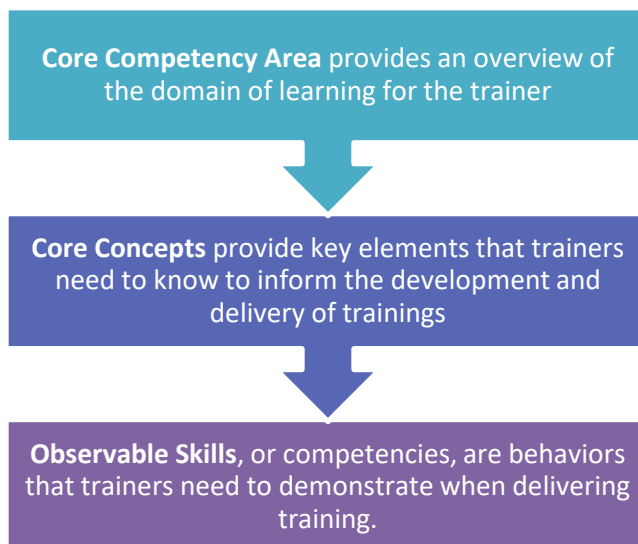


# Core Competencies for Trainers

## Overview

Competencies are defined as an individual's demonstrable abilities that can be observed or otherwise assessed. The competencies in this document represent core strategies that trainers can use to plan, develop, deliver, and evaluate early childhood trainings.

Quality early care and education begins with a highly qualified early childhood workforce (NAEYC, 2009). Research shows that the years between birth and age 5 are a critical learning period for children, and the quality of an early childhood program largely depends upon the education and ongoing professional development of teachers and administrators. In general, core competencies refer to an individual's demonstrated skills and abilities. The Core Competencies for Early Childhood Trainers outline specific, basic concepts that an early childhood trainer should know, learn and be able to do. This document, which is part of the third set of competencies developed to support the Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators, ensures that professional development trainings address these competencies through quality instruction that focuses on the needs of the early childhood workforce and the goals of the early childhood programs. The Core Competencies for Early Childhood Trainers, as outlined in this document, is an effort to build a comprehensive and effective system of education and training for the early childhood workforce. There are three components addressed in this document, defined below: core competency area, core concepts, and observable skills, or competencies.



There are six categories of competency: adult learning theory, training delivery and methodologies that facilitate learning, transfer of learning, training content development, monitoring and evaluating training effectiveness, and characteristics of effective trainers. This document can also be used to support the types of trainings a trainer should seek in order to become a better skilled trainer for the early childhood workforce and the Texas Trainer Registry. Our hope is this would support high quality training experiences for the early childhood workforce.

Coming soon, trainers will be able to earn micro-credentials across the six areas by demonstrating individual competencies via video submissions or other artifacts on the CLI Engage platform. Please contact Dr. Varghese for more information (Cheryl.A.Varghese@uth.tmc.edu). Information will also be posted on cliengage.org when the micro-credential system launches. The micro-credentials will be linked to the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS), automatically updating the education and credentials for early childhood professionals with personal TECPDS accounts.

## Using This Document:

- **Trainers, Specialists, Instructors, Higher Education Faculty:** Professionals who provide training and professional development services to educators can use this document to self-assess current skill levels, set goals for improvement, and track improvements. Used over time, the tool supports self-reflection and differentiation of skill levels (i.e., competencies demonstrated but needing further improvement). By looking at gaps across the six areas, trainers are able to identify where additional training and learning is needed, allowing for targeted professional development decisions that build specific skill sets through train-the-trainer workshops and courses. These competencies can also be used to develop train-the-trainer workshops and courses.
- **Program Administrators:** Professionals who are responsible for managing, implementing and evaluating programs can use this document to identify areas of need, create targeted professional development plans, and evaluate the appropriateness of existing trainings. The framework can also be used to develop detailed job descriptions and reward trainers who engage in improvement efforts and demonstrate increasing levels of competence.
- **Policymakers, Program Leaders, Training Organizations, State and Local Agencies:** Individuals and agencies responsible for high stakes decisions, policies, and programs can use the competencies to create and implement policies and initiatives that support quality improvement and professionalism of training and professional development, including hiring train-the-trainers and hosting train-the-trainer workshops.



## Core Competency Area 1: Adult Learning Theory

Part of being an effective educator involves understanding how adults learn best (Lieb, 1991). Learning is a lifelong part of human development that is personal, contingent on experience, and is to some extent intuitive. As professionals engage in activities to increase their knowledge and skills, they are unable to disentangle personal experiences from their

orientation toward learning and receptivity to training experiences. Adult learners often derive greater benefits from training experiences when they have been able to choose training opportunities that (a) interest them, (b) build on foundational knowledge they already possess, and (c) they feel are connected to their personal goals for career and professional development.

Core Concepts:

- Principles of adult learning are important to the development of competency based training
- Adult learning theory stems from behaviorist and constructivist theories
  - Behavioral perspectives emphasize the importance of structuring the learning environment so information is received in small increments that build upon one another along with positive reinforcement
  - Constructivist approaches emphasize the importance of culture in shaping motivations and expectations for professional learning and growth
- Individual differences among adult learners influence interpersonal and group dynamics during training sessions
- Trainings must be adapted to meet the individual needs of the adult learner
- Adult learning is built upon what the adult learner already knows and is able to demonstrate
- Experiential and interactive opportunities are important for retention and learning
- Individual differences in learning change with age and transition through various stages in life and career
- Adult learning styles assist the learner in processing the information and allow them to process information through multiple senses

### **Application of Adult Learning Theory: Observable Competencies**

- Articulates and can apply principles of adult learning to training development and delivery.
- Identifies the typical stages in the development and mastery of new knowledge and skills and develops training materials that promote sequential development
- Verbalizes how individual and cultural differences (e.g., immigration, culture, age, professional status) can impact learning preferences and should be considered when developing strategies to meet those needs
- Identifies the importance of critical reflection and self-directed learning, demonstrates understanding of how to adjust the training approach for participants that do not share these values (i.e., values such as autonomy and individuality in learning experiences that are closely linked with western thinking; biases toward individuality and autonomy may isolate or seem irrelevant to members of communal cultures)
- Demonstrates adaptation of training to meet individual needs of participants (e.g., assesses what participants already know and adjusts approach to build on existing knowledge and skills, filling gaps in understanding and helping participants connect training content to existing knowledge)
- Promotes understanding and retention by providing participants repeated and varied opportunities to engage with content/material (ex., uses auditory and visual stimuli, didactic

presentation, opportunities to engage in discussions, application exercises through behavioral and experiential activities, encouraging participants to share and guide others)

- Engages learners in identifying their own learning and setting personal learning goals
- Uses experiential and interactive training techniques and creates opportunities to practice the learning experience
- Creates and sustains an engaging, supportive, and safe learning environment that enhances learning



## Core Competency Area 2: Training Delivery and Methodologies that Facilitate Learning

In order to effectively support learners, the trainer recognizes the impact of the physical training environment in facilitating or impeding learning. The integration of adult learning theory with training content, planning, and session management are important. Conducting sessions in a well-organized manner helps participants stay focused on learning new content and skills. Effective training requires strong group facilitation skills and planning that connects content and objectives to meaningful activities.

### Core Concepts:

- The training environment must be safe, comfortable in order to support learning
- Training sessions should provide an introduction, overview of goals, learning objectives, and content with summary and evaluation
- Effective trainers deliver training based on principles of adult learning and use a variety of methodologies to support the learning objectives
- Active learning techniques are effective as teaching tools
- Effective trainers value and utilize elements that create an effective presentation style
- The principles of group management and the dynamics of creating group interaction can be very effective teaching tools
- The trainer's role is a facilitator of learning
- Adults learn best in environments that are non-threatening and recognize differences in learning styles
- Effective trainers select appropriate technology and audio visual supports that best match training content
- Effective Trainers utilize content and objectives that are appropriate for distance learning and self-paced training methodologies, when applicable

### Training Delivery and Methodologies that Facilitate Learning: Observable Competencies

#### Organization and Session Management

- Presents training content in an organized fashion (e.g., follows agenda, articulates transitions)
- Ensures all necessary materials (e.g., workbooks, evaluations, props, activities) are prepared and ready for use before training begins
- Shows punctuality and releases participants according to an agreed upon schedule
- Develops training materials that are accurate and legible; if using tools such as PowerPoint, trainer uses best practices for developing PowerPoint slides (e.g., slides are not text heavy; slides have consistent theme/font; fonts are easily readable)
- Effectively sets up LCD projector, SMART board, tablets/iPad, or other technologies, as needed. *Note:* The trainer does not need to set up the technology by him or herself; the trainer can seek out assistance from others (e.g., media specialist, technology-related personnel).
- Prepares training modifications to ensure coverage of content in case of equipment failure
- Creates an atmosphere that feels safe and open to a range of perspectives and opinions
- Arranges the training room to promote interactions among participants (e.g., small groups, pair-and-share) and to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities
- Clearly articulates learning objectives and takes time to check for understanding before moving forward (does not move forward before participants are primed for learning)
- Uses a variety of training methodologies (e.g., lecture, discussion, visual presentation) to keep participants interested and engaged in training content
- Demonstrates, models, and discusses concepts and skills to ensure participants have a good understanding of core content
- Uses a variety of audio/visual support to deepen participants' learning experiences (e.g., charts, graphs, workbooks, note-taking handouts, dry erase boards, posters, PowerPoint presentations, video clips)
- Clearly states expectations for learning and participation prior to the training
- Uses intentional and efficient methods for transitioning participants from one activity to the next (e.g., music/songs, direction cards, verbal cues)
- Makes connections between content and learning objectives
- Provides logistical information (e.g., agenda, restrooms, certificates) at the beginning of the training
- Clearly provides an introduction/overview of the training.
- Clearly outlines or describes what the participants will know and/or be able to do upon completion of the training (Learning Objectives)

## Group Facilitation

- Establishes and maintains group cohesion by setting clear expectations for participant engagement and communication; appropriately engages participants who are reluctant to

join in or who interfere with constructive group processes

- Uses principles of conflict resolution to reduce tension and de-escalate resistance (e.g., works to elicit reasons/rationales and beliefs from participants, and helps to negotiate resolution)
- Uses small groups to facilitate opportunities to share thoughts about training content, reflect on how information relates to their own practices, and generalize what is taught across multiple contexts/settings
- Uses a variety of strategies during a training session to create a positive climate for collaboration and engagement
- Provides sensitive and constructive feedback that supports the needs of individuals and deepens understanding of the group
- Responds to participants' verbal and nonverbal signals (e.g., "That's a great comment—thank you for your input," or notes participants' expressions during training)
- Uses appropriate techniques to manage group dynamics and ensure participants are engaged (e.g., varied levels of socializing, such as individuals, pairs, small groups, or whole group activities)
- Models and/or articulates the procedure/process of the activity before encouraging participants to join in
- Uses verbal or nonverbal behaviors to refocus participants who may be disengaged

## Experiential and Transformational Approaches to Learning

- Provides opportunities to discuss practices in small groups and problem solve about contextual situations that link with their own practice
- Uses a variety of training methods (e.g., case studies, role play, question cards, games, mind maps) to keep participants engaged in the training
- Uses a variety of strategies to ensure that training content is intellectually stimulating and involves the learner in concrete learning experiences, including:
  - Engaging participants in role playing so they can perceive content from multiple perspectives
  - Engaging participants in brainstorming sessions in order to generate ideas linked with their own practices and experiences
  - Engaging participants in reviews and discussion of case studies/application vignettes
  - Integrating content into games that increase participants' interest in and attention to content
- Encourages participants to challenge their beliefs and practices by promoting exploration of alternate perspectives, critical and reflective inquiry, and posing/solving problems
- Conducts sessions that are learner-centered (e.g., promotes autonomy, choice, participation, and collaboration)
- Provides opportunities to practice and reinforce training content (i.e., presents content in multiple formats and activities)

- Asks higher level, open-ended, thinking questions (analysis or thinking required, “why,” “how,” compare, link, explain, etc.) during the training



## Core Competency Area 3: Transfer of Learning

Professional learning is not a discrete event, but is best understood as a process that unfolds over time and in concert with experiences and interactions with actors throughout one’s professional environment. This the transfer of learning is important for people to embrace lifelong learning and be able to transfer and apply what they have learned into different situations. Effective training incorporates information about trainee’s prior workplace experiences in areas connected to training content, and supports trainees and their organizations in thinking about post-training extended learning opportunities. To say that learning has occurred means that the person can demonstrate that learning *later* (Perkins and Salomon, 1996a, p. 423).

