Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) for the Preschool Environment

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Contents

About the Book

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) Handbook For the Preschool Environment is an adapted from Implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) in the Preschool Environment by Joan Hayden and Laura Hutton (2021) Harford Community College shared under a CC BY-NC license.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Children playing photo by Seattle Parks and Recreation CC BY license via Flickr.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES (DAP)

What are Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) and how do they pertain to me, my classroom and the students under my care? The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the premier professional organization of early childhood educators. Its position statement on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) provides the following definition:

NAEYC defines "developmentally appropriate practice" as methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning. Educators implement developmentally appropriate practice by recognizing the multiple assets all young children bring to the early learning program as unique individuals and as members of families and communities. Building on each child's strengths—and taking care to not harm any aspect of each child's physical, cognitive, social, or emotional wellbeing—educators design and implement learning environments to help all children achieve their full potential across all domains of development and across all content areas. Developmentally appropriate practice recognizes

and supports each individual as a valued member of the learning community. As a result, to be developmentally appropriate, practices must also be culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate for each child. (NAEYC, 2020a, p. 5)

Exercise

Learn more about developmentally appropriate practice by completing the interactive lesson by Laura Hutton Overview of Developmentally Appropriate Practices.

How does knowledge and implementation of DAP improve my teaching?

Teachers and childcare professionals who successfully implement DAP in their learning environments create spaces for children to grow, learn, interact, play, and develop in educationally and culturally rich settings. Curricular decisions are based on proven principles of child development, as well as knowledge of effective early learning practices. Curriculum is designed with each child's individual needs and interests in mind and is focused on helping all children successfully meet developmental goals within the school's conceptual framework. Good curriculum allows for the flexibility needed to individualize the activities while still meeting mandated standards.

Each and every child, birth through age 8, has the right to equitable learning opportunities—in centers, family childcare homes, or schools—that fully support their optimal development and learning across all domains and content areas. Children are born eager to learn; they take delight exploring their world and making connections. The degree to which early learning programs support children's delight and wonder in learning reflects the quality of that setting. Educators who engage in developmentally appropriate practice foster young children's joyful learning and maximize the opportunities for each and every child to achieve their full potential. (NAEYC, 2020a, p. 5)

Video Moment

Watch the video "Using Dry Erase Board" by High Scope US to see how a teacher in a developmentally appropriate classroom approaches a writing activity.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=30#oembed-1

DAP IN PRACTICE

Before learning about DAP, I started my two-year-old class each day with a 20-minute circle. We talked about the day of the week and the weather and counted how many days had passed in the month. I held up the children's names and had each child identify their own name. Then, we went through color and shape flashcards.

I HATED circle. I was constantly having to stop to remind the children to sit down, stop talking, and keep their

hands to themselves. My aide spent most of circle chasing children around the room and returning them to the carpet.

After I learned about DAP, my approach to circle changed. My circle is now only 5- to 10-minutes long. We sing and move to a good morning song then talk about something special that is happening that day. Sometimes this is a special activity we have planned; sometimes is it a flower that they can see blooming on the playground; sometimes it is the weather. I always pick something that directly impacts the children. We also play one game, like finding something in the room that is a certain color or shape.

What a difference! The children now love circle and are eager to join me. My aide is free to support the children's learning and I can focus on engaging the children in meaningful conversations. Not only is circle a lot more fun for all of us, but I've seen the children make so much progress with their academic skills now that they're learning them in a more hands-on and meaningful way!

What Would You See in a DAP Classroom?

- open-ended art projects
- hands-on experiences with real objects
- emphasis on children doing tasks for themselves
- small group activities focused around children's interests
- children offered choices
- scaffolding for children at different skill levels
- room contents and organization reflect children's input
- flexibility
- emphasis on problem- solving
- boxes with quiet activities for children who don't nap
- integrated curriculum

What Wouldn't You See in a DAP Classroom?

- art projects that are all supposed to look the same
- rote learning and memorization
- adults do tasks for the children while they wait
- mostly adult-directed, large group lessons
- forced activities selected by teacher
- tasks designed for children to succeed or fail
- adult-oriented décor
- rigid adherence to schedule and plans
- emphasis on complying with adult directions
- teacher frustrated with non- napping children
- instruction on isolated academic skills

Untitled image of woman and child by Basheer Tome CC BY license via Flickr.

WHAT ROLE DO RELATIONSHIPS PLAY IN A DAP CLASSROOM?

Teachers who implement developmentally appropriate practice consciously take steps to form strong, caring relationships with the children in their care. Healthy teacher-student relationships help develop all aspects of a child's development.

When young children have a positive relationship with their caregiver, they are more likely to build healthy peer relationships and less likely to exhibit behavior problems. Healthy relationships during the preschool years enhance a child's self-esteem and form a template for future relationships with adults, such as those with elementary school teachers.

Video Moment

Watch these videos by Conscious Discipline that show teachers engaged in relationship- building activities with children.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=30#oembed-2

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=30#oembed-3

The power of relationships has been proven by neuroscience. Brain imaging shows that the parts of the brain where learning occurs are more active when in a positive emotional climate. Responsive interactions with young children support the development of strong neural connections. Positive back-and-forth interactions, sometimes called "serve and return," support the development of the brain architecture necessary for strong communication skills, social skills, and self- regulation.

Video Moment

Learn more about how interactions with young children build brain architecture by watching the brief video "Five Steps to Brain Building: Serve and Return" by Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=30#oembed-4

Is DAP supported by research?

Decades of research support the effectiveness of developmentally appropriate practice. Studies show that children who engage in the type of authentic and active learning integral to DAP have more advanced academic skills than do children in classrooms using teacher-directed activities focused on memorization and rote learning. In addition, it has been shown that preschoolers whose teachers focus on all areas of learning, another key element of DAP, have stronger school readiness skills then do preschoolers whose teachers focus solely on academic skills. DAP is particularly effective at fostering the development of language skills, social skills, and self-regulation, all of which are cited by kindergarten teachers as very important skills for school success.

CHAPTER 2

Core Considerations for DAP

According to NAEYC, there are three core considerations for DAP:

- Commonality
- Individuality
- Context

COMMONALITY

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Development follows certain preset patterns. Children learn to sit up before they learn to walk. Babies babble before they learn to speak. Students learn to count before they learn to add. Across all children from all cultures, the early childhood years are a vital time of learning. The first few years of life provide a critical window of opportunity to enhance brain development and build the background knowledge children will need to be successful in school and life.

While the development of all children follows a predictable progression, learning occurs within a specific social and cultural context. While each context varies, the importance of this context remains a commonality. Consider play. All children in every culture play. However, the materials they use to play and the games they play vary. This is because children learn to play within their environmental contexts. If children watch their parents talk on the phone and use a laptop computer, these themes are likely to emerge in their play. If children watch their parents cook in the family restaurant and wait on customers, these themes are likely to emerge in their play.

Social and cultural context not only impacts what children learn; it impacts how children learn. Early interactions with parents and other caregivers influence children's preference for noisy versus quiet activities. Context also shapes children's preferences for playing independently or cooperatively, for taking the lead versus following the

group. Context teaches children how they should interact with adults and classmates. A child who fails to conform to classroom expectation may be displaying behaviors expected by cultural context. Effective early childhood educators understand the impact that the social and cultural context has on children's development.

INDIVIDUALITY

Special Populations, by Seattle Parks and Recreation CC BY licence via Flickr

While development generally follows a predetermined progression, effective educators need to recognize that the development of each child is unique. Children vary in their experiences, interests, strengths, learning styles, and knowledge. "Development and learning also occur at varying rates from child to child and at uneven rates across different areas for each child"[1].

Instead of trying to get all the children in their classroom to the same place in their learning using the same methods for all, effective early childhood educators celebrate their children's diversity. They use a strengths-based approach that allows them to view each child's uniqueness as an asset. Instead of requiring quiet children to "speak up" and become more forceful, the teacher using a strengths-based approach will provide opportunities for these children to share their thoughts in small groups, through their artwork, and by actively listening to them when they decide to share. Instead of requiring very active children to "sit still" and become more passive, the teacher using a strengths-based approach will provide fidgets for active children to use during lessons and incorporate plenty of movement throughout the day to keep these children engaged.

Tiered instruction is an approach which can help you meet the needs of children at different skill levels. In tiered instruction, the teacher selects a skill to teach. The teacher then thinks of a related skill which is just a bit easier and a related skill which is just a bit more difficult. Using these levels, or tiers, of skills a variety of questions, activities, etc. can be developed to provide each child with the just right amount of challenge.

DAP IN PRACTICE

When I first learned about the importance of instruction which is individually appropriate, I was overwhelmed. How could I plan a lesson which is simultaneously appropriate for each of my 20 students? I've since found that tiering instruction makes this easier.

1. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 10

Within my classroom, I have children who do not yet have the prerequisite skills to begin to recognize letters, children who are beginning to recognize letters, and children who already know all the letters. By tiering instruction, I can provide activities within a single lesson to address these individual learning needs. Let's say it's October and I'm teaching "P" using a lesson themed around pumpkins. I give a "P" to the children who are still building prerequisite skills and ask them to find the same letter somewhere in the room. I ask the children who are just starting to identify letters to find the letter "P" somewhere in the room but without giving them a model to take with them. I ask the children who already know all the letters to find an object in the room which begins with the same sound as "pumpkin." All the children can then report back to the class and share what they found.

CONTEXT

All development and learning are embedded in both personal cultural context and the broader cultural context in which we live. Sometimes thinking about culture leads teachers to make generalizations like, "My Hispanic children learn this way." When children's social and cultural contexts are considered, it has to be done with an emphasis on individuality. While there are certainly some experiences which are shared by all or most individuals of a certain gender, race, ethnicity, geography, socio-economic status, religion, etc. many of the experiences which shape children's identities are not shared by everyone. Each child's social and cultural context is unique and includes not only by broad issues like gender, race, and religion, but also include narrow issues like family composition, parental personality, family customs, and other influences which differ even among children within the same family.

Children are not the only ones to bring their individual social and cultural contexts to the classroom; teachers do, as well. It is important for teachers to reflect on the experiences they have had and the contexts they have experienced, particularly if they differ from those of the children they teach. Often the things that teachers assume "everyone knows" are culturally learned information. Do the children struggle to sit quietly and listen during circle? Maybe those behaviors aren't valued in their culture. Do the students not seem to understand when you explain what characters in a story are using the story of The Three Little Pigs? Maybe that story is not part of their culture. "By recognizing that children's experiences may vary by their social identities (for example, by race or ethnicity, language, gender, class, ability, family composition, and economic status, among others), with different and intersecting impacts on their development and learning, educators can make adaptations to affirm and support positive development of each child's multiple social identities"[2]

DAP IN PRACTICE

The easiest way that I've learned to make sure that my classroom reflects the social and cultural contexts of my children is to recruit the children and their families to support my efforts. At the beginning of the year, and periodically throughout, I ask families to send in a couple of empty boxes and other containers from their favorite foods and put these in our housekeeping center. I ask families for donations of old clothes, particularly uniforms and special occasion clothing that is stained or outgrown, and stock our dress-up area with these. I also have families send in used magazines, calendars, and other reading material that they would usually throw away and put these in the class library, writing center, and math center. When we are learning about a particular letter, I ask the children to bring something from home that starts with that letter. This practice has taught me much about my children's home lives. It has allowed me to create a classroom which reflects backgrounds of my diverse students. It has also helped expand the language and background knowledge of my children as we engage in conversations about objects and practices which are familiar to some but new to others.

2. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 7

SELF-REFLECTION

To effectively apply developmentally appropriate practices in teaching and make decisions about children's learning and development, a practitioner should:

- Have a strong knowledge and understanding of child development. (What can you expect a child to do?)
- Know individual children. (What interests a child? What in their life may be affecting their learning?)
- Be knowledgeable about the cultural and social expectations of the community that the children live in. (What skills and characteristics are valued by the community or are needed to fit into the community?)
- Be intentional in planning and practice. (Why do you do what you do?)
- Use effective teaching approaches and practices.(What are "best" practices? What regulations and standards must be met?)
- Scaffold children's learning. (What is the learning sequence for skills and concepts? How can you build on experiences?)
- Use a variety of teaching methods. (What are the learning styles of the children? How can you present concepts for varied styles?)
- Recognize that approaches will vary and will change. (What works with your current group may not work with your next group or as the group grows. How can you change or adapt activities, the environment, and teaching?)
- Be a lifelong learner. (What inspires you? What do you want to know more about?[3]

3. Penn State Extension, 2016a, p. 1

CHAPTER 3

Characteristics of the Classroom

Fun at Preschool by Madgerly CC BY via Flickr

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CLASSROOMS

There are as many lists of the characteristics of developmentally appropriate practice as there are authors of those lists. Often, teachers struggle to explain exactly what makes a classroom developmentally appropriate. They simply state that they know developmentally appropriate when they see it. Most early childhood educators would agree though that developmentally appropriate practice requires caring relationships, active and hands-on learning, play, a focus on the whole child, meaningful lessons, age-appropriate appropriate instruction, individually appropriate instruction, culturally responsive practices, open-ended activities and joy.

CARING RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships motivate humans to learn. Have you been in a situation where you worked a little harder, studied a little longer because someone you cared about believed in your ability to succeed? This is the power of a relationship. It is seen in a baby's first steps which are so often towards a beloved caregiver or family member. It is seen in the hesitation of a child who looks to a parent for reassurance before going to school for the first time. When people are in settings where they are loved and valued, they excel. Teachers who implement developmentally appropriate practice take the time to develop strong, caring relationships with the children they teach, as well as their families. They promote feelings of love and security so that children feel safe to take the risks inherent in learning.

> Children construct their understandings about the world around them through interactions with other members of the community (both adults and peers). Thus, early childhood educators actively work to build their own relationships with each child as well as foster the development of relationships among the children. Educators regularly seek out opportunities for extended conversations with each child, including those with whom they do not share a language, through verbal and nonverbal interactions. Opportunities to play together, collaborate on investigations and projects, and talk with peers and adults enhance children's development and learning and should be available to all children, with support as needed. Interacting in small groups provides a context for children to extend their thinking, practice emerging language skills, build on one another's ideas, and cooperate to solve problems.[1]

Video Moment

Watch the brief video "Building Positive Relationships with Young Children" by Eastern Connecticut State University Center for Early Childhood Education.

