



## Foreword

On November 9, 2000, CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, INC. (CAII) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) co-hosted a first in a series of luncheon presentations targeted to stimulate discussion regarding education to combat abusive child labor. The first luncheon presentation was entitled, “Planning Education to Help Combat Abusive Child Labor: Important Considerations.” The featured speaker for the luncheon was William E. Myers, Ed.D., an internationally well-known and respected authority on child labor issues.

A transcript of Dr. Myers’ presentation was developed based on numerous requests to provide a copy his presentation. Transcript editing includes only very basic grammatical changes, the addition of headings, punctuation, and paragraph breaks, and the inclusion of an occasional missing word in order to enhance clarity [as noted by the use of brackets around the word]. Copies of the transparencies that were used by Dr. Myers are appended at the end of the transcript. Throughout the transcript, references made to the transparencies are noted and highlighted by the use of *[brackets in italics]*.

Approximately forty-one individuals attended the luncheon presentation, including representatives from senate and congressional offices, the Academy for Educational Development, the American Federation of Teachers, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, Development Alternatives, the U.S. Department of Labor’s International Labor Affairs Bureau, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Society for International Development, the World Bank, World Learning, and CAII staff.

The event was sponsored by the USAID-funded Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity, Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL). If you would like any additional information about this event or any other aspect of the ECACL activity, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-966-5804, ext. 120, or email me at [DianeM@caii-dc.com](mailto:DianeM@caii-dc.com).

Sincerely,

L. Diane Mull, Senior Associate/Activity Coordinator

### **About the Speaker**

William E. Myers, Ed.D., obtained his doctorate degree from Harvard University Graduate School of Education in 1983. He considers himself an educationalist focusing on child rights in developing countries. Some highlights of his work on child labor related activities include: Special Assistant to the Director, Working Conditions and Environment Department with main responsibility for child labor policy and research, for the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva, Switzerland; Manager of the ILO's Interdepartmental Project on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC); and Project Officer responsible for the establishment and management of UNICEF programs in the Amazon region of Brazil, including the creation of rural sustainable development approaches.

As an International Human Resources Consultant, he assisted both UNICEF and the ILO in various studies and program development tasks relating to working and street children. Additionally, he provided technical assistance to field and central offices, prepared a UNICEF book on the protection of working children, drafted an ILO special report on child labor, and published various articles and "how to" materials on the same subject. Additionally, he helped UNICEF/Brazil design a sustainable development program for meeting the needs of children in areas of severe environmental risk or degradation. Also for UNICEF, he directed a global policy study on children in especially difficult circumstances, including child victims of armed conflict and natural disasters, working and street children, and abused and neglected children. He currently works as an independent consultant on child rights in developing countries.





attitudes, and so forth, so that not only individuals but also societies can develop. And in this particular case, where we live in the land of the World Bank [Washington, D.C.], that has a strongly economic emphasis. That is, they are talking about developing national economies. And they take the point of view, of course, that child labor can get in the way of that because it ends up weakening children rather than strengthening them, and becomes inimical to the development of an economy.

These two perspectives [*points to the first two bullets on Transparency I*] are very much concerned with social organization around economic issues. There is a second set of two approaches that are more social and cultural than economic in their orientation. The first one I call “social capital” here, but since I did this here, I am more referring to it as “social responsibility.” This is a group of people that says that child labor is largely a problem in a nation of exclusion. It is society not playing its proper role in relation to its weaker elements, children, the women, ethnic groups who suffer discrimination, castes, and so forth. It links the whole idea of child labor to society not properly conducting its responsibilities. They don’t mean only government; they mean the whole society. So, this kind of an approach looks a lot at government, but in addition to government, to institutions, religious, social, cultural institutions, and so on. These people, for example, frequently talk about mobilization, about having to get society to be concerned about its future, including child labor, and taking action against it [*points to fourth bullet on Transparency I*].

Most lately there has been a campaign for the “child-centered approach,” that basically says we should be looking at individuals. The others all talk about society primarily, giving that kind of a framework. The child-centered approach says that our first, and sometimes they say almost exclusive, aim should be the development of the child. We should do what’s best for children. Children should have priority over adults. I’m going to talk about this in a little more detail because I think that in the United States this approach is less well understood than the others.