### Core Concepts:

- Learning is a process and is shaped by opportunities and activities that occur before, during, and after participation in formal trainings
- Changes that result from training are only possible when managers at the participant’s organizations support employee efforts at implementing what was learned in training
- Transfer is a core concept in learning and relates to process and outcomes
- Previous learning is a building block for all subsequent learning
- Levels and types of transfer of learning can be positive or negative
- Effective Trainers recognize the impact of individual learning preferences and culturally based learning styles and can design a variety of strategies for the transfer of learning
- Effective trainers give relevant examples and encourage critical assessment of how new learning can be applied
- Effective trainers know the sequence and stages of acquiring and mastering new knowledge and skills

### Supports Transfer of Learning: Observable Competencies

- Draws on participants’ experiences in order to help them understand how training content connects with their own professional environments
- Adjusts and modifies plans for the application of knowledge and strategies covered in training to meet the needs of participants with different learning styles and attitudes
- Makes specific recommendations for immediately applying content covered in training to their own practice upon returning to work (e.g., designs post-training exercises and activities)
- Assesses individual participants’ level of knowledge at the conclusions of training and recommends additional learning opportunities to extend knowledge and skills
- Provides information and recommendations to management (e.g., directors, supervisors,

team leaders) that will help ensure participants have opportunities to practice and extend content presented in training (e.g., establishing and participating in communities of practice, ongoing support through coaching and mentoring, consultation, targeted collaborative staff development sessions)

- Trainer provides opportunities for participants to practice key training concepts with trainer support, as needed



## Core Competency Area 4: Training Content Development

Training developers bear considerable responsibility for building the effectiveness of the workforce. Developing effective training content requires deep knowledge of one's own field of practice, including evidence-based and emerging practices as well as alternate perspectives that challenge dominant views. Trainings and trainers should ensure the success of training through varied levels of assessment and feedback. The training experience should be constructed based on the needs of the participants and a content scope which is narrow enough to prevent confusion, yet broad enough to ensure participants leave training aware of the wider context, criticisms, and extensions of what they have learned so they may make informed choice about continued professional development and practice.

### Core Concepts:

- Effective trainers give accurate, current information consistent with sound theories of child development, developmentally appropriate practice, quality standards, and licensing regulations
- Effective trainers give accurate, current information consistent with sound theories of program planning and personnel management, and licensing regulations
- Effective trainers possess extensive knowledge and practical experience in the identified core competencies for early childhood practitioners and/or administrators
- Effective trainers research current trends in the core competency area and synthesize these findings to support the development of learning goals and
- S.M.A.R.T. competency-based learning objectives (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time Bound)
- Effective trainers use proven methods to assess the needs of participants and utilize this data to design the training content

### Depth and Breadth of Knowledge: Observable Competencies

- Designs well-organized trainings around a clearly identified set of SMART (e.g., Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-based) learning objectives with measurable behavioral outcomes for participants
- Develops learning objectives that align with relevant early learning guidelines (i.e., Infant, Toddler, and Three Year Old Guidelines and Prekindergarten Guidelines), core competencies for practitioners and administrators, regulations, and accreditation standards



- Develops training content to fit the needs of learners with a broad range of knowledge and skills (i.e., designs trainings to target beginner, intermediate, and advanced audience levels)
- Designs and delivers training content and activities that are informed by evidence-based and emerging practices (i.e., creates and modifies training in light of new evidence from research and shifts in theory)
- Integrates information that is comprehensive, meaningful, and relevant to participants' needs, making connections between theory and practice
- Reflects knowledge of the value of diversity, uniqueness, and abilities of all children and families
- Stays current on research, best practices, and trends related to the topic (as evidenced by citations or references to studies within the past five to seven years)
- Trainer provides clear definitions of relevant content-related vocabulary or key concepts



## Core Competency Area 5: Monitoring and Evaluating Training Effectiveness

Effective trainers must be able to collect and synthesize information from participants, both before and after training. Before training assessments are used to ensure a good match between the needs of participants and the depth and complexity of the training objectives. During training, trainers must monitor for participant understanding and make adjustments as needed to ensure the training is meeting the needs of its participants. After training assessment of participant learning provides critical information that must be used to strengthen the connection between learning objectives and course content, and subsequently improve the training activities and experiences.

