | ㄚ | ㄛ | ㄜ | ㄝ | ㄞ | ㄟ |
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| ㄠ | ㄡ | ㄢ | ㄣ | ㄤ | ㄥ | ㄦ |
| | | | | | | |

图7 国语注音符号发音指式

Following the adoption of pinyin, a corresponding pinyin finger-spelling system became official in the PRC in 1963.

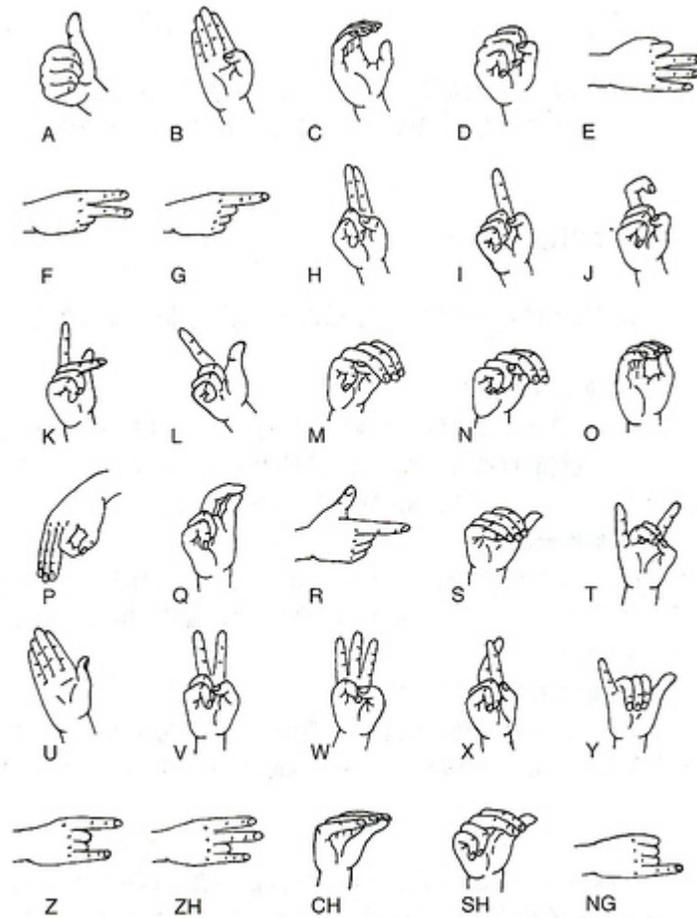


图8 汉语手指字母

Most in most cultures, however, deaf people communicate using signs that represent whole words or ideas and use finger spelling only for unusual or unfamiliar words.

Practical Activity

Find out, either from a deaf person or from the special school in your area, what sign language is used and how it is taught. Fluent signers can communicate as effectively through sign as speakers can through speech.

Write a short report on what you find out.

Deaf children should learn to sign as early as possible. In many counties parents and other family members are taught to sign as soon as it is realized that they have a deaf baby. Children who are deaf and who do not learn to understand and use a signing system when they are very young miss out on many important milestones in the development of communication and will always be less fluent communicators, and have a more limited understanding of the world than they would otherwise have done.

Signing for children who have a cognitive disability or who cannot speak clearly

Signing can enable children who can hear but cannot speak, or cannot speak clearly enough to be understood, to communicate more effectively. Children can be taught some simple signs for everyday needs and wants so that others can understand them. Their families and all professionals working with them should use the signs consistently when communicating with the children.

