Developmentally Appropriate Practices with Young Children

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

Benjamin Franklin

Yes, but is it developmentally appropriate?

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, we, as early childhood professionals, respond by changing and evolving in how we work with children, and in our 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."

To assist you in your planning, the following are questions to assess how appropriate an activity may be…

Does the activity:
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?
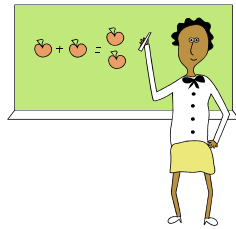
| What _wouldn't_ you see in a D.A.P. Classroom?	What _would_ you see in a D.A.P. Classroom?
Dittos as art activities	Open-ended art
"Rote" learning & memorization	Hands-on experiences with real objects
Waiting, lining up	Self-help skills/autonomy
Most activities teacher - directed & large group	Small group activities, based on interest
Forced participation	Children offered choices
Activities with "right" & "wrong" outcomes	Successful participation at any skill level
All adult-oriented décor	"Ownership" of the room by the children reflected
Rigidity	Flexibility
Compliance with adult the only choice	Problem-solving
Teacher frustrated with non-napping child	Small, quiet "naptime boxes"
Art, music, science are all at designated times <u>only</u>	Media tables, easels open, art/music/science accessible

Developmentally Appropriate Activities and Practices are:

- 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

- 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
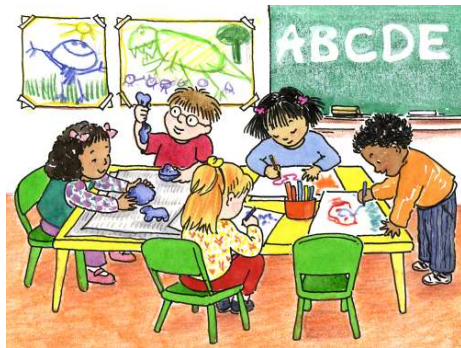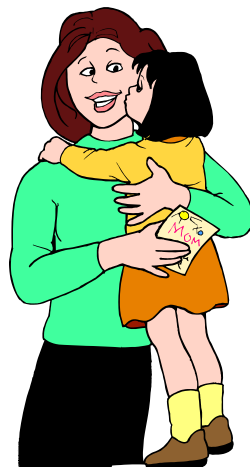
How do we tell children…

…this is a good place to be?

…that this is **their** classroom?

…that this is a place that they can trust?

…that they can be by themselves if they need to?

…that this is a safe place to try out ideas and explore?

…that they are valued and respected?

From this…   to this.

SHIFTING TO BETTER CHOICES:

Example: *Better Activity:*
Children color a beach ditto   Shells placed in the Sand Table

All must participate in a game   _____

An elaborate 2 hour "graduation
ceremony" at the end of the year   _____

Children are intrigued by the
construction going on outside,
but it isn't the theme of the week   _____

All children are doing art at
the table as a group   _____

Children watch a video
on dinosaurs   _____

The teacher has cut frogs out
of construction paper for art   _____

Introduction of math concepts
with flashcards   _____

Children have lost interest in the
book, but there are 6 more pages   _____

Children are expected to do at
least one page of writing letters,   _____
then can play when finished

15 children are lined up at the   _____
sink to wash hands for snack

What is the Teacher?

What is the teacher?
A guide, not a guard.

What is learning?
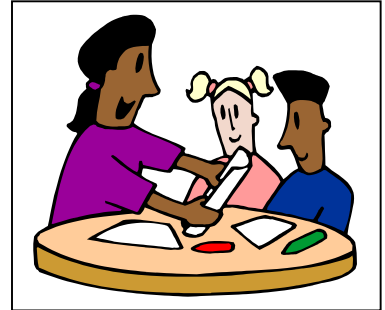A journey, not a destination.

What is discovery?
Questioning the answers,
not answering the questions.

What is the process?
Discovering ideas,
not covering content.

What is the goal?
Open minds,
Not closed issues.

What is the test?
Being and Becoming,
Not remembering and reviewing.

What is the school?
Whatever we choose to make it.

- Alan A. Glatthorn

In the Developmentally Appropriate Classroom, Children:

Create… rather than duplicate.

Move… rather than wait.

Attempt to solve their own problems… rather than tell the Teacher, to have her solve them.

Speak… rather than listen passively.

Explore their interests… rather than just learning about what the Teacher thinks they should learn

Make choices… rather than just being told.

Make their own lines… instead of coloring within the Teacher's lines.

Write their own books… rather than fill in workbooks.

Create art… rather than do pre-planned crafts.

Decide… rather than passively submit.

Learn through experience… rather than by rote.

Appreciate the process… rather than the end product.

Ask questions… rather than being told facts by adults.
   Then - Figure out the answers… rather than being told facts .

Learn and Use skills that are of interest and meaningful… rather than vague, abstract concepts that have no real significance to them.

Have a schedule based on their needs… not the needs of the adults or the program.


Adapted from "The Butterfly Garden" by Sandra Crosse

What Can Children Learn From
Self-Serve, Family-Style Meals?
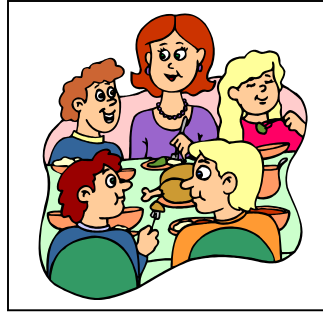
- To utilize social skills, and to use language to get their needs met
- Increased dexterity and small muscle development
- To associate quantities of food with their level of physical hunger
- Enhanced self-esteem from experiencing independence, and more control of their choices
- Math skills: quantities, counting, measuring, comparing, mentally dividing the amount of food by how many children, one-to-one correspondence, etc
- Problem-solving – figuring out who has the potatoes instead of just yelling for the Teacher
- Cooperation
- Responsibility
- Eye-hand coordination
- Culture – exposure to how some families eat meals
- Patience (and a more relaxed focus)
- Language development
- Manners
- To be a more active participant in the process, and in their environment
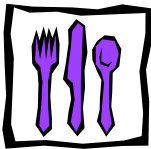
How to implement family-style meals:

- Implementing family-style, self-serve meals is something that you will need to discuss and coordinate with the Director and Cook. (Some Health Departments have specific regulations on this.)
- All classrooms will need to have enough serving bowls for each table to get every menu item, eliminating unreasonable waiting times.
- Start "slowly" with items that are logically single quantity – like rolls or oranges – where children take only one and then pass them.
- Do a great deal of speaking with the children about this change - how and why, the concept of passing food, appropriate quantities, etc.
- Incorporate some pouring and scooping activities into your lesson plans for additional practice and skill-building.

What If's…

You have a child that will serve himself a disproportionate amount of food	Start the main dishes so that he is "last"; talk to him in terms of a math problem (division)
The usual "Can we eat yet? Can we eat yet? Can we eat yet?""	"Does everyone have everything on their plates? Look and see." (problem-solving)
Children put the serving spoon in their mouth	Have extra serving spoons at hand; respectful reminders
Meals take more time	Watch to ensure that children are "passing"; Encourage children to remind friends politely

12 Things You Can Do to Make Your Classroom More Developmentally Appropriate

if you are not already…

Have the Art Area open throughout the day, including a variety of collage materials available

Playdough should always be a choice for children

Place a child-size broom (or a wisk broom) by the sand table to allow children to be responