DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

OVERVIEW

Developmentally appropriate practice, often shortened to DAP, is an approach to teaching grounded in the research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education. Its framework is designed to promote young children's optimal learning and development.

DAP involves teachers meeting young children where they are (by stage of development), both as individuals and as part of a group; and helping each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals.

Developmentally appropriate practice is the foundation for all of NAEYC's work including—publications, training programs, conferences, accreditation of child care programs, and more.

3 CORE CONSIDERATIONS OF DAP

• Knowing about child development and learning.

Knowing what is typical at each age and stage of early development is crucial. This knowledge, based on research, helps us decide which experiences are best for children's learning and development. (See "12 Principles of Child Development and Learning" from *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*.)

• Knowing what is individually appropriate.

What we learn about specific children helps us teach and care for each child as an individual. By continually observing children's play and interaction with the physical environment and others, we learn about each child's interests, abilities, and developmental progress.

• Knowing what is culturally important.

We must make an effort to get to know the children's families and learn about the values, expectations, and factors that shape their lives at home and in their communities. This background information helps us provide meaningful, relevant, and respectful learning experiences for each child and family.

For more information about DAP, the 3 Core Considerations, the 12 Principles of Child Development and Learning, and the 5 Guidelines for Effective Teaching, read the NAEYC position statement "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8" (PDF), adopted in 2009.

12 Principles of Child Development and Learning that Inform Practice

12 Principles of Child Development and Learning

1. All areas of development and learning are important.

2. Learning and development follow sequences.

3. Development and learning proceed at varying rates.

4. Development and learning result from an interaction of maturation and experience.

5. Early experiences have profound effects on development and learning.

6. Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.

7. Children develop best when they have secure relationships.

8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.

9. Children learn in a variety of ways.

10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation and pro¬moting language, cognition, and social competence.

11. Development and learning advance when children are challenged.

12. Children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning.

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5 Guidelines for Effective Teaching

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Through the decisions they make, excellent teachers translate the DAP framework into high-quality experiences for children. Such teaching is described in NAEYC's position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice, pages 16-23: "Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice." These guidelines address five key aspects of the teacher's role:

1. Creating a caring community of learners
2. Teaching to enhance development and learning
3. Planning curriculum to achieve important goals
4. Assessing children's development and learning
5. Establishing reciprocal relationships with families

Let's think of these guidelines as five points on a star—a "mariner's star" to guide our journey to help children learn best. Each point of the star is a vital part of good practice in early care and education. None can be left out or shortchanged without seriously weakening the whole.

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10 Effective DAP Teaching Strategies

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An effective teacher or family child care provider chooses a strategy to fit a particular situation. It's important to consider what the children already know and can do and the learning goals for the specific situation. By remaining flexible and observant, we can determine which strategy may be most effective. Often, if one strategy doesn't work, another will.

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 . . . Matt/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.*")

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