For example:

Hand as fists except for forefingers, moved up to mouth (to replicate chopsticks) = hungry

Hand curved to shape of cup and brought up to mouth = thirsty

Finger moved up and down on chest = toilet

Hands with palms together at side of head = tired. 'I want to go to bed'

Hand clawed like chicken's foot = chicken

Fingers like horns on head = buffalo or cow

Three fingers of right hand on palm of left hand = mama;
mummy

Two fingers of right hand on palm of left hand = dada;
daddy

Hand palm forward moved sharply across = no

Hand as fist; two sharp knocks = yes

Practical Activity

Think of five things that a child might wish to communicate and create signs for them

Write up your signs. All the signs will be collated into a booklet to teach to children

Section 3 Aids and appliances to help with skills for everyday living

Children with physical disabilities can often be more independent and more able to learn if they have some equipment to help them

Sitting

Every child with a disability needs to be able to sit up without someone holding him. No child should be left lying

for long periods or have to be supported by adults when he is sitting (other than for particular exercise periods)

Some children can sit in an ordinary small chair. Arms are useful to help the child stand up and sit down on his own and a tray on the front gives the child a surface for play or eating. The back of the chair can be high if the child needs it (as in the picture below) and the chair can also have straps to help the child maintain a good seating position



Children with more severe cerebral palsy need chairs made to give them the best possible seating position

‘For functional sitting a child needs to lean slightly forward from the hips. This frees shoulders, arms and hands for eating, writing and toileting or just simply communicating. Ideally a chair should encourage sitting skills while the child is participating in other activities. The Push Handle on the smallest Advancement Chair allows caregivers to move

it comfortably. On all chairs, the prompts, straps and supports can be removed as new skills are achieved.’



A corner seat like the one below can be made by a competent carpenter



‘For the child who cannot sit up on his own, and who needs his shoulders and upper trunk supported, the Corner

Floor Chair is the simplest way of seating a child at floor level. In this chair he is independent, with hands free for play, while maintaining optimal erect trunk alignment. When the chest strap is loosened, the child has limited movement, while remaining well secured. This encourages trunk strength, stability, and self-righting. Sitting at a 90° angle, with comfortable leg extension, children can join their peers on the level they like best'

Moving about

Children who cannot walk unaided can sometimes hold the back of a chair and use it as a walking aid. It is helpful to put 'skis' on the bottom of the chair to help it slide more easily

Parallel bars can be set up at home by tying long poles to two heavy chairs, as has been done in the picture below, by the child's father.



A father made this walking frame for his daughter.



Children who are up on their feet should have boots or ankle supports to keep their ankles steady and their feet as flat as possible on the ground

Practical Activity

Design a piece of equipment that could be made at home, that would help a child with a disability become more independent or more able to learn.

You can either draw it or describe it in words

Section 4 The impact of rural life on all aspects of child development

Child rearing practices in rural area have an impact on all children, but even more on children with disabilities. In rural areas it will not be easy to get families to think differently about their children or behave differently towards them. The following paper was written in 1999. Its findings have a particular relevance to rural children with disabilities. (Tables and references have been omitted)

INTEGRATED CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL CHINA

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January, 1999

INTEGRATED CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL CHINA

Abstract

In the past two decades China has instituted economic and social reforms that have resulted in impressive strides in virtually every area of human endeavor. Yet despite these achievements, China's rural children continue to lag far behind their urban counterparts in physical, cognitive, and social development. Since two-thirds of the country's children reside in the countryside, improving child development services in rural areas is one of China's most pressing concerns.

Educational research has shown that intervention in the preschool years, particularly before age five, has the greatest impact on an individual's future (and for the health of society as a whole).

This study evaluates the current situation of children in rural and urban China, identifies problems related to child development, presents evidence of the effect of investment in interventions targeted to the early years, assesses the socioeconomic development of such investment, and outlines a program of interventions in both health and education to improve the outcome for children in rural China.

Interventions in the early years of life have the best chance of permanently enhancing children's cognitive skills, personality, and social attitudes and behavior. By helping to

provide poor rural children (especially girls) with a fair start, therefore, early childhood education programs attack a root cause of poverty.

Research has shown that early education has a lasting effect. It helps to reduce social costs and leads to higher economic returns. It promotes social equality. It increases the efficacy of nutrition and health programs and other investments designed to improve children's chances for survival. The proposed investment in early childhood services for rural children aged 0-6 has the potential to greatly improve the quality of life in China as a whole.