I want to say something about what one finds in each one of these perspectives. They all have a separate idea of social concern [*points to “labor market” approach*]. In this particular case, labor market perspectives are concerned about economic injustice and things like that. They have

actors, they have their own versions of child labor problem, they have their own objectives, and they have their own priorities for action. They even have a view of children, which is important. In this particular case, for example, a child is seen either as an actual or potential victim; as somebody that is capable of being manipulated. Children have to be protected from without.

The four approaches have ideas about what are the key rights that people have. For example, in this case [*points to "labor market" approach*] children should have a right not to have to work before adolescence, so you try to get them out of the job market where they are exposed. And the approaches even have ideas about education. For example, look at this particular idea that the goal of education should be to remove children from the labor market. That's why you have compulsory education and you coordinate it with the age that children are allowed to work so that children will stay in school until the proper time.

I'm not going to go through all of these approaches within our limited time, but I will point out that these different discourses each have a kind of internal logic. What's important about that is that they disagree on fundamental points. And that is causing at this time, right now, a lot of [policy] disagreement. Some arguments are very heated between people who would hang together around these different points of view.

In my opinion, I think most of us who look at this [*points to Transparency 1*] as a kind of system is coming to think that we need this debate. Because when that happens, people dig down into the reasons why they think the way they do, and it generates research. We have some very interesting research coming out of these areas right now, and it sharpens our view. We also would say that no one of these approaches contains the whole truth. They are all legitimate, and I think that all of us would agree, for example, that a labor rights perspective is useful and needed. And I think that all of us would argue that a focus on children, what's good for children, is needed. But we've had a lot of trouble in being able to get a single view that allows us to do all of this at once. So we find that people tend to specialize. For example, you find labor departments up here [*points to the "labor market" approach*] and you find that the World Bank [*points to the "human capital" approach*] tends to be a little more interested in the human capital approach. You find that churches and some Christian organizations [*points to the "social*

*responsibility” approach*] are more interested in approaches based around the idea of what are social responsibilities. And you find that child welfare people, for example [*points to the “child centered” approach*], are more interested in the child-centered approach.

### **The Child-centered Approach**

I’m going to skip right to the child-centered approach because it is one that this project is going to need, and which is quite different from our normal thinking and our normal discourse. [*Transparency 2*] It merits a little bit of examination so that we have some idea of [what] it gets into. A child-centered perspective tends to look at the problem of children being impaired, either physically or mentally, from involvement in activities that are damaging to them. Abusive work would certainly qualify as that. What they want out of anything that they do is the better well-being and development of children. This is identified with institutions like UNICEF, a lot of child advocacy NGOs, you know the Save the Children and people like that. Educators in a large number are in this position, too. They tend to think of child labor in terms of work that undermines children’s well-being and development. Obviously, if you are being poisoned by some toxin, that is a physical development problem. So is working in a situation where you have a lot of psychosocial stress, for example, children working as maids. Live-in maids in households where they are under a lot of duress certainly would not be consistent with children’s development. If a child cannot get an education, if they have to work so long that they can’t go to school or otherwise receive an education, that would, of course, be a child labor problem for them. Advocates of a “child-centered” approach are not particularly concerned, on the other hand, like the labor rights people, whether children work or not. They are concerned with what happens to the child; some work is actually good, from this point of view.

Obviously, then, the objective of child labor interventions is to promote children’s welfare and development. It is very focused on the child. And they (advocates of that position) tend to really look at it carefully and invest in the kinds of activities that allow them to understand children quite in detail. What is the situation? What is this child up to? How does this child operate? What is the family behind? And so forth. And they look at children as partners. I am going to come back to that in a minute. They have a view of children that is quite different from the other

approaches. They tend to look toward the competency of children; seeing children as being very adaptive, and being smart and capable of doing things in the world. And they tend to work in empowering children to do whatever it is that needs to be done. The CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child), that I will come back to, is really the key instrument internationally which is the framework for this line of thinking. And it has different articles that I will delve into.

Advocates of the “child centered” approach see education as something that should reach out to children. Children should not be adapted to fit education; education should be made available in a way and in a form that it can extend itself to meet children. And so, for example, you find street education, street educators who go out and try to find working children who are on the streets and make contact with them and begin to attract them to programs. You find a lot of participative work in which children come in and participate in the actual planning of their own activities. You find a lot of emphasis on developing different capacities in children; they will be working on developing three or four different kinds of intelligences or capacities at once. You find a lot of programs in which children are involved in changing society, just learning off site, getting involved in communities or work with other children, or whatever. That’s a different model than the other ones. Now, understand that I’m not saying that this model is more important; I think that all four are important. I’m going to get into this one now simply because I think it is the one strangest, perhaps, to more of the people that are here, and it happens to be particularly useful when thinking about education. [*Transparency 3*]

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in 1989 and has now been ratified by every country in the world except for Somalia and the United States, is the key international framework these days for planning all interventions with children in every country. In developing countries where we work, we are going to see that it has a very high priority. It is the master treaty that is supposed to set certain parameters for other treaties that come under its provisions. So, for example, Convention 182 of the ILO [International Labor Organization] that addresses specifically child labor was designed with this particular convention in mind. It states things in such a way as to be consistent with it—saying that member states are supposed to see that children are protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education, or to be harmful to the child’s

physical, mental, or spiritual health or social development. In other words, that is their idea of the bad forms of child labor, if you want to call them that. So Convention 182 is very much within that concept.

What this convention also does is demand that in all actions concerning children, the best interest of the child should be of primary consideration. This is generally considered the most fundamental article of this convention. That means that anything we do has to have the child's welfare uppermost in its mind—it's not just a little bit. It says a "primary consideration," although it realizes that there are adult areas too that can't be ignored, but its very demanding.

What this means is, if you put these two together, is that interventions that promote children's development normally would meet that best interest criteria. Interventions that could undermine their development, either physical or mental, would tend not to be in their best interest. That's not made formal, but that's how that is reasoned out. I want to bring that up because there is a problem with child labor that I will not go into here. There are interventions of different kinds, not all from one of these different kinds of lines of reasoning, which have been shown by research to be inimical to children in some way or another. In other words, this is an area wherein trying to help people, we can hurt them, and have. It is well documented. So it's an area where we need to be careful in policy, and I'm going to go into a little bit more now into this child's perspective. *[Transparency 4]*

In addition to the CRC, there is a whole other line of reasoning that is behind this child-centered approach, and that is new thinking about child development. I'm going to put up just a few of the new lines of thinking that are particularly pertinent for thinking about child labor. *[Transparency 5]* First of all, we now think of children as developing cognitively, socially, mentally, and in every way as part of a social milieu. It doesn't just happen inside a person – you don't get more mature just by getting older; it is through your transactions with the environment. Children do that; we now know very well that they tend to become individuals by becoming social. In other words, you don't become an individual person and then become social; your individuality is based on the way you transact with society from the very first days.

Children become social according to different values. For example, some societies like ours emphasize making children independent. But some other societies feel that the best that people become is when they are interdependent in an intelligent way; when people are part of community and have a set of responsible relationships. This means, for example, that whereas we tend to raise children here to do more and more on their own, in other societies, in some cases, a good parent would raise children to do everything with others. One of the things that goes with that is a sense of responsibility. You get a sense of belonging, or, as they put it in Africa, your right to belong is defined in part by your gradually increasing responsibilities, which, by the way, are very multiple. I'm not saying, by the way, that work is the only responsibility, but you can see where I'm heading. Work is one of the ways in which families are tied together, not just out of economic necessity but out of the kinds of people that they are trying to create, which often are not the kinds of people who are individualistic in the same way that we are.

And so, what developmental psychologists are saying today is that each child grows up in a "developmental niche," a little pocket of a certain kind of a cultural background. [*Transparency 6*] These are different from place to place and there is no indication that one is better than another. There is no indication for example, when anthropologists look at it, that children raised to be individuals like ours are necessarily better or worse off than children who are raised in other ways to become other kinds of children. But it does mean that all children have to be recognized as part of a family unit.

This has led us to think in terms no longer of one childhood that has cultural expressions-- which is kind of an old idea, a Piaget idea--that all children go through the same phases. Well, that's true in some instances. But as we talk about middle childhood, that seems to get less and less true. And now people are talking about different childhoods even within a given culture. So children do not have the same experience of childhood and are quite different, and children thrive in a very wide variety of childhoods. They do not have to be protected or pampered in the same way in all societies.

I want to point out one thing in particular, and that is that people protect children in very different ways. For example, we tend—our first tendency in this society is—to protect children by separating them from danger. Many other societies look at the kind of danger first, and then the ones that are not too severe and that can be handled, they teach the child how to handle. They expose the child on purpose with guidance so that that child will be “inoculated” and will know how to handle itself in the future. And if you have, as I have, gone to some places in Africa, they think that we are very neglectful by not teaching our children how to deal with such things at a young age. They really think that we are kind of neglectful parents.

Development is not something that just happens to children as they get older. *[Transparency 7]* The new view is that it is something they do. It is because they are active; they are reaching out. Even when they start crying to get fed and they get their mother’s attention, that child is reaching out to the world, making the world, shaping the world to its view and its needs. And that doesn’t go away; that gets stronger as children get older. And the thinking is that children need more and more room to do that as they grow. They transact with their environment in increasingly sophisticated ways, and what they find out with participation and directing their own life is in itself developmental. People develop skills and abilities by taking responsibility for their own lives, and in their interaction with their environment, whatever that may be.

One of the most interesting and hot topics right now is resilience. *[Transparency 8]* I’ve just come back from a conference in Oxford on resilience of children in serious adversity. They are finding that children who have more life experience in fact are more resilient. And there are a lot of things that you can do to either improve or undermine children’s resilience. An adverse experience has both undesirable and desirable effects. What is really important and comes out of it is less the situation (except in the most extreme cases, as in the example of being caught in the middle of armed conflicts) than how adults and peers regard the child in this. We use street children as an example, [for] this has been shown over and over with street children. Being on the street is bad enough, but it may not be nearly as bad as being looked down on and made to feel as some kind of a delinquent, or perhaps a vagabond, on the street. It’s the way that people regard you as a child that has a lot to do with your resilience. And working children are very sensitive to this.

There is all kinds of interesting research in which kids say, "I don't mind the work; I mind being looked down on." And interventions in the work that immediately tell the children that what they are doing is wrong convinced some of us from looking at the experience (I am one); that this does more damage, perhaps, than the work that they are involved in. So that maybe the way you get involved in the right way doesn't mean you have to leave them there, but you find ways to work with the kids "from the inside out." You bring them along. Sending them a message that society thinks that what they are doing is wrong is exactly the wrong way to go about working with children in a way that makes them stronger rather than weaker. Families are critical for resilience. So are circles of friends, which suggest, for instance, that interventions should be involved not only for the children but should involve the whole family or a sense of community. And all of these things act together.

Another really interesting line of research: You who are in education are going to recognize right away; this is Gardner and people like him. [*Transparency 9*] Children have not just one intelligence, like that for school; they have many types of intelligences and they do different tasks by using these intelligences in different ways. If one is a little down, they use another one and adapt it to be able to cover that ground and get things done. That's why we all think and act differently. They are extremely resourceful in using these intelligences. But some things -- some kinds of work, or school for example -- only call on certain intelligences that the children have. Now we end up putting them in very narrow confines. So a lot of the thinking that comes from this research says we need to be paying attention to children's competence, bringing them along in ways that develop a variety of these capacities, intelligences, and competencies that they have. Different societies value different competencies and develop them to different extents and in different ways.

We are very much into formal schools; that's what we do, although there is some indication that we may be moving from that in the more innovative programs. Other societies emphasize other parts and, perhaps, other kinds of education, and school is the more narrow part of a child's learning. So there are many different channels of learning and learning theory; these days is



empirical understanding. Just sort of reasoning from a right, or from a principle, or international convention may be ok to get started, but that is not enough when it comes to having a beneficial effect on children. We have to try to get busy and understand what is there. On the other hand, we don't have to be rocket scientists. In other words, there are a lot of techniques for doing this that don't mean years of studies; there are fast assessments and things like this.

A second thing that is suggested is the importance of social contexts in which children develop. There is a need to create the right kinds of environment for them. The kind of community, the kind of family, the kind of economic and social environment—justice if you want to call it—that they grow up in is very important. And perhaps hardest for us to get a handle on, coming from the United States, is the idea that children's active participation suggests that they should be full partners in advocacy and action on their behalf. I will come back to this in a little bit, because that is something that sounds very strange to our ears, although it is happening all over the world today, especially in dealing with child labor.

