

Differentiating practice paradigms in child development

All children grow and develop. Subsequently 'child development' does not belong to any given agency, service or clinical area. Health professionals and others support children to grow and develop in both direct and indirect ways.

Child health nurses work in partnership with families and other agencies to provide a wide range of services that support, evaluate and enable family function and optimal infant-child development. Part of their work is related to the information and support they provide to new parents about feeding their babies. Optimal nutrition and strong bonds between a child and their caregivers are essential foundations for growth and development.

Teachers in a long day-care setting understand expected developmental trajectories. They understand the importance of enriched environments and are skilled in the application of strategies that stimulate and engage young children. They are able to identify children who are developing differently to their peers and will be able to describe how this impacts on that child's day to day function and participation.

Medical and Allied Health Professionals within the public health service system will also understand child development in different ways. This will influence how they understand their role, as well as the service they expect to provide. Many Health Professionals practice according to a traditional paediatric practice model.

School of Thought A: Traditional Approach to Paediatric Health Practice	
Purpose	Assess, treat and remediate
Philosophy	A child's development ideally happens according to a trajectory of skills that is predictable and mappable, and approximated to that of children without developmental concerns (normal developmental pathway).
Ultimate Goal	The achievement of milestones that follows as closely as possible the normal developmental pathway
Focus	What children do and learn
The role of the Health Professional	The role of the health professional is to identify, treat, and ultimately remediate neurodisabilities, ensuring that variation to that child's developmental trajectory is minimised or eliminated.
Fundamental question	"What is this child's ability within or across developmental domains, in comparison to what we expect of children of a similar age?"

Skill set required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed knowledge of the normal developmental trajectory • Ability to administer standardised and non standardised assessments and interpret results • Ability to plan for and deliver evidence based, cost effective intervention that bridges the gaps that are identified • Ability to partner with other disciplines to understand whether the child's developmental gaps sit in single or multiple domains and whether multidisciplinary intervention can support improvements in an effective and efficient way • Ability to partner with other service providers within and beyond health and build relationships along the care continuum to advocate for clients and to promote an understanding of Child Development
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Other Health Professionals who work with children will understand the scope and purpose of their role differently. This model of practice is based on the World Health Organisation's (WHO) International Classification of Function (ICF) and holds function and participation at its core.

School of Thought B: Specialist Child Development	
Purpose	Understand, problem solve and empower
Philosophy	A child's development is the process of them becoming a distinct and functional individual according to their own capacity and despite the apparent limitations of their biology and/or their environment. Variation to the normal developmental pathway is ok.
Ultimate Goal	Optimal functional participation
Focus	What parents/carers understand, do, and learn
The role of the Health Professional	The role of the health professional is to facilitate a common understanding of a child's abilities, and support others to enable optimal development despite the child's conditions/impairments and the apparent limitations of this/these.
Fundamental Question	"What are the functional implications of this impairment that prevents this child from interacting with the human and physical environment to the greatest extent possible?"
Skill set required	All of those required for <i>School of Thought A</i> , plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed understanding of the child's current functional status across contexts, focusing on their strengths and challenges, and integrating

	<p>biological, behavioural, emotional, medical and psychosocial factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated understanding of abilities across developmental domains and how this does or does not impact on function • High level advocacy and communication skills to support others' understandings of the child's abilities (including across domains) and application of these across everyday contexts • High level problem solving to partner with others to create meaningful and individualised solutions to carers' concerns
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Health Professionals who work to support children with complex developmental impairment need to practice in a way that aligns with School of Thought B. This school of thought has a foundation in the former and has evolved to place function and participation alongside body function as key considerations in an individualised approach to assessment and intervention.

An understanding of different paradigms of practice supports allied health, nursing, medical and other professionals to engage with children, families and each other in a supportive and meaningful way.