This document contains information regarding the current state of preschoolers and preschool education in China and outlines a program of interventions designed to improve the quality of that education in rural counties. It is divided into chapters on;

1. Background,
2. Parenting and Child Development,
3. Preschool Education in China,
4. Solutions,
5. Conclusions.

1. Background

Even after many decades of controlled population growth, China still contains a one out of every five preschool-aged children in the world. According to the 1990 Chinese National Census, children under six then numbered 155.5 million, or 13.8 percent of the country's 1.2 billion citizens. (*Almanac of China's Population 1993*)

China's policymakers have long recognized that young children are the country's future. The *National Program of Action for Child Development in the 1990s* (China Women's Federation, 1993) states clearly that ensuring young children's survival, protection, development, and education is the most direct route to human progress and a decent quality of life. For this reason China has made a concerted effort to provide services to children (despite its limited budget and vast numbers of people to be served). China has accordingly made considerable gains:

In health

- * Infant mortality rates in China are among the lowest in the developing world, having declined from 139 per thousand in 1954 to 30 per thousand in 1990
- * Immunization coverage for children reached 85 percent in 1990
- * Malnutrition for children under five is currently 21 percent

In education

- * Between 1949 and 1995 enrollment rates for preschool-aged children went from 20 to 98.8 percent nationwide (People's Daily, Overseas Edition, October 27, 1997), with the result that in 1995, 26.3 million children aged three to six were enrolled in preschool.
- * Roughly 80 percent of Chinese counties have universal primary education (People's Daily, Overseas Edition, May 30, 1994).
- * One-year preschool classes now serve 60 percent of the nation's five- and six-year olds and are being expanded into rural areas (People's Daily, Overseas Edition, June

1, 1991).

Yet much more remains to be done. The medical, social, and educational services available to rural children, for instance (who account for two-thirds of the under six cohort) still lag considerably behind those available in the city. Where city children regularly start kindergarten at age three, for instance, at least half of all rural children have no access to appropriate child care or educational preparation before entering primary school. Rural parents are also far less likely than their urban counterparts to understand how children grow and learn, and therefore to appreciate the importance of early education to very young children's development.

While first grade enrollments in China today stand at 98 percent of the national cohort and at 95 percent for rural areas (Shanghai Development Group for Intelligence 1996), the picture becomes more complex later in children's school career. A 1994 national retention rate for children in the fifth grade of 81.08 percent, for instance, fails to convey the wide gap in student enrollments separating city from country and affluent from poor.

Children repeating grades is another serious **problem** for primary students in rural areas. As a group, rural students tend to have *trouble* adhering to school rules. They are unobservant, do poorly in class, and have little sense of accomplishment. They also tend not to take part in school social activities. Their social skills are also underdeveloped. They are rarely able to express themselves well or to convey ideas or wishes, and their personal hygiene is frequently bad (

In addition to creating a two-tiered society divided between educated city dwellers and uneducated rural populations, Chinese education policies and practice have also put girls at a considerable social and economic disadvantage. In 1994 China had 180 million illiterates over 70 percent of whom were female. Girls also account for more than 70 percent of the 1 million children who drop out of primary school every year, and for most of the 1 million children who never enter school at all.

These statistics reflect the widespread tradition in rural China that girls belong at home and therefore do not need education. Yet research has shown that when girls participate in early development programs, they are far more likely to enroll in primary school and to enter better prepared. This then leads to girls' increasing success in school, which often convinces parents to change their ideas enough to allow their girl children to continue on in school. Economic analyses consistently show that educating girls produces long-term social and economic benefits. Educated girls enter the labor market with greater self-confidence and ambition and are consequently more productive (girls' primary enrollments have a strong positive correlation with per capita GNP). Benefits derived from female education, moreover, frequently last through many generations. For educated women are more likely to plan their families (women's schooling has been shown to reduce fertility rates by 5-10 percent) and to raise healthy, educated, and productive children.

