All About Developmentally Appropriate Practices (D.A.P.)

"Show me and I forget;
Teach me and I remember;
Involve me and I learn."

-Benjamin Franklin

Presented by: Child Care Training Consultants

Developmentally appropriate practice requires teachers to make decisions daily based on their knowledge of child development, taking into consideration individual learning differences and social and cultural influences. A simple definition of developmentally appropriate practices would be a setting and curriculum that meets the cognitive, emotional, and physical needs of children based on child development theories and observations of children's individual strengths and weaknesses. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has pioneered the use of developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood classrooms, and is considered the topmost expert in the field of early childhood education.

http://www.naeyc.org/DAP

Course Agenda

- Understanding early childhood development
  - Five stages of development
- How do children learn best?
- What is Developmentally Appropriate Practices (D.A.P.)
- Why is D.A.P. Important
- What is an Active Learning Environment
- What is the difference between D.A.P. and play

When planning classroom curriculum for young children, it is important to factor in the wide spectrum of abilities and interests of children, as well as activities that are based on the way in which we know children learn. As more and more research becomes available on brain development early childhood professionals respond by changing and evolving in how to work with children, and in the approaches to best assist them in reaching their full potentials – cognitively, socially, physically, and emotionally. "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" is more about doing things **better – not "right" or "wrong."**

Learning Objectives

By the end of this training, you will:

1) Understand different developmental theories
2) Identify different developmental stages of children birth to 6 years old
3) Implement skills using different learning styles
4) Organize your center according to the developmental stages of the children in your care

Understanding Early Childhood Development

- Physical

- Social

- Emotional

- Cognitive

Children go through distinct periods of development as they move from infants to young adults. During each of these stages multiple changes in the development of the brain are taking place. What occurs and approximately when these developments take place are genetically determined. However, environmental circumstances and exchanges with key individuals within that environment have significant influence on how each child benefits from each developmental event. During each stage growth and development occur in the primary developmental domains including physical, intellectual, language and social – emotional. Our goal is to help child care providers understand what is taking place in a child's brain and body during each period with the hope that they will be able to provide the necessary support, encouragement, structure and interventions to enable a child to progress through each stage as easily and successfully as possible based on each child's unique set of traits and interests.

The Five Stages of Development

- Infancy
  ◦ birth to 12 months
- Toddler1
  ◦ 12 months to 3 years
- Preschool
  ◦ 3 to 6 years
- School Age
  ◦ 6 to 12 years
- Adolescents
  ◦ 13 to 18 years

A child is growing and changing by the day. From the time of birth through adolescence, a child moves through a steady progression of milestones that include every area of development. These vary by age and include acquiring new motor abilities, developing thinking skills and learning emotional regulation, as well as social growth.

Understanding child development is key to positively impacting children, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) says in a statement on professional preparation standards. Without such knowledge and information, early childhood professionals will struggle to reach children in a positive light. That is why understanding child development can help the professional practitioner in a variety of ways -- from creating and implementing effective lesson plans to assessing learning delays.

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During the first year of a child's life, s/he will go from a naive newborn who has little motor control to an on-the-verge-of-toddling baby. This first stage of child development includes rapid physical growth that supports new abilities. Major milestones include rolling over at roughly 4 to 6 months, sitting up unassisted by 6 months old and crawling or even walking by 12 months. By the end of the infant stage, children also have the fine motor, or hand, skills to use a pincer grasp, pick up and put down small objects and make attempts to scribble with a crayon or other writing tool. As a child reaches between 4 and 6 months, that s/he will begin to purposefully babble and laugh or squeal with emotion. By 12 months old, an infant may also have the ability to say simple words, such as "mama," and understand a limited vocabulary of basics, such as "no."

Between 1 and 3 years, a child is making major strides toward independence. During the toddler stage, children are up on their feet walking and running. By 24 months, most children can kick a ball, walk up and down stairs with help and carry objects while moving. Toddlers can also scribble, making marks that they see as real objects, build block towers and start to feed themselves. Language and communication skills sharply increase at this stage, with the typical 2 year old understanding between 500 and 700 words and speaking well over 500 words. Socially and emotionally, toddlers are immature, having little self-control and an unsophisticated style when "playing" with peers. For example, it isn't uncommon for a toddler to hit or yell when **asked** to share a toy with another child.

By age 4, most children can move well, hopping and standing on one foot, kicking a softball with ease and even throwing a ball overhand. By 5 years old, children may even climb on play equipment, somersault and skip. Additionally, the preschooler's growing fine motor and cognitive skills allow her to draw geometric shapes, patterns and human figures and write some letters of the alphabet. Emotionally, the preschooler is building greater self-regulation abilities and has the ability to verbally express what s/he is feeling instead of only using gestures or physical aggression. Socially, preschoolers are entering a new world where they are making their first true friends based on similar interests. They have the skills to share and take turns and can show empathy toward others.

How Do Kids Learn Best?

◦ Relationships with responsive adults

◦ Active, hands-on involvement

◦ Meaningful experiences

◦ Opportunities to construct their understanding of the world

Not every student is learning in the classroom. Numerous distractions stand between the teacher's message and the student's ears. In addition to the physical layout of the classroom, factors such as feedback from peers and the instructor can either hinder or improve a student's ability to absorb information. It is the important for the instructor to make the classroom environment conducive to learning.

In order for children to get the most out of their education, they need to learn in an environment that is safe and nurturing. From the design scheme and color palette to the organizational materials and furnishings, how you structure the preschool space is essential. If students feel they can safely explore an environment and use the materials therein, they will properly access the tools that will assist in helping them to grow and learn.

What is Developmentally Appropriate Practices

- Based on what we know about how young children learn
- Relevant to children's life experiences
- Based on the children's current knowledge and abilities
- Respectful of cultural and individual differences and learning styles
- Responsive to the interests and needs of the children

Does your classroom:

Allow children to participate at their own level?
Allow for flexibility, with no "right" or "wrong" outcome?
Encourage active learning through participation?
Encourage exploration and thinking?
Allow for socialization and interaction with others?
Enable children to learn through their senses?
Allow children to experience things "hands-on"?
Give children choices?
Foster children's positive feelings about themselves?
Respect individual differences and cultural diversity?
Lend itself to being adapted if beneficial?
Acknowledge the physical needs of children?
Reflect the goals and philosophy of the center?

What is Developmentally Appropriate Practices continued…

- Focused on the learning process, not the end product
- Thought provoking - stimulating and challenging the minds of young children
- Based on the philosophy that children are competent and trustworthy, and can make good decisions if given the opportunity and practice

Developmentally appropriate practices recognize the importance of relationships

Developmentally appropriate practices must be responsive to the learning style of young children

A developmentally appropriate curriculum responds to individual differences

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 NAEYC's DAP Position Statement.) (note: add link to page below)

• 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.

The Twelve Guiding Principles of Developmentally Appropriate

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

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1. All the domains of development and learning—physical, social and emotional, and cognitive—are important and they are closely related. Children's development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains.
2. Many aspects of children's learning and development follow well-documented sequences, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.
3. Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child, as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child's individual functioning.
4. Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction of biological maturation and experience.
5. Early experiences have profound effects, both cumulative and delayed, on a child's development and learning; and optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning to occur.
6. Development proceeds toward greater complexity self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.

The Twelve Guiding Principles of Developmentally Appropriate continued…

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 promoting 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

7. Children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers.
8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
9. Always mentally active in seeking to understand the world around them, children learn in a variety of ways; a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting all these kinds of learning.
10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence.
11. Development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery, and also when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills.
12. Children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, such as persistence, initiative, and flexibility; in turn, these dispositions and behaviors affect their learning and development.

Developmentally Appropriate Principles

- *Principle #1: Developmentally appropriate practices recognize the importance of relationships*

Principle #1: Developmentally appropriate practices recognize the importance of relationships. During the past 30 years, probably the most significant change in our thinking about young children is our new understanding of the role of social interaction in learning. We now know that children construct their knowledge about the world and learn their skills through engagement with adults and older peers.

This is different than how we understood development in the 1960's, when Piaget's influence was at its height. Then we thought of the active child as learning mostly on his own. Adults were supposed to get out of the children's way as they made sense of the world through their own initiative. They were to construct their own intelligence. We now understand that children are not completely self-directed little beings. We also now

know that children are not wholly dependent on adults. They are not like cars on an assembly line. We cannot stamp out competent children with standardized formulas, characterized by work sheets and drill and practice. Our new model of development calls for both an active child and an active caregiver/teacher.

Children learn to "make meaning" from and through their social interactions with adults and older children. The new model sees development more like a dance between adults and children, with each bending and sliding to the moves of the other. Parents, because their relationship with their children is on-going and consistent, are likely to be the most influential relationships in children's development. This is why good quality early childhood programs support parents so they can do their jobs better.