### Core Concepts:

- Effective trainers utilize methods of assessing training effectiveness, including gauging learning transfer, learner interest, satisfaction, and needs
- Effective trainers use behavioral objectives (i.e. those that you can hear or see demonstrated) in measuring the extent of participants' learning
- Effective trainers understand the importance of training evaluation results for future trainings and participant follow-up
- Effective trainers use needs assessment information in training design

### Evaluates Training Outcomes: Observable Competencies

- Uses training needs analysis (i.e., needs assessment) to help determine match between participant's knowledge, attitudes, and interests with the training objectives and methods

- ❑ Uses information collected about participant knowledge, attitudes, and interest to provide individualized support/scaffolding around training objectives
- ❑ Checks for understanding during training sessions and modifies instruction to fill gaps in understanding
- ❑ Identifies indicators of success that are connected to learning objectives for training, and uses established or self-developed evaluation tools to determine the effectiveness of training
- ❑ Uses a variety of assessment methods and tools that are well aligned with training content and evaluation needs (e.g., surveys and feedback forms, demonstrations or performance certification, knowledge exams, participant or employee/stakeholder interviews)
- ❑ Modifies or redesigns training delivery, content, and/or activities to address weaknesses identified through participant evaluation and feedback
- ❑ Uses training evaluation methods with participants to get feedback on training activities, content, and effectiveness in meeting learning objectives and training facilitation



## Core Competency Area 6: Characteristics of Effective Trainers

Highly effective trainers are driven by a desire to teach. In order to teach, one must be highly knowledgeable in their content areas, be flexible, and professional. Both the trainings and the trainers must reflect the professional values and ethics fundamental to those working in the early care and education field. They must interact with participants in a manner that is respectful and focused on the task of building knowledge and skills of early childhood practice that is research-based.

### Core Concepts:

- Effective trainers recognize the importance of examining one's own sense of self, attitudes towards learning processes, and teaching in order to support learners
- Effective trainers understand the need to be flexible, when possible, and responsive to trainee's needs in order to maintain their attention and interest in the training sessions
- Effective trainers apply a professional code of ethics for Adult Educators and the field of early childhood
- Effective trainers aid in establishing professional growth plans
- Effective trainers understand the importance of maintaining a professional demeanor in the training environment
- Effective trainers recognize and model the standards for adult learning and professional development
- Effective trainers understand the importance of keeping current on laws, state mandates, and practice changes in the field of early childhood and can incorporate up to date information in curriculum

- Effective trainers know and adhere to copyright regulations and know how to fully and accurately cite sources for materials used in the curriculum

## Characteristics of Effective Trainers: Observable Competencies

### Professionalism and Ethics

- Ensures that personal content knowledge is deep enough to support participants and connects those who need additional information with the right resources
- Reflects on one's own biases and perspectives on learning to help maintain objectivity and flexibility with participants
- Practices or rehearses, and to the extent possible, pilots trainings before working with participants
- Refrains from promising answers that will not be delivered, and informs participants when an exact answer is not known

### Disposition and Interactions with Participants

- Motivates participant's learning by showing energy and excitement
- Values participants by responding sensitively to their comments and questions
- Shows flexibility by making accommodations for learner preferences that do not alter the content and effectiveness of the training or coaching
- Uses appropriate humor to set participants at ease and increase interest
- Shares leadership during activities intended to increase learner problem solving and decision-making skills
- Shows respect to all learners and avoids using any verbal or nonverbal characterizations of diverse individuals or groups
- Speaks clearly and in a manner that keeps participants' attention and interest (e.g., varies/modulates tone and volume, uses a pace that allows participants to follow along and join-in as appropriate)
- Avoids jargon and ensures technical terms are presented in a manner that promotes understanding.