Let's just take, if you want to in practical terms, what are the practical implications of the child-centered approach. (By the way, all of these things that I am putting up are plagiarized from somebody else, from other workshops and such on child-centered approaches. I am throwing out ideas that are not just my ideas, but are ideas that I collect from people who think in these terms from lots of places). First of all, *you need to understand children*. Secondly, *we need to be able to organize and operationalize the whole idea of the high priority of children*. Make sure that the government and civil society can deal with the complexity that this issue is, so that we can look at things holistically and can bring in all the stakeholders. These ideas are coming out of experience; this is what people are coming out and saying, and it turns out to be important from this point of view. And third is *to include children as partners*. I will talk about that more in a few minutes.

[*Transparency 12*] To give you an idea about the kinds of things that people talk about when they get together in workshops and talk about this, they spend a lot of time talking about such things as how to do situational analysis, or at the donor level, how do you define the needs analysis, or the kinds of mandates that you give to your contractor, and so forth. Then they look

at policies. NORAD for example, in Norway, has a child labor policy, and they evaluate all of their policies and proposals in terms of their likely impact on child labor. They have a way of doing this. They ask for changes in national statistics, since our official national statistics will not give us this kind of information.

The ILO and some others are actually trying to change national statistics to reflect, for example, work that is done by young people that doesn't normally apply, or so that they distinguish between part-time, full-time, or seasonal employment of children, which is poorly defined. Or to indicate the number or distribution of children in the worse kinds of child labor, which is something you can never find in official statistics. There is a problem with official statistics because they usually talk about participation in the labor force, but they don't talk about impacts on children. You end up with the labor statistics definition of child labor, and you try to apply it to an objective, which is about getting to the kids who are in trouble. And the two don't match, of course.

*[Transparency 13]* A lot of talk these days is on how you deal with the concept of children's well-being and development and how you get that into program objectives. What should we use for indicators? Do you do nutrition assessments? Do you have children put something down in writing? What do you do? There is a lot of interesting talk these days about cross-cultural and cross-sectoral ways of working. Most of us now believe that child labor should not be, ipso facto, in a labor ministry. Not that it's wrong, because labor ministries' kinds of concerns are in fact very important, but they are very limiting. Neither should they be just an education concern, nor just be a welfare concern. The real question is, "How do we get this whole area under some kind of a more general look that can deal with the holistic aspect of children and the need to bring in other parts of society to work together?" Are you talking about committees? Are you talking about putting it in a general ministry like the planning ministry? Are you talking about a program group? What do you do? There is a lot of this stuff going on, and lots of talk these days about how to involve children. What are the "how tos" of that?

*[Transparency 14]* Some of the most interesting work related to education that I am going to call to your attention and that I think is worth taking a look at, I wouldn't oversell. I think it can

apply to just a small portion of the problem, but it is very important in many other ways. And that is, “How do you get kids to be aware of what possible dangers are?” “How do you get them involved?” “How do you get them to do what they can for themselves?” “How do you get them to work with each other?” “How do you even get children to go out and work with other children and with adults to change their situation?” This is very much in line with what we talked about earlier as some of the new thinking about child development.

There are two basic ways. One is to consult children, and right now there are a whole host of ways and schemes for focus groups, kinds of interview activities, and so forth at which people come to consult with children, including through their organizations where they exist. The other one is partnership. These are ways of bringing kids right into the definition of a problem, the planning of alternatives for getting at it, and even with the evaluation and follow-up. There are programs doing this today. They are not rare. Some of the most interesting actually help children organize and get together. Some of you from Latin America have seen these with street children already. But they are also common in West Africa. India has some that are famous, and they are spreading. There is a whole movement of these kinds of programs that is being created right now.

Then adults have to create space for children, within their activities. What activity or decision will we leave to children on their own? What will we let them do to define that space? This is a concept not really very familiar or manageable to us, where we come from in our policy. It is a different idea of policy. Then of course there is a lot of money invested. There are manuals and all kinds of things that are for training adults in how to support and work with children’s participation. There is no such thing as children working by themselves. They have what they call “working children’s organizations” but they aren’t just children. All of these kinds of activities are special kinds of partnerships, and I would say *educative* partnerships, between children and adults. There is a model of thinking and a way of getting at things that seems to be very unfamiliar to us here. But if you went to, let’s say, Lima or to Dakar in Senegal or some other places, you would find that this kind of stuff is quite available.







