But parental relationships are not the only important ones. New research in child development indicates that teachers and caregivers are powerful influences on the development of young children. When trained to understand and respond to young children, they can buffer (or intensify) a child's experience. We must be sure that every child in our centers and schools finds committed and responsive adults. Children will not find these kinds of relationships when teachers are overwhelmed by too many children, by too little take home pay, and by too few opportunities to learn their profession.

Developmentally Appropriate Principles

- *Principle #2: Developmentally appropriate practices must be responsive to the learning style of young children*

Principle #2: Developmentally appropriate practices must be responsive to the learning style of young children. This need seems to have been forgotten as pressure for academic achievement has increased. Instead of the metaphor for young children being passive, ignorant and unworthy students, everyone now speaks of them as "sponges," ready to soak up knowledge and skills. But many people misunderstand what we mean when we extol the intelligence and capabilities of young children. They believe that because young children are so smart, we can teach them as if they were older children.

This has resulted in a dread disease--what I call the "academic bump." You know you have got it in your program when teachers at each level complain that the children are coming to them unprepared, which, of course, means that the teachers in the prior grade or level are not doing their job. Often this leads to downward dumping of curriculum. More and more of the curriculum of 3rd grade finds its way into 2nd grade, and what used to be done in 2nd grade is moved into 1st, 1st into kindergarten and kindergarten into preschool. Pretty soon, if the school is suffering from "the bump," you will begin to find signs of 2nd grade in kindergarten and the program that used to be taught in 1st grade becomes the preschool curriculum.

This bump disease is noticeable in preschools and day care centers as well as the primary grades. You know the program is afflicted when worksheets, number facts and whole group teaching are in and story reading, dictation, block play and conversation are out. I was in a program recently in which the teachers were lining up 3-year-olds to go to the bathroom and, as you can imagine, they were all over the place and it took forever to get them organized. When I asked why the teachers were doing this instead of just taking a few children at a time while the others continue their activities, the answer was that they will have to do it when they get to elementary school. But, it is not developmentally appropriate curriculum to teach next year's skills this year. Many people are realizing that the very countries with whom we want to compete, like Sweden and Japan, do not rush children into formal instruction in reading and writing at an early age.

Developmentally Appropriate Principles

- *Principle #3: A developmentally appropriate curriculum responds to individual differences.*

Principle #3: A developmentally appropriate curriculum responds to individual differences. All children do not do the same things at the same time. The basic equation of early childhood education is that the same curriculum practiced on different young children will get different results. No matter how carefully you plan, no matter how well you implement your plan, all the children will not learn the same amount or the same thing from the same experience. Homogeneous treatments delivered to heterogeneous kids yield heterogeneous results. Children do not develop evenly over 12 months or over 8 years. Much of early learning is maturation driven. That means that biological growth and experience have to coincide before a new developmental step can be taken. Some children's biological capabilities develop more or less evenly, others grow by fits and starts. Some children do everything a little early, some are uneven (walk early/talk late or the other way around) and some are just a little later than others. But just as most children will learn to talk between 9-18 months, they will all learn to read between 5-8 years old, with appropriate reading environments. We have no evidence that there is an advantage to learning two months or even two years earlier.

Even if we could match the children for developmental or experiential characteristics which would predict similar outcomes, we shouldn't want to. Our world is populated with people of various abilities and talents. During early childhood, children must learn how to regard differences between themselves and others.

Active Learning Environment

- Playing
- Hypothesizing
- Experimenting
- Doing

Many preschool parents will walk into a developmentally appropriate classroom and think, "But they are just playing!" Developmentally appropriate practice can best be observed when there is an active learning environment. In active learning, children come to understand concepts by playing, hypothesizing, experimenting, and doing. Most activities in a developmentally appropriate preschool classroom are not teacher directed. The projects and activities are set up based on individual children's needs, and take into account each child's strengths and weaknesses, developmental level and interests. There is a delicate balance of teacher directed and child centered activities, with minimal time spent in teacher directed activities such as circle time. Children are not required to sit still and absorb information for long periods of time without being active participants in the activity. Developmentally appropriate environments take advantage of teachable moments and capitalize on intentional teaching techniques. Children are encouraged to interact with materials in their environment, as well as with teachers and peers. When observing a classroom for developmentally appropriate practices, be sure to take notes, documenting the activities you see and determining whether they are teacher directed or child centered. Observe other classrooms for tips to set up active learning center environments.