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ACTIVE AND HANDS-ON LEARNING

Think back to the lessons you remember most clearly from your early education. Chances are that you do not remember sitting in a group identifying flashcards or reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. While it is possible to learn by rote, deeper learning occurs when the child is more actively engaged in the activity.

Video Moment

Watch the video "Acting Out Stories" by High Scope US to see how a teacher makes a literacy lesson active and hands-on.

1. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 15

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=49#oembed-2

Activities which are hands-on involve having the child construct their own understanding and usually require the child to manipulate materials. This actively engages the child. Lessons that require children to brainstorm, problem solve, and be creative involve higher level thinking and result in quality learning.

PLAY

> Play is essential for all children, birth through age 8. Play develops young children's symbolic and imaginative thinking, peer relationships, language (English and/or additional languages), physical development, and problem-solving skills. All young children need daily, sustained opportunities for play, both indoors and outdoors. Play helps children develop large-motor and fine-motor physical competence, explore and make sense of their world, interact with others, express and control their emotions, develop symbolic and problem-solving abilities, and practice emerging skills. Consistently, studies find clear links between play and foundational capacities such as working memory, self-regulation, oral language abilities, social skills, and success in school.[2]

Early childhood settings should emphasize free play. Free play is not directed by the adult. During free play children decide what to play, how to play, and with whom to play. Adults support learning during play by putting materials in the classroom which are likely to stimulate complex play themes. Toys that are designed to be used in one way are less likely to promote complex play than are toys that can be used in many ways. Have you ever heard a parent joke that their child ignored their birthday presents and instead spent the entire day playing with the boxes they came in? This is a perfect example of the type of complex play that can be facilitated with materials that can be used in many ways. As a bonus, these material are often less expensive than toys with television or movie tie-ins.

Video Moment

Watch the brief video "Play in Early Childhood: The Role of Play in Any Setting" by Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=49#oembed-3

In addition to creating an environment conducive to play, adults facilitate learning through play by playing with

2. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 9

the children. When doing this, avoid taking charge of the play. Instead, subtly introduce new skills and thoughts into the children's play with questions and comments. For example, if children are pretending to cook, you can ask them what they're making and cook beside them. If you want to introduce writing into the play, you can pretend that you ran out of an ingredient and need to go to the grocery store. You can then model writing a grocery list.

Video Moment

Watch the video "Making a School Bus" by High Scope US to see how teachers can support children's play.

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DAP IN PRACTICE

I used to spend learning centers wiping tables, doing paperwork, and taking a breather. The children were all busy and I was there for emergencies; so, I figured I was doing my job. After all, it was just play.

Then I learned about developmentally appropriate practice and realized I was missing out on a huge opportunity to promote the children's learning. Now I spend most of learning centers time playing with the children; some of the time I spend quietly observing and taking notes. By playing with the children I have a much better understanding of what they are interested in, how they try to solve conflicts, and how they use the different materials in my room.

As a result, I've replaced about a third of my toys. For example, I found that many of the dress-up clothes I had were going unused. At the same time, I watched them tie a baby blanket around their shoulders to make a scarf, tie is around their waist to make a skirt, and lay it on the floor to make a beach towel for sun-bathing. This led me to take out many of my traditional dress-up clothes and replace them with large scarves that the children can use in a variety of ways.

Playing with the children has also let me gently guide them towards more academic learning during learning centers. Thinking of ways to introduce reading, writing, and counting into their play, when I never know what they're going to want to play next, keeps me on my toes.

The other day, I was playing beside three children building with the blocks. They began talking about whose block structure was the best. Another child noticed and stated which one they thought was the best. With some scaffolding, we decided to have all the children vote. We talked about what words we could use to describe really good block structures and came up with "tremendous," "huge," and "awesome." I wrote these words on slips of paper and all interested children voted on which word best matched each structure. We counted the votes, awarded winners, and took a photo of each child with their winning block structure. It took much longer than I had planned for learning centers that day but the entire class was actively engaged and I was able to integrate so many math and literacy skills. It was well worth the extra time. And, it would have never happened if I hadn't been playing with the children!

WHOLE CHILD

Sometimes teachers feel as if their responsibility is to teach children academic skills. They imply that teaching skills in other developmental domains is not their job. However, children will not develop strong academic skills without adequate progress in other areas of development. Think of the toddler who, because of a physical disability, is unable to move independently. This child, dependent on others to get from one place to another, will be unable to explore the environment. This child may even be unable to participate in typical toddler activities that teach object permanence (like looking for objects when they fall out of sight), cause and effect (like pushing buttons that make lids on toys pop up or music play) and other foundational cognitive skills. Even though this child may have been born with intact cognitive abilities, their motor delays are likely to cause delays in early academic skills without specific intervention.

Because of the interrelatedness of the areas of development, it is important for the early childhood educator to teach the whole child. This means that educators need to focus not only on academic (or cognitive) growth but also on physical (motor) skills, language skills, and social- emotional (social & play) skills. By addressing all areas of development, teachers ensure that they teach the whole child.

Preschool Joy by Kristin :: Prairie Daze CC BY license via Flickr.

An effective way to teach the whole child is to use an integrated curriculum. An integrated curriculum is one in which each lesson touches on skills in multiple areas of development. For example, the activity discussed previously where the children voted on block structures integrated physical skills (building with blocks), language skills (selecting appropriate vocabulary to describe block structures), literacy skills (writing and reading those

vocabulary words), math skills (counting the votes and using mathematical terms like “most”), and social studies content (voting).

When you integrate curriculum, you are more likely to teach skills in context; teaching skills in context results in better learning. Imagine that you were taught a random word in a foreign language. How likely would you be to remember it? Now imagine that you were taught a song using that word. Would that help? Teaching academic skills in isolation using rote teaching methods like flashcards and worksheets may help some children memorize the required material; however, learning is more efficient when you use an integrated curriculum.

MEANINGFUL LESSONS

Remember the discussion about learning a new word in a foreign language? What if the word you were being taught meant “bathroom” and you needed to say the word correctly to be excused to use the restroom? Would that increase the likelihood that you learned the word?

When something being taught is important to the learner, the learner is motivated to learn. Teachers can capitalize on this by focusing on topics which are of interest to the students. Effective educators redesign rote learning activities into more meaningful ones. For example, instead of having a child write their name five times on a worksheet, have the child write their name to label their artwork or to sign in for attendance. Instead of having children count numbers on a calendar, have the children count out supplies to make sure there are enough. Instead of having children learn to read high frequency words (like “the” and “is) use environmental print by labeling a items throughout the classroom and drawing the children’s attention to those words when they appear in books.

Humans learn by making connections between new information and information we already know (background knowledge). When children can connect new information to information in their background knowledge/everyday lives, they will deem the new information to be meaningful and be likely to learn it effectively. This tricky part of this is that all the children in your classroom will bring different repositories of background knowledge.

DAP IN PRACTICE

I love teaching with my iPad but I haven’t gotten around to downloading any apps. What I use constantly is the camera. My children love looking at photos of themselves. During learning centers I frequently take photos of the children playing then use these to engage in conversations with them about what they’re doing.

This December I decided to print photos and have each child make a book to share with their parents as a Christmas present. The children were really excited about this project and it was proving to be an excellent way to engage in literacy instruction. I even fit in some math skills as I told the children I only had enough ink and paper to print five pictures for each child. As we photographed and printed we would count how many pictures had been completed so far then figure out how many more the child had left.

During this, I noticed that Sara wasn’t really participating. She wasn’t talking about the project and hadn’t asked me to take any pictures of her. I pulled her aside and asked her if something was wrong. She told me she didn’t want to do the project. I was puzzled but told her that was fine. When her mother came to pick her up, I shared what had happened. Sara’s mother told me that Sara probably didn’t want to participate because they were Jewish.

I felt horrible. I had brought up holidays during circle one class and asked the children to share but now I realized that Sara had been silent. Maybe she had felt uncomfortable sharing when her celebrations were different. Or maybe she just didn’t feel like talking that day. Either way, I had made an assumption that was false. This had resulted in Sara feeling isolated from what would have otherwise been a valuable learning activity.

Toddler by jessicahtam CC BY license via Flickr.

AGE-APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION

Would you try to teach a one-year-old to jump rope? Of course not. Children at that age do not have the prerequisite motor skills or the necessary foundational skills (motor planning, attention, etc.) to accomplish this task. Research tells us that the brains of young children function somewhat differently than do the brains of adolescents or adults. By presenting instruction which is age appropriate, you increase the likelihood that your students' brains are ready for the instruction you are providing.

Research also tells us that there are critical time periods for certain types of learning. For example, children's brains are wired to most effectively learn language during the first few years of life. As children get older, the neural pathways for the sounds the child hasn't been hearing begin to be pruned away. It is possible to learn a new language later; many people do. However, additional languages come much more easily when children are exposed to them early. By taking advantage of these optimal periods, educators maximize learning. Using age-appropriate instruction does this.

INDIVIDUALLY APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION

The development of young children is often uneven. Not all children who are typically developing meet developmental milestones at the same time. While people say that children first walk at around a year old, early childhood professionals know that it is perfectly normal for a child to start walking as early as 9 or 10 months or as late as 14 or 15 months. Sometimes a child will seem to put all their energy into learning motor skills for a while and their language will lag. Later the same child might suddenly exhibit an explosion of vocabulary but be slow to pick up additional motor skills. All of this is normal, but it means that teachers cannot assume that all of a child's skills are exactly at the four-year-old level just because the child is four years old.

> Effective, developmentally appropriate curriculum is based on what is known about the interrelationships and sequences of ideas, so that children's later abilities and understandings can be built on those already acquired. At the same time, the rate and pattern of each child's learning is distinctive. An effective teacher must account for all these

> factors, maintaining high expectations while setting challenging, achievable goals and providing the right amount and type of scaffolding for each child.[3]

Meeting every child where they are and taking them to the next level helps them to become confident, self-reliant and anxious to continue to on their path to understanding the world around them. "Children need to feel successful in new tasks a significant proportion of the time to promote their motivation and persistence.

Confronted by repeated failure, most children will simply stop trying. Repeated opportunities to practice and consolidate new skills and concepts are also essential for children to reach the threshold of mastery at which they can go on to use this knowledge or skill, applying it in new situations".[4] Individualizing instruction for each child allows for growth without frustration.

Children do not just differ in regard to their skills levels.

> Educators understand that each child reflects a complex mosaic of knowledge and experiences that contributes to the considerable diversity among any group of young children. These differences include the children's various social identities, interests, strengths, and preferences; their personalities, motivations, and approaches to learning; and their knowledge, skills, and abilities related to their cultural experiences, including family languages, dialects, and vernaculars. Children may have disabilities or other individual learning needs, including needs for accelerated learning. Sometimes these individual learning needs have been diagnosed, and sometimes they have not. Early childhood educators recognize this diversity and the opportunities it offers to support all children's learning by recognizing each child as a unique individual with assets and strengths to contribute to the early childhood education learning environment. [5]

Teachers must look for ways to involve each child in their own learning. Awareness of each child's personality and learning style helps the teacher draw students into the lesson and check for understanding before moving them onto the next concept.

Using an emergent curriculum is powerful way to make sure that your instruction is individually appropriate. An emergent curriculum is one which "emerges" from the children's interests. Instead of determining at the beginning of the year what

topics will be studied each month, the teacher using emergent curriculum watches the children's play and listens to their conversations to see what is currently interesting them. The teacher then designs the curriculum around the children's interests. This guarantees that the topics being studied relate to the children's background knowledge facilitating learning.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

In today's culturally diverse society, it is imperative that teachers work to intentionally include a variety of cultures in their daily lessons and learning centers. Multicultural educational opportunities should be included in every aspect of the curriculum: environment, play and everyday activities. Items (clothing, specific cooking utensils, art, and musical instruments) that are representative of differing cultures and ethnic groups should be introduced and made available for all children to explore.

> Teaching is not neutral. If our goal is to nurture each child's cognitive, academic. linguistic, and socio-emotional development, our responsibility is to recognize and nurture diversity, to guide each child's growing understandings and interactions, and to create a learning environment that is inclusive of diverse families and communities. It may seem that academic pressures don't leave time for "frills" like multicultural studies, but, if we don't want to replicate societal inequities, multicultural education is not a frill! "In a culturally inclusive environment, teachers treat all students

3. NAEYC, 2009b, p. 2
4. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 13
5. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 7

> equitably, their languages and cultures are incorporated into the curriculum, and they are supported in becoming active seekers and producers of knowledge."[6]

Video Moment

Watch this brief video focusing on multicultural instruction for very young children by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services entitled "Recognizing Bias and Promoting Equity in Early Childhood Settings." It includes comments by the President of NAEYC.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=49#oembed-5

All children must feel included to maximize learning. Learning about others helps children develop a better understanding of the world around them. Include a variety of choices for dramatic play including regional clothing, dolls of varying ethnicities, and household items from different cultures. The music center is an excellent place to showcase instruments from around the world.

PUTTING IT INTO PLACE

- Include pictures of children of other cultures in the classroom. Focus on children of their own age in familiar situations, i.e., school, play, church, etc.
- Introduce familiar songs sung in different languages as well as songs that are representative of different cultures.
- Include games, both indoor and outdoor, that are played in other countries.
- Learning centers should include objects and activities from around
- the world, including musical instruments, art materials, toys and dolls.
- If food is included in the center, include items from other regions and cultures to introduce children to something they may not have regularly.
- Teach children simple often used words in various languages, i.e, "hello", "goodbye", "how are you", etc.
- Include celebrations of regional holidays in your lessons. Children can create simple dress, make representative crafts and enjoy a snack that is indicative of the holiday. Include information for parents in the daily report to facilitate at-home discussion.

Video Moment

Watch this video "Chopsticks" by Peggy Morrison showing how a preschool teacher integrates items from her children's home lives into learning centers.

6. NAME, n.d.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=49#oembed-6

In addition to bringing in objects from different cultures, particularly from the cultures of the children in your classroom, effective early childhood teachers read books containing strong characters from diverse backgrounds. Classroom books should include stories of other cultures and nations. When selecting books to share, particularly if you do not share the background

being portrayed, make sure that you do a little research. Books written by authors who share the background of their main character are most likely to be authentic portrayals. Books written by others, including many books by well-known children's book authors, may inadvertently portray stereotypes or convey misinformation.

Diverse Books Lists

- Celebrating Multiculturalism in Canadian Kids' Books!
- You can also ask for assistance finding appropriate books at your local library.

Community and family partners can provide resources and insights on cultures, customs and traditions with which you may not be familiar. Don't hesitate to reach out to others for assistance with creating a diverse classroom environment. Invite guest speakers, mystery readers and special visitors into the class to help students learn about others.

> To fully support each child's optimal development and learning in an increasingly diverse society, early childhood educators need to understand the implications of these contexts. By recognizing that children's experiences may vary by their social identities (for example, by race or ethnicity, language, gender, class, ability, family composition, and economic status, among others), with different and intersecting impacts on their development and learning, educators can make adaptations to affirm and support positive development of each child's multiple social identities. Additionally, educators must be aware of, and counter, their own and larger societal biases that may undermine a child's positive development and well-being. Early childhood educators have a professional responsibility to be life-long learners who are able to foster life- long learning in children; in this, they must keep abreast of research developments, while also learning continuously from families and communities they serve[7]

While providing multicultural instruction is a necessary step for effective early childhood educators, culturally responsive instruction goes beyond this. In addition to making sure their classroom reflects a variety of cultural backgrounds, particularly the cultures of the children in the classroom, teachers who use culturally responsive practices intentionally link instruction to children's background knowledge, relate instruction to children's everyday lives, leverage children's cultural capital by providing opportunities for all children to share their knowledge and experiences, use a strengths-based approach and build strong relationships with children. They involve students in activities that benefit others to encourage kindness, sharing and awareness of the world beyond their own.

7. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 7

Video Moment

Watch this brief video "2012 Teaching Tolerance Award Winner Robert Sautter" by Teaching Tolerance in which a kindergarten teacher shares his culturally responsive teaching practices.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=49#oembed-7

OPEN-ENDED ACTIVITIES

When you use flashcards to teach colors, children have the opportunity to learn to identify colors. When you provide children with objects of different sizes, shapes, and colors and ask them to sort the objects into groups, children have the opportunity to learn to identify colors, shapes, and size. They also have the opportunity to practice problem solving and language skills as they determine which objects go where and explain their decisions. Open-ended activities, activities that have more than one right answer, provide far more learning opportunities than do closed-ended activities like worksheets and flashcards. "Giving children autonomy and agency in how they approach problems, make hypotheses, and explore potential solutions with others promotes deeper learning and improves executive functioning"[8]

Video Moment

Watch the video "Singing and Moving" by High Scope US in which a teacher engages the children in an activity incorporating movement which follows the children's lead.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=49#oembed-8

Open-ended questions can help the teacher lead the activity in the desired direction while challenging the children to observe, react, explore and draw conclusions about the topic at hand. Open-ended activities and questions allow children to lead instruction and take ownership of their own learning. Lyndsey Lynch (2019) recommends that teachers ask themselves:

- How comfortable am I with letting students choose what or how they will learn?
- What classroom resources could benefit my students' autonomy and discovery?

8. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 10

- How will I teach and model resources so that students can access them independently and responsibly?
- How comfortable am I with giving students space and time to explore and problem-solve for themselves?

In its 2020 Position Statement on developmentally appropriate practice, NAEYC emphasizes the importance of open-ended activities. Opportunities for agency—that is, the ability to make and act upon choices about what activities one will engage in and how those activities will proceed—must be widely available for all children, not limited as a reward after completing other tasks or only offered to high-achieving students. Ultimately, motivation is a personal decision based on the learner's determination of meaningfulness, interest, and engagement. Educators can promote children's agency and help them feel motivated by engaging them in challenging yet achievable tasks that build on their interests and that they recognize as meaningful and purposeful to their lives.[9]

DAP IN PRACTICE

When I began teaching, I believed that good teachers were always firmly in charge of their classrooms. I planned everything well in advance and rigidly stuck to my plans. I provided many academic activities to my students throughout the day. Even in learning centers, I had one mandatory activity in each center designed to teach academic skills.

I remember one day it began to snow. Playground time was finished for the day and we were getting ready to lie down for rest time. The children desperately wanted to go outside or watch the snow through the window, but I stuck firmly to our schedule resulting in no one getting much rest or enjoying the snow.

Since then, I've learned the importance of following the children's lead. I still start each day with a plan, but my plan includes plenty of opportunities for the children to tell me what they want to do and how they want to do it. There are days when teachable moments occur, and the plan goes out the window as I follow the children down a rabbit hole of exploration.

Last week when we were on the playground, some children noticed that the windows in the building across the street were being washed. Someone was hanging in the air in a harness to complete this task. The children were fascinated. We spent extra time on the playground watching and talking about how we thought the person washing the windows felt about that job. This led to a discussion of other unusual jobs. When we went inside, we clustered around the class computer looking up unusual jobs the children suggested like who keeps the animal's teeth clean at the zoo. The children then each drew a picture of someone doing an unusual job and dictated a sentence about how they felt about that job. It turned into a great opportunity to work on language skills, literacy skills, and social-emotional skills.

Video Moment

Watch the video "Reading Picture Books" by High Scope US to see an adult follow the children's lead while sharing a book.

9. p. 11

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=49#oembed-9

JOY

How do you know a classroom where developmentally appropriate practice is being used? You can tell by the existence of joy. When you implement the characteristics of developmentally appropriate practice, children and teachers alike have the freedom to enjoy the learning process. Joyful learning is effective learning!

PUTTING IT INTO PLACE

- Whenever possible, lessons should focus on children with a minimum of adult direction. Children should determine the direction of the activity with the adult acting as facilitator providing guiding questions to help meet desired outcomes.
- Plan to be flexible in your planning. Accept the changes that inevitably happen.
- Use professional development opportunities to keep current on emerging teaching methods, dealing with emergent situations, changing standards, and
- new finding regarding child development.
- Do not hesitate to try new ideas. Assess their success, make any necessary changes and try again.
- Ask for help if you are not meeting with success.
- When planning, anticipate children's questions and reactions. Be prepared with additional questions to guide them to the desired outcomes of the lesson.
- Make note of individual student's interests and work to integrate those whenever possible.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM

Preschool Cooking Programs by Seattle Parks and Recreation CC BY via Flickr

Before you plan lessons, you need to know where each child's skill levels lie. Challenge children by looking to the next level of competency and support them as they work toward that goal. Be aware of difficulties they are likely to have and provide the scaffolding they need to conquer the challenge. For instance, if a class of four-year-olds is working to cut out shapes for a collage and you find that one child is having difficulty manipulating the scissors, you need to find a way to help that child be successful. The cutting task can be made easier by offering the child a pair of adaptive scissors (such as scissors that spring back open on their own) or slightly thicker paper (which helps prevent the paper from slipping between the blades of the scissors). At the same time, a child who is adept at cutting could be given more complicated shapes to cut.

[A developmentally appropriate] curriculum meets children at their current skill levels and fosters individual and group progress. The materials, activities, and interactions offer challenges without causing frustration. The goal is for all children to experience success and be motivated to learn.

Clearly, such effective teaching does not happen by chance. A hallmark of developmentally appropriate teaching is intentionality. Good teachers are intentional in everything they do—setting up the classroom, planning curriculum, making use of various teaching strategies, assessing children, interacting with them, and working with

their families. Intentional teachers are purposeful and thoughtful about the actions they take, and they direct their teaching toward the goals the program is trying to help children reach. [10]

What role do standards play in a developmentally appropriate classroom?

An understanding of the skills that children typically develop at each age is necessary to effectively plan and implement successful lessons. When planning does not take this into consideration, children often aren't challenged or they are overwhelmed with activities for which they are not intellectually or physically ready. Standards identify the skills that are appropriate to teach to children at different ages.

Nova Scotia Standard

- Capable, Confident and Curious – Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework

When using a resource like Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework, do not just review those skills for the age group you are teaching, also review the skills for the adjacent age groups. When you find that one of your children is lacking a skill listed at a younger age level, you need to provide instruction on that earlier skill.

Children with gaps in knowledge typically learned at a younger age have difficulty learning age-appropriate skills. Taking time to go back and teach earlier skills will allow children to effectively move forward.

In many classes you will also have children who have already mastered all (or most) of the skills typical for children at their age level. When this occurs, you need to make sure you are appropriately challenging them by moving on to more advanced tasks. Keep your focus on the standards for the age group you are teaching but don't hesitate to also use standards for adjacent age groups when a child's skill level requires it.

How can you address standards if you are focusing on play?

10. NAEYC, 2009a, p. 10

untitled photo licensed under Creative Commons CC BY by Seattle Parks and Recreation, taken November 30, 2003, from Flickr

When a classroom emphasizes play, educators ensure that learning occurs by creating an environment that encourages the development of vital skills. Teachers should also provide times in the day for the children to gather as large- or small-groups to engage in activities planned by the teacher. While the adult will guide students more during group instruction, the activities planned should be playful in nature and should incorporate opportunities for the children to make choices.

In a developmentally appropriate classroom, Bredekamp says, the teacher provides lots of organized activity. Children are actively involved in learning: writing, reading, building with blocks, doing project work, making choices. Young children need hands-on experiences and social interaction around content, she says. In math, for example, students grasp concepts better when they grapple with real-life problems and work with manipulatives.

Teachers must respect how young children learn best: through social interaction, Bredekamp says. “It shouldn’t be chaos,” but children should be discussing their pursuits with peers. Research shows that children learn to solve problems better when they work in groups, she says. So while some whole-group instruction may be useful, teacher lecture should not be the rule of the day.

For the most part, teachers should avoid whole-group instruction, Katz agrees. When a teacher tries to teach something to the entire class at the same time, “chances are, one-third of the kids already know it; one-third will get it; and the remaining third won’t. So two-thirds of the children are wasting their time.” To learn a particular

concept, “some children need days; some, ten minutes,” says Hughes—but the typical lockstep school schedule ignores this fundamental fact.[11]

PUTTING IT IN PLACE

- Refer to the Nova Scotia’s Early Learning Curriculum Framework as you plan daily lessons.
- Challenge students to move past their level of competency.
- Provide materials, books and experiences that match the interests of the children.
- Be flexible in your planning to meet the immediate needs of children.
- Develop a relationship with parents to facilitate two way communication about the children.
- Continually assess each child’s level of boredom or frustration and adjust the activities accordingly.
- Help every child be successful every day.

11. Willis, 1993

CHAPTER 4

Developmentally Appropriate Environment

The design of the classroom has a great deal of influence over children's behavior and learning. Effective teachers design their classrooms keeping the following in mind:

- Lines of Sight – It is important to be able to see all the children all of the time.
- Traffic Flow – There should be clear pathways to navigate the room; however, too much open space encourages running. Use furniture to block off different areas of the room while leaving open passages.
- Child Friendly – The furniture should be appropriate for the size of the children. Materials they need to access, children's artwork, and classroom decorations should be placed where children can easily see and reach them.
- Messy Play – Put learning centers that encourage messy play (sensory table, art center, etc.) together in an area of the room which is not carpeted.
- Noisy Play – Put learning centers that encourage noisy play (blocks, dramatic play, etc.) together. When these learning centers are not messy, put them on carpet to help cut down on noise.
- Quiet Play – Put learning centers that encourage quiet play (library, cozy corner, etc.) together and away from noisy learning centers. Among these, make sure to include at least one space where one or two children can retreat when they need a break from the hustle and bustle of the class.
- Group Meetings – Create a place in the classroom where the entire class can meet. This is usually best located in a corner or off to the side of the room. Placing your group meeting location in the center of the room can encourage running. In addition to having a place where the entire class can meet, incorporate places into your room where you can meet with small groups of children.
- Storage – Children should have storage for personal items which is within easy reach. Storage also must be available for teacher materials, including items that are potentially hazardous.

Video Moment

Watch the video "Learning Environments: Designing Spaces for Learning" by Virtual Lab School to see how a classroom can be set up to facilitate developmentally appropriate practice.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=58#video-58-1

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AS A LEARNING TOOL

A parent who heard about the importance of following their children's lead decided to implement this at home. A few weeks later, this parent was discussing the results with the child's preschool teacher. The teacher had initiated the discussion because of concerns about a change in the child's energy and alertness at school. The parent said that they had been allowing the child to make more choices at home including what to eat, what to do, and when to sleep. The child had been eating mostly sugary cereal and chips, had been spending most of the day watching television, and hadn't been going to bed until very late.

This parent missed the important role of adults in a developmentally appropriate environment. While children are given agency and encouraged to make choices, the adults set up the environment to guide those choices. When adults fill the environment with only healthy options, the child's choices are going to promote development and learning. Even then, the adult will sometimes need to limit a child's choices. For example, staying in learning centers playing while lunch is occurring is not a choice that most teachers would provide. However, teachers can allow children to select which foods go on their plate, how much the child eats, and even where the child eats.

Sometimes, the children may even be given the opportunity to help select the foods which are on the menu.

Untitled image of a child playing in a daycare by Micah Sittig CC BY license via Flickr

Preparing the learning environment for exciting and effective learning is the first step in successful teaching. Taking time to select, arrange and introduce a wide variety of age-appropriate materials and equipment will enhance the quality of care. Learning centers should reflect current curricular goals and should be changed, rearranged and updated to current student interests often.

Learning centers should invite children to play with other, but there should also be a spot for quiet activities. The learning environment should be child friendly, welcoming and safe but children should also be free to explore and to use materials in novel ways.

When creating the learning environment, teachers should also consider the standards that need to be taught. Make sure that materials which promote mastery of these standards are integrated into several learning centers. Effective teachers support learning by intentionally creating an environment that scaffolds children as they practice new skills.

Video Moment

Watch the video “Using a Word Box” by High Scope US to see how a teacher intentionally designs the environment to support children’s development of writing skills.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=58#oembed-1

DAP IN PRACTICE

Each month I look at the standards I want to address that month and consider how I can change learning centers to guide children towards those standards. I make sure to integrate materials related to each standard into multiple learning centers. For example, not all of my children enjoy the writing center. I increase the probability that they will work on writing skills during learning centers by adding a science notebook to the science center for children to record their observations of our class pets, by printing photos of their block structures so they can label them to record their creations, by placing sponge letters in the art center to use with paint.