Studies have shown, moreover, that stimulation in the early years plus proper preparation for entry into primary school can put disadvantaged children on a more equal footing. Preschool interventions can help to solve the problem of primary school dropouts, grade

repetitions, gender inequity, and relapse into illiteracy. Since very young children (even those enrolled in preschool programs) spend most of their time at home, moreover, parents' knowledge about and approach to child-rearing is still the most important single factor affecting a child's early development. With parents who do not understand the value of stimulating their children or encouraging them to explore and learn from their surroundings, rural children begin school already far behind their city counterparts children in physical, cognitive, and social growth. Persisting from grade to grade and from school to work, this initial handicap continues throughout life. Not surprisingly, therefore, rural children do worse in school and are more likely to drop out than urban children. As they grow older, they are also likely to be less productive and even to become burdens on public health and social service budgets.

2. Parenting and Child Development

Since what happens in the earliest years will help to determine each person's future level of achievement in school and life, parents' child-rearing practices are the single most important influence affecting preschool-aged children's development. Parents' cultural mores, level of education, social values, ideas about child-rearing, knowledge of nutrition, and access to food, income, and security largely determine how well a child's basic physical and intellectual needs will be met.

In China where children's achievement redounds to the family's social credit and brings honor to the ancestors, child-rearing is a fundamental social issue. Especially in rural areas boys, who have higher status and carry on the family heritage, are strongly preferred over girls. Boys are therefore offered more opportunities for education but must also meet higher expectations for achievement.

Chinese parents prize obedience, filial piety, and mutual dependence between parents and children. Early leniency is generally favored over harshness. Parents who are easy, even indulgent, with preschoolers, however, frequently impose strict discipline on older children. Once a child reaches school age, it is thought to pass into a different period of life. Increased understanding brings with it increased responsibility for the child's own achievement and actions.

City attitudes, country attitudes

Chinese society traditionally considers children under the age of six to be in a state of "not understanding." Most parents therefore consider it useless to try to shape young children's behavior or instill ideas and moral direction in the preschool years. According to the traditional view, children only develop the ability to reason after age six, at which time they are sent off to primary school.

While this traditional view has largely been replaced in urban China, where parents are now almost universally convinced that early stimulation and education is beneficial and necessary for their children's healthy development, in the countryside the old view still holds. Rural parents - largely unaware of how much early intervention can enhance children's intelligence and social skills - concentrate their efforts on providing clothing and food. One study found that 60 percent of rural parents think that children's physical

well-being depends on getting three meals a day. . Yet even in providing the basics, few rural parents have a grasp of nutrition and healthy behaviors sufficient to ensure their children's physical well-being. The majority do little to ensure that children have proper nutrition, physical exercise, and a secure routine. Even when incomes rise, moreover, rural parents rarely buy children's books, toys, and other educational aids. Of the 600 families with children aged 4 to 12 surveyed by Chen in 1994, 37 percent had no children's books and 27 percent owned fewer than 10 books of any description.

Rural children also tend to enter preschool at a later age than their urban counterparts. While 70 percent of parents in Hebei and Jiangsu provinces appreciated that early education could give their children a head start, for instance, only 10 percent thought three-year-olds needed preschool education. In rural Hebei, the poorer of the two provinces, 83 percent of parents planned to send their child to kindergarten no earlier than age five or six, while 68 those in rural Jiangsu planned to send them to school at age four or five (Shen and Xiang, 1986).

By contrast city parents have become increasingly aware of the benefits derived from early childhood education - especially since the one-child policy took effect in the 1970's. Many are so convinced that they send their children to the best preschool available regardless of distance or cost. Children as young as three, supervised by parents and grandparents, are encouraged to learn how to draw, play musical instruments, or speak a second language. Enrollment has also increased in formal kindergartens, with the result that more urban children than ever are now enrolled in high-quality kindergartens, furnished with appropriate toys and teaching materials, trained teachers, and a developed curriculum.