Developmentally appropriate programs promote children's active exploration of the environment. Children manipulate real objects and learn through hands-on, direct experiences. The curriculum provides opportunities for children to explore, reflect, interact, and communicate with other children and adults (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996). Learning centers are one means of providing active learning experiences. Field trips, real life experiences--such as cooking, reenacting historical events, conducting scientific experiments, and participating in community service projects--are other examples.

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Varied Instructional Strategies

- Process writing
- Skill instruction
- Guided reading
- Modeled writing
- Cooperative learning
- Independent learning activities

Developmentally appropriate practice encourages the use of varied instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of children. Such approaches may include process writing, skill instruction, guided reading, modeled writing, cooperative learning, independent learning activities, peer coaching and tutoring, teacher-led instruction, thematic instruction, projects, learning centers, problem-based learning, and literature-based instruction. By providing a wide variety of ways to learn, children with various learning styles are able to develop their capabilities. Teaching in this way also helps provide for multiple intelligences, and enables children to view learning in new ways.

Varied Instructional Strategies

- Peer coaching and tutoring
- Teacher led instruction
- Thematic instruction
- Projects
- Learning Centers
- Problem based learning
- Literature based instructions

Balance Between Teacher-Directed and Child-Directed Activities

- Child-directed learning allows the child to assume some responsibility for learning goals

- Teacher-directed learning involves the teacher as a facilitator who models learning strategies and gives guided instruction

Developmentally appropriate practice encourages a mixture of teacher-directed and child-directed activities. Teacher-directed learning involves the teacher as a facilitator who models learning strategies and gives guided instruction. Child-directed learning allows the child to assume some responsibility for learning goals.

Integrated Curriculum

- Motivates students to investigate interesting ideas from multiple perspectives

An integrated curriculum is one that connects diverse areas of study by cutting across subject-matter lines and emphasizing unifying concepts. It combines many subject areas into a cohesive unit of study that is meaningful to students. An integrated curriculum often relates learning to real life. It also recognizes the importance of basic skills and the "inclination to use them" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996).

One technique for integrating curricula is a thematic approach, which "motivates students to investigate interesting ideas from multiple perspectives. The central theme becomes the catalyst for developing concepts, generalizations, skills, and attitudes" (American Association of School Administrators, 1992, p. 25). Not all integrated curricula revolve around a theme, however. Whole language and writing across the curriculum are examples of integrated approaches that may or may not involve a thematic approach.

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Learning Centers

- Independent stations
- Children choose the center
- Children will decide the amount of time spent there

Learning centers are independent stations set up throughout the classroom where children can go to actually engage in some learning activity. Children choose the center they will go to and decide on the amount of time to spend there. The learning center approach provides a time when children explore and practice skills to their own satisfaction. These centers provide children with opportunities for hands-on learning, cooperative learning, social interaction, real-life problem solving, autonomous learning, and open-ended activities. "Open-ended activities allow for each child to successfully engage in the activity at whatever skill level the child happens to be," notes Stone (1995, p. 123). Learning centers should reflect the goal of active learning; they must not be workstations full of worksheets for students to complete. Learning centers offer an opportunity for children to be responsible for their own learning; this responsibility is the foundation for lifelong learning (Stone, 1995).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

- Large groups
- Small groups
- Play and engagement in learning centers
- Daily routines
- social-emotional development
- language development
- literacy development

Teaching would take place in a variety of formats. It's woven into every aspect of the environment from procedures and environment, to experiences, activities, and even moments of direct instruction. The four learning formats where teachers can implement a variety of teaching strategies include large groups, small groups, play and engagement in learning centers and daily routines.

Small Groups instruction is effective because teaching is focused on what each student in the group needs. A teacher may sit on the floor with a small group of children in front of her. The teacher models how to read print from left to right, they discuss what is happening on each page, and problem solve how the story may or may not end and why. This is called small group instruction and it allows for open-ended learning opportunities that are relevant and meaningful to each group.

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Developmentally Appropriate Practices

- mathematics
- technology and scientific inquiry and knowledge
- understanding ourselves and our communities
- creative expression and appreciation for the arts
- physical development and physical skills

Each format provides a different opportunity for teaching, learning, and discovering together. Within the variety of teaching formats, strategies, and particular activities, **practitioners of DAP promote the health and development of the whole child, not just the aspects measured on the standardized tests**.

These areas of development are **interrelated** and many are often supported with the same activity. For example, painting at the easel may promote physical development (motor skills), creative expression and appreciation for the arts, social-emotional development (if painting to express feelings), and language development (if discussing the painting with a thoughtful teacher). So as you can see, **the notion that a developmentally appropriate approach can be pitted against an "academic" approach is really nonsensical**. The method of DAP certainly yields academic understandings, but the method of instruction may take on a different (and I would say more *appropriate* and *effective*) form.

Why is DAP Important?

- Developmentally appropriate activities
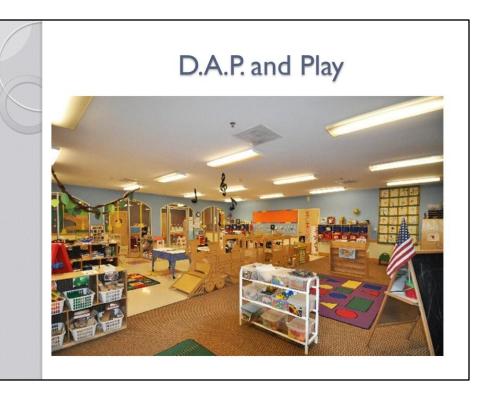- Intentional teaching techniques
- Active learning environment

Research in child development shows that all children develop in a sequential, predictable manner. While all children develop at their own rate, they tend to reach milestones in a predictable pattern. Observing and documenting the physical, emotional, and cognitive development of each child in your care will ensure that you are providing the best learning environment possible. Implementing developmentally appropriate activities and using intentional teaching techniques will help you understand how best to serve the children and families in your classroom. By providing an active learning environment, teachers help children make decisions, solve conflicts, and develop a sense of community. While the teachers are the sole decision makers in a developmentally appropriate classroom, they must be sure to take into account the individual learning styles of the children in their care, as well as any social or family concerns.

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The National Association for the Education of Young Children is the foremost resource for developmentally appropriate practices. They have made it their goal to define what we mean by developmentally appropriate practices, as well as outline the best ways to implement developmentally appropriate practices into your own classrooms.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs; Sue Bredekamp and Carol Copple; 2005

D.A.P. and Play

Imagine entering a classroom where children are dressed as doctors, towers are being built, red and blue paint is being used for the picture of an American flag, children are walking on a balance beam in the middle of the room, and play dough cookies are being made and baked. The individual areas children can choose from allow them to converse, pretend, and explore their physical environment which benefits all areas of literacy instruction (Beaty, 2009). This teaching strategy is called free play which sparks curiosity, allowing children to practice not only fine and gross motor skills, but also oral language, and even achieve mastery in many areas. Through this type of self-exploratory play, objects and materials become real world manipulatives where they can develop their own sense of the world and their learning styles.

What would a D.A.P. classroom look like?

- Give children choices?

- Foster children's positive feelings about themselves?

- Respect individual differences and cultural diversity?

- Lend itself to being adapted if beneficial?

- Acknowledge the physical needs of children?

- Reflect the goals and philosophy of the center?

•Allow children to participate at their own level?

•Allow for flexibility, with no "right" or "wrong" outcome?

•Encourage active learning through participation?

•Encourage exploration and thinking?

•Allow for socialization and interaction with others?

•Enable children to learn through their senses?

•Allow children to experience things "hands-on"?

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The great teachers in my life never told me about my weaknesses. They only showed me my strength and then I was able to realize my weaknesses by myself.
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Early childhood caregivers and teachers look to the various theories to provide the foundations for working with young children. As an early care and education professional you will use the theories in your work with children. After you have gained experience and learned more about early education, you will use the theories to form your own philosophy of early childhood education.

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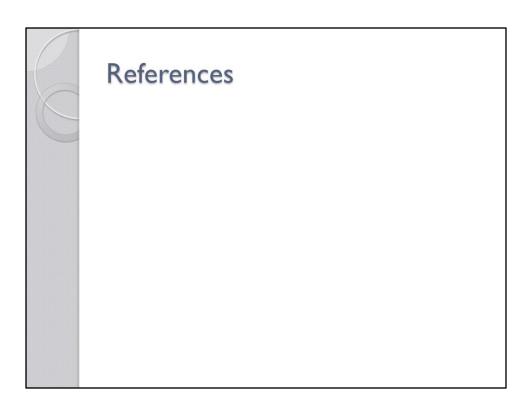
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