To motivate the children to use these materials, I change them regularly. The children tend to flock to the items in the classroom that are new. Some materials I introduce during a group lesson so I can show the children how the material can be used. Sometimes I will play in the center with the new materials. When there is a material that is not being used, I decide whether to replace it with something else or make a change to increase the children's interest in the material. For example, the children began to use the previously neglected writing center when I added envelopes and a mailbox to "mail" letters to classmates and staff.

THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AS A LEARNING TOOL

While the physical environment influences learning, the social environment has an equally powerful influence. Children construct their understandings about the world around them through interactions with other members of the community (both adults and peers). Thus, early childhood educators actively work to build their own relationships with each child as well as foster the development of relationships among the children. Educators regularly seek out opportunities for extended conversations with each child, including those with whom they do not share a language, through verbal and nonverbal interactions. Opportunities to play together, collaborate on investigations and projects, and talk with peers and adults enhance children's development and learning and should be available to all children, with support as needed. (NAEYC, 2020a, p. 15)

Video Moment

Watch the video "Creating New Colors" by High Scope US to see how a teacher supports a child's learning by playing and talking with him during learning centers.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=58#oembed-2

Relationship-building is a task as important as academic instruction. "Children's feelings of safety and security are essential for the development of higher-order thinking skills, so fostering that sense of belonging is essentially a brain-building activity"[1] Effective teachers promote strong relationships, not just with children, but also between children. This can be accomplished by creating a classroom climate that values each child, acknowledges children's feelings, and promotes social problem solving.

When children have conflicts, teachers should not sweep in and punish the child viewed as the aggressor. To support social problem solving, they can acknowledge the strong feelings of both children and guide children towards a solution that allows them to all get what they need.

Video Moment

Watch the video "One Sword and Two Boys" by High Scope US to see a teacher guide two children through the steps needed to solve their problem.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=58#oembed-3

To promote learning, adults need to be attentive and responsive to the needs of the children in their care. "When adults are sensitive and respond to an infant's babble, cry, or

gesture, they directly support the development of neural connections that lay the foundation for children's communication and social skills, including self-regulation".[2] When children cry, yell, whine, or withdraw they are expressing a need. It is the teacher's job to identify and meet that need instead of punishing what may be perceived as an inappropriate behavior.

Video Moment

Watch the video "Words Do Hurt My Feelings" by High Scope US to see a teacher meet a child's needs while guiding her towards solving a problem with a classmate.

1. (NAEYC, 2020a, p. 11).
2. (NAEYC, 2020a, p. 8).

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=58#oembed-4

THE SCHEDULE

The importance of the schedule to the classroom environment may be overlooked. When the schedule is consistent and predictable, children feel secure and are more available for learning. Effective teachers incorporate predictable routines; like greeting rhymes, clean-up songs, and rest time procedures; into each day.

Video Moment

Watch the video "School Family Song: PreK Brain Smart Start Song" by Conscious Discipline in which the teacher starts the day with a routine song.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=58#oembed-5

Effective teachers discuss schedule changes in advance whenever possible. At the same time, early childhood teachers need to be flexible enough to modify the schedule spontaneously when the children's response warrants it. Extending an activity in which the children are still actively engaged or ending an activity early when they aren't improves the children's time on task.

While schedules vary, developmentally appropriate full-day classrooms demonstrate their commitment to play by incorporating at least 45 minutes of uninterrupted free play (learning centers) twice a day and another 45 minutes of outdoor play twice a day. In addition to free play, developmentally appropriate teachers incorporate brief large group lessons and slightly longer small group lessons. During group lessons, adults engage children in hands-on activities of the adult's choosing. While the adult makes some of the decisions about how these lessons will progress, they also incorporate opportunities for the children to make choices.

Most developmentally appropriate classrooms will emphasize small group lessons over large group lessons. When children work in a small group, they don't have to wait as long for a turn and receive more of the teacher's time. In addition, activities that are very messy or need very close supervision can be more easily completed with a small group of children.\

Video Moment

Watch the video "Introduction to Small Group Time" by High Scope US to see how teachers can create developmentally appropriate small group lessons.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceappropriatepractice/?p=58#oembed-6

PUTTING IN INTO PLACE

- Curriculum decisions should be made based on proven developmental milestones and student needs and interests.
- Change learning center offerings to match curricular goals.
- If space limits the number of learning centers available at one time, rotate them depending on relevancy to current curricular topics, time of the year and student interest.
- Invite parents to add items of interest and relevance to the learning centers as needed especially to add to the diversity of cultures represented.
- Maintain a portfolio for each child to measure progress and note areas of strength and weakness. Make notes after daily interactions to guide lesson planning decisions.
- Throughout the day, engage children in conversations about their activities to assess their level of understanding or need to move to a more difficult task. Make changes as necessary.
- Open and maintain two way communication with parents. Give a daily report, either written or verbal, that highlights activities and accomplishments. Provide parents with current topics being covered in class with a prompt to spark a conversation with their child. A weekly newsletter can include topics of study, upcoming special events and highlights of events of the week.
- Provide enough materials in learning centers to avoid conflict between children.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In a DAP classroom, the environment invites children to explore, question, problem solve and play. Children respond to DAP classrooms by being engaged, responsive, challenged and involved. The focus on healthy teacher-student relationships helps develop all aspects of a child's development. Healthy relationships enhance a child's self-esteem and assist in the development of secure relationships with other adults. DAP classrooms also encourage children to build healthy peer relationships and reduce the frequency of behavior problems.

An effective teacher understands theories of child development and uses these to guide curricular, environmental, and experiential decision making. Effective early childhood professionals structure children's educational experiences to best suit their age and abilities. Children should be challenged, but not frustrated. Finding this point with each child is the goal of DAP. Lessons should be planned with state standards, student interests and abilities, and time and environmental constraints in mind. Teachers intentionally plan the environment so that children can lead but will inevitable lead towards important learning goals.

Recognizing play as critical for children to experience joy and wonder, early childhood educators incorporate frequent opportunities for play in their teaching strategies. They plan learning environments that provide a mix of self-directed play, guided play, and direct instruction. Educators maximize opportunities for children to choose the materials, playmates, topics, and approaches they use throughout the day for all children, birth through age 8. Educators support and extend children's play experiences by providing materials and resources based on careful observation of children's play choices. Adult-guided activities provide for children's active agency as educators offer specific guidance and support to scaffold and extend children's interest, engagement, and learning. Direct instruction—for example, providing children with relevant academic vocabulary, pointing out relationships, helping children recognize specific phenomena, or suggesting an alternative perspective—is an important tool for supporting children's learning. Its effectiveness is determined by the degree to which it extends children's interests and learning in meaningful ways and educators' sensitivity to changes in children's interest. Individually or in small or large groups, across all activities—self-directed play, guided play, direct

instruction, and routines—the teacher is responsible for ensuring that each child's overall experiences are stimulating, engaging, and developmentally, linguistically, and culturally responsive across all domains of development and learning. Promoting many opportunities for agency for each child is essential to fulfilling this responsibility. [1]

MOVING FORWARD WITH DAP

Infusing DAP into the classroom environment and learning activities should be a part of the daily routine. A school that is DAP driven should already have a philosophy in place that focuses on the DAP principles previously outlined. Individual teachers' decisions should be made with the DAP-based philosophy in mind. The following is

1. NAEYC, 2020a, p. 21

a list of suggestions from NAEYC that can be utilized on a daily basis to help with DAP implementation in your classroom.