Chinese parents' dedication to educating their children was reflected in a recent national survey, which found that 40.8 percent of city families save money for their children's education (first choice) and 27.3 percent intend to invest in their children's education (second choice)

Physical health and development

While Chinese children from the North and Central provinces tend to grow taller than those from the South, studies consistently show that rural children everywhere lag behind their urban counterparts in physical growth. National surveys recorded, for instance, that urban children made average gains of 3 percent in weight and 1-2 percent in height between 1975 and 1985 while rural children showed little or no improvement. These findings suggest that rural children may lag as much as 10 years behind urban children in nutritional status and physical growth. While the percentage of city children judged to be moderately underweight dropped from 12 to 6 percent between 1987 and 1991, in the same time period the group went from 24 to 19 percent - still nearly a fifth - of all rural children. Small stature caused by malnourishment is almost nonexistent in China's cities yet is not uncommon in rural areas, particularly in the provinces of Hainan, Guangxi, and Xinjiang. The problem is more prevalent among girls than boys

Children in rural China also tend to be less healthy than urban children and less likely to

have the complete array of early childhood vaccinations. Rural children also tend to suffer more from the lack of vital micronutrients (such as iron, iodine, vitamin A, and calcium). It is estimated that rickets, a vitamin D deficiency in children brought about by feeding patterns and lack of exposure to sunlight in the first few months of life, affects a fifth of China's rural preschoolers (nearly half of all rural children in North China, a third of children in Central China, and a quarter of children in South China). Yet the occurrence of rickets is only 2 percent in the urban south.

Intellectual development

Early experience affects children's intellectual development. Recent research has now shown, in fact, that early experiences influence the formation of new neural pathways and connections in the brain, enhancing the physical capacity for mental activity throughout life. In October 1997, speaking on child care at the University of Maryland in College Park, America's first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton summed up these recent findings: "Children's earliest experiences, the sights and sounds and smells and feelings they encounter, the challenges they meet, determine how their brains are wired. When someone speaks, reads, or plays with an infant or toddler, he or she is activating the connections in that child's brain that will one day enable him or her to think and read and speak and solve problems by him- or herself."

Emotional and social development

Sensitive care-giving, individual attention, and responsive interaction with infants also has emotional social consequences. For in addition to having more difficulty learning and mastering language, children who are emotionally neglected or abandoned early in life are also more like to have trouble experiencing empathy, attachment, and emotional expression in general. According to a major national study, Psychological Development and Education of Chinese Children and Adolescents (Zhu 1990), urban children are also intellectually more advanced than their rural counterparts.

Another study conducted in 1989 by WHO and the Shanghai Institute for Pediatric Research found that rural preschoolers lagged behind their urban peers in the development of gross motor skills, fine motor skills, vision and perception, hearing and language, and cognitive understanding. Using a 70-item questionnaire derived from the WHO protocol, the DDST, the Vineland Assessment of Social Competence (Guo 1991), and the California Fifty-Item School Readiness Test, the WHO-Shanghai study found that the gap between country and city children was particularly wide for abilities that require practice and learning. Specifically, rural children between the ages of 5 and 9.5 months were slow to develop vision and fine motor skills and those between 8 and 12.5 months showed a delayed grasp of language, hearing, and understanding concepts.

Of the 3,320 urban and rural children aged four to six-and-a-half tested in 1988 using the Wechsler Younger Children Scale of Intelligence used in China, urban children in every age group (and by every measure of intelligence - scored significantly higher than their rural peers. Given their more highly developed skills in learning, language, logical and flexible thinking, and the understanding of concepts, urban students also earned better grades than rural students once they entered school. Early childhood development

has been shown to help prevent the stunting of rural children's physical and intellectual development, which otherwise puts them at a lasting disadvantage from the beginning of their lives. If China is not to have a two-tiered citizenry, therefore, it must improve the child development and education services available to preschoolers throughout country.

Parenting extremes - China's "sandbag" children

One traditional method of rearing young children, commonly practiced in parts of Shandong and Hubei provinces, is known as "sandbag rearing." After a baby is born, it is laid in a bag of fine sand. The sand acts as a diaper and is changed once a day. Once placed in the bag, the baby is left alone, face up, and is visited only when being fed by the mother. To reduce stimulation, adults are not allowed to hold, play with, or train the child in any way. After a period of time the child becomes calm and quiet, ceasing to cry or express emotions.

Sandbag-reared babies are considered to be "good" babies, easy to deal with and raise. They are generally left in the bag for one to two years, and only after that are taught to walk. But while this child-rearing method cuts down considerably on the wear and tear on the parents, it provides the worst possible environment for the child's physical, mental, and emotional development. Studying the phenomenon, researchers compared a group of randomly selected children aged seven to sixteen years old deprived of stimulation for over a year with a similar group raised more normally. The average IQ of sandbag-reared children was significantly lower than that of children in the control group, and the longer the sandbag experience, the lower the IQ

It was also found that parents using the sandbag method were likely to have little or no education and to be more conservative about preserving traditional ways. Given these parents' limited education, it was unlikely that they knew anything at all about how young children develop or the impact of early stimulation and education. Most expressed the belief that children grow and learn by themselves. Since sandbag child-rearing occurs in areas where water and economic resources are scarce, it is a practice that is likely to continue. It is therefore critical to educate parents -especially in poor areas - on the best way to provide a healthy and stimulating environment for their young children.

3. Preschool Education in China

All Chinese children aged three to six are eligible for a three-year kindergarten program, and in some areas five-year-olds may also attend a one-year preschool class attached to the primary school. The Chinese kindergarten curriculum uses cooperative activities and decision making to convey a political message. Children are taught language skills, arithmetic, singing, dancing, and drawing. Nearly half of the 930,000 teachers and administrators currently employed in China's preschool system, moreover, have a middle-school degree in preschool education. Yet China still has only 41 percent of the eligible three-to-six cohort enrolled. With China currently working to increase preschool attendance, however, it is projected that urban kindergarten enrollments will reach 70 percent of eligible-age children in the 1990s and rural enrollments in the one-year program will reach 60 percent.

Although the State Education Commission is officially responsible for preschool education in China, however, most preschools are actually established and maintained by local communities (which run the majority of preschool classes and kindergartens), business enterprises, or government administrators. Roughly 58 percent of all children receiving preschool education today are enrolled in community-based preschools, and 56 percent of preschool teachers are employed by the community (Children and Women in China 1995). Preschools in China also differ considerably between city and country in the quality of the education they provide. While demand for preschool education in cities is high, for instance, most rural parents are still unaware of its importance. In rural communities, therefore, preschool rarely makes it to the level of a priority concern - with the result that teachers are less well trained, the curriculum is poorly developed, and facilities are inadequate and poorly maintained. Rural preschools also tend to suffer from a lack of expertise in educational management, poor motivation on the part of teachers, limited transportation resources, and inadequate teaching materials and supplies.

A recent study of preschools in and around Shanghai, the biggest city in China, found that 95 percent of urban and 73.1 percent of rural children aged three to six were enrolled in kindergarten. Yet of the 2,286 kindergartens operating in peri-urban areas of the municipality, only 14.8 percent met minimum standards and only 32.9 percent of kindergarten teachers were qualified for their jobs. In addition, more than half of suburban preschool teachers did not like their jobs and wanted to leave.