1. Acknowledge what children do or say. Let children know that we have noticed by giving positive attention, sometimes through comments, sometimes through just sitting nearby and observing. ("Thanks for your help, Kavi." "You found another way to show 5.")
2. Encourage persistence and effort rather than just praising and evaluating what the child has done. ("You're thinking of lots of words to describe the dog in the story. Let's keep going!")
3. Give specific feedback rather than general comments. ("The beanbag didn't get all the way to the hoop, James, so you might try throwing it harder.")
4. Model attitudes, ways of approaching problems, and behavior toward others, showing children rather than just telling them ("Hmm, that didn't work and I need to think about why." "I'm sorry, Ben, I missed part of what you said. Please tell me again.")
5. Demonstrate the correct way to do something. This usually involves a procedure that needs to be done in a certain way (such as using a wire whisk or writing the letter P).
6. Create or add challenge so that a task goes a bit beyond what the children can already do. For example, you lay out a collection of chips, count them together and then ask a small group of children to tell you how many are left after they see you removing some of the chips. The children count the remaining chips to help come up with the answer. To add a challenge, you could hide the chips after you remove some, and the children will have to use a strategy other than counting the remaining chips to come up with the answer. To reduce challenge, you could simplify the task by guiding the children to touch each chip once as they count the remaining chips.
7. Ask questions that provoke children's thinking. ("If you couldn't talk to your partner, how else could you let him know what to do?")
8. Give assistance (such as a cue or hint) to help children work on the edge of their current competence ("Can you think of a word that rhymes with your name, Matt? How about bat? What else rhymes with Matt and bat?")
9. Provide information, directly giving children facts, verbal labels, and other information. ("This one that looks like a big mouse with a short tail is called a vole.")
10. Give directions for children's action or behavior. ("Touch each block only once as you count them." "You want to move that icon over here? Okay, click on it and hold down, then drag it to wherever you want.")

A small version of the 10 Effective DAP Teaching Strategies list in infographic form created by NAEYC. You may want to print a large version and post it in your classroom.

SUMMARY

In order for DAP to be successful in your learning environment, the basic practices should be infused into all aspects of the center. Total involvement will serve to help each child meet with success and equip them with the skills to progress to their next level of learning. The summary that follows is designed to help with this integration.

Community of learners

- Provide nurturing, loving, responsive, joyous, and safe care.
- Build consistent and caring relationships among children, families, and co- workers.
- Value and respect all members of the community.
- Celebrate and embrace diversity, reflecting children's cultures in the classroom and activities.
- Develop open positive collaborations with families and colleagues to support children's learning and development.
- Focus on building self-confidence, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills

Teaching

- Offer both child initiated and teacher-[guided] learning experiences.
- Be responsive to children's ideas by offering materials, documentation (samples of their work, photographs, etc.), and thoughtful conversation that builds on their ideas, skills, and knowledge.
- Plan for hands on experiences where children learn by doing.
- Plan enough time for children to explore and fully engage (as well as revisit) their interests.
- Build children's learning by adding activities that challenge children and expand on what they can do.

Curriculum

- Identify and define core learning goals for individual children and the program.
- Develop a curriculum framework based on child development, individual learning, and cultures of the children in your group and that reflects learning goals.
- Use the framework for planning activities, experiences, and routines.
- Present rich content, focused work/center areas, and both indoor and outdoor environments that have meaningful connections to children's interests, curiosities, and development.
- Allow for flexibility in programming.

Assessment

- Assess what is appropriate for children developmentally, individually, and culturally.
- Use assessment tools that allow you to assess children in an authentic, ongoing, and intentional manner.
- Develop a system for collecting and compiling assessment information.
- Use results for planning, decision-making, communicating with families and other colleagues, and to identify children who may need additional learning support.
- Gather information from multiple sources, including families, children, and other teachers.

Families

- Welcome all families into the program and invite them to participate in a variety of ways.
- Work in partnership with families.
- Communicate regularly with families in an open, positive, two-way manner.
- Respect and acknowledge family goals and choices for their child.
- Involve families in planning for their children.
- Be responsive to family concerns.
- Be familiar with community programs and support families by referring them to additional services as needed.
- To make effective decisions . . ., practitioners need to be reflective and intentional. Take time to reflect on the children, your teaching, and your interactions. Think about what happened, what worked, what didn't, and any surprises. Be intentional in your planning for children, in developing policies and procedures, in designing the environment, and in your approach.
- Think about why you do what you do, keeping your vision and goals for children in mind. Effective decision-making will guide you in choosing the best strategies for meeting the needs of the children and families.[2]

2. (Penn State Extension, 2016a, p.2)

CHAPTER 6

Practice Checklist

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Both academic (math, writing, etc.) and nonacademic (dramatic play, blocks, etc.) learning centers are included in my classroom.
- Sufficient learning center options exist so that all children have choices of where to play.
- I select the materials in learning centers with standards (learning goals) in mind.
- I rotate the materials in learning centers regularly.
- My learning centers contain plenty of open-ended materials that can be used in multiple ways.
- Materials in my learning centers reflect the social and cultural backgrounds of the children in my classroom and throughout the larger community.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

- I engage in relationship-building activities with children.
- I promote positive relationships between children.
- I use peer conflicts as opportunities to teach problem solving skills.
- I build positive relationships with families.
- Overall, my classroom is warm and nurturing.
- During learning centers, I play with the children supporting, but not directing, their play.
- When planning activities, I consider whether the children will perceive them as fun.
- I take advantage of spontaneous opportunities to have fun with the children.
- Overall, my classroom is joyful.

CURRICULUM

- I intentionally plan all the activities we do with standards (learning goals) in mind.
- I select the standards I address using the children's age.
- As I plan activities, I consider the unique background knowledge that each of my children brings to the learning environment and consciously build connections to that background knowledge.

- The activities that I plan reflect the social and cultural backgrounds and learning styles of the children in my classroom.
- Most of the activities that I plan are open-ended.
- Most of the activities that I plan are hands-on.
- Throughout the day, I provide opportunities for the children to make choices.
- I use an emergent curriculum where the topics we study emerge from the children's interests.
- I take advantage of families and community resources to enrich my program and bring different perspectives, knowledge, and traditions to my classroom.
- I take advantage of teachable moments when they occur. I do not hesitate to change my plans and follow the children's lead when this will promote engagement and learning.
- I emphasize play by scheduling at least 45 minutes twice a day for learning centers and at least 45 minutes twice a day for outdoor play (in a full-day program).
- I individualize instruction based on each child's skill level and learning style.
- Most of my group lessons are small group lessons so that I can better individualize instruction.
- My lessons are brief enough to match the attention spans of the children in my classroom.
- I emphasize meaningful activities related to children's everyday experiences.
- I plan for learning in all areas of development.
- I use an integrated curriculum. Each lesson focuses on multiple areas of development.

CHAPTER 7

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