Another survey conducted in 75 villages in 23 counties in the Jiangsu and Hebei provinces, found that 82 percent of kindergarten teachers in Jiangsu and 96 percent in Hebei had little or no training in early childhood education. Training available to preschool teachers, moreover, consists of a one- or two-month crash course in teaching singing and dancing

Real as these problems are, however, preschools in remote villages and minority population districts face conditions far worse. Many rural areas have no kindergartens at all or offer programs that are essentially babysitting facilities. Funding is in short supply. Preschools operate without a curriculum and in poor (and sometimes unsafe) facilities. Sixty-five percent of kindergarten teachers in Hebei province and 27 percent in Jiangsu reported having no access to teaching materials such as toys, books, and pictures. And as a group rural kindergarten teachers are ill-trained, ill-paid, ill-motivated and not respected.

4. Solutions

Given the right opportunities and the right learning environment, children will develop in similar ways whatever their background ... As long as we keep in mind that everything we do is concerned with the development of the whole child, we are doing the same sorts of things for the same sorts of reasons.

-Dr. Stephen Ngaruiya

In China today, two-thirds of the country's preschool-aged children live in underdeveloped rural areas where health care facilities are inadequate, child care facilities

either do not exist or do not meet minimum standards, and - most importantly - parents' knowledge of child development and early education is limited. In physical, intellectual, and social development, rural children lag measurably behind their urban peers. During the past decade the World Bank has worked with a number of different countries to develop integrated and culturally specific early childhood intervention programs. The following program is derived from the experience of these countries - particularly Colombia, Mexico, and India - and adapted to suit the Chinese context. India, especially forward-thinking on this front, has made its early education program a national priority, and China's policymakers are urged to take a similar stance with regard to early education for rural children in China. In accordance with the strategy outlined in the National Program of Action for Child Development in China in the 1990s, a variety of approaches will be used to educate parents and preschool-aged children and to increase preschool enrollments in sparsely populated, mountainous, and remote areas and to nomadic populations. Services for rural children aged 0-3, a formative period largely ignored by parents, educators, and policymakers, will also be improved. The proposed program calls for an information campaign to educate rural parents about the importance of interacting with children aged 0-6, stimulating their minds, and encouraging them to explore and learn. Broadcast radio and TV are two powerful educational tools for increasing parents' awareness of ECD. Educational videos, moreover, have the ability to convey the message quickly to large numbers of people, and to do so in an engaging and easily retainable way

The Philippines, Bolivia, and Nigeria have all used the mass media successfully to educate their citizens about early childhood development. Local and national broadcast television has been used in these countries to teach parents the basics of child development and care. ECD programs for the mass media show how physical and mental stimulation are as necessary to young children's health and growth as nutritious food. By the same token, programs such as Sesame Street, which uses popular children's songs and stories to convey information, have proved highly effective for educating young children. Mass media, moreover, is available throughout China.

In rural China young children are cared for exclusively by their mothers in the home for at least the first six years of their lives. Research has shown, moreover, that the most effective interventions are those that occur in the first four years of a child's life - the years when humans develop the foundation for intelligence, personality, and social behavior. Educating parents is therefore the most effective means of achieving an integrated early development program for very young children.

It is also important that parents and caregivers understand that child development occurs in stages. Teaching the basic principles of child development strengthens the parents' ability to stimulate their children appropriately at different ages and stages, which divide roughly as follows:

- *infant care and development (birth to age one)*. Focus on interaction between mother and infant, such as talking, active engagement while feeding, frequent touching, showing affection, and responding to the infant's demands. Healthy cognitive development requires active interaction with caregivers in a safe environment, with many objects that

children can see, hear, smell, and taste during playtime.

* *preparing children for school (three to six)*. Older preschool-aged children need a variety of activities to help them develop the skills they will need in school, such as simple problem solving tasks, taking care of themselves (dressing and eating), interacting socially (with adults and peers), and developing language and cognitive skills (telling stories, becoming familiar with the spoken and written word, drawing pictures, etc.).

Parents in rural China also need to learn about:

* *adequate and appropriate nutrition for young children*. The traditional home-weaning diet includes rice or wheat porridge but no fat or oil - a diet shown to contain insufficient caloric intake to support rapid growth. Undernourishment during this crucial period can lead to physical and mental problems later in life, including stunted growth. It is therefore important to package nutrition information in a way easily understandable to parents and to encourage them to make more nutritious supplementary foods using ingredients available in the home.

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* *constructive interaction with young children*. Mothers will be instructed on how best to supervise and interact with their children as these children pass through different stages of development. The program will set out which conditions are optimal for development at each stage (such as physical, verbal, and emotional exploration and experimentation from ages one to three).

* *growth monitoring*. Mothers will be instructed on how to conduct basic growth monitoring activities, such as measuring children's height and weight to determine physical development. These activities should reinforce improvements made in nutrition by showing mothers that they result in healthier outcomes for the child.

* *stimulating environment*. To enhance children's awareness of their environment and their social, emotional and intellectual performance, parents will be encouraged to set up and use natural and safe learning settings in the home. The program will use positive reinforcement to change deleterious child-rearing practices.

* *enhance mothers' education*. Particularly where the mother is illiterate, preschool education programs can be used to enrich parents' educational skills along with those of their children.

5. Conclusions

For thousands of years China has revered education as the surest route to political, social, economic, and cultural attainment and success. In modern times the country's nine-year compulsory education requirement - complemented by substantial vocational, adult, and higher education programs - have raised the population's cultural level and economic productivity dramatically. Socialist modernization, in fact, is based on the idea that the nation's future rests on improving the quality of its children.

Yet significant differences in family policy, population growth, social environment, and economic development have combined to create a two-tiered system when it comes to

early childhood education. Ignorant of young children's changing needs, China's rural parents fail to provide the nutrition, stimulation, and interaction needed to promote healthy growth. No government or community education services are targeted to children aged 0-3, and while city children attend quality preschools from age 3 to 6, their rural peers - who make up two-thirds of the cohort - are relegated to inferior facilities or have no access to preschool education at all.

Under these conditions, China's rural children have fallen far behind their city peers in their physical, mental, and social development. They enter school already at a disadvantage, and this disadvantage continues to hamper their productivity throughout life. China is not now - and will not be in the future - able to provide early child care facilities for all its children, particularly in poor and remote areas. If the preschool education gap between city and country to be closed, it will have to be closed by better-informed parents.

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Recognizing the key role parents play in children's development, China's National Program of Action for Child Development in the 1990's states that educating 90 percent of parents with children below the age of fourteen about child care and child rearing is one of its primary goals. In the same vein India, the Philippines, Nigeria, Israel, and Mexico have instituted national training for parents and caregivers in the principles of early child development. As China becomes increasingly developed, the economy will need more and more skilled workers. Urban communities will prosper and grow, leaving rural communities - which hold two-thirds of the population- ever further behind. Efforts to enhance early development of rural children and educate parents about the benefits and practices related to integrated child development will help to shrink this growing rift. For giving rural children an equal start will help to make them and their children more intelligent and effective people and productive citizens throughout their lives.

15

Practical Activity

Explain how the issues raised in this article have a particular impact on children with disabilities in rural areas

How can the experiences of some children with disabilities be compared to the experiences of the 'sand bag children'? What impact will this have on their development?

This article was written eight years ago. Have things

changed since then?

What things are still the same?

Do you think that the situation of rural children with disabilities has improved over the past 8 years? In what ways?

You have now completed Module 3

You should be able to understand and describe how children with disabilities can learn communication skills and a range of skills for greater independence.

You should understand the importance of communication and alternatives to speech for children who are deaf or who cannot speak or speak clearly enough to be understood

You should be able to think about simple devices which would help children with disabilities become more independent and understand the importance of appropriate seating in enabling a child to develop skills and understanding.

You should understand the importance of early stimulation and its role in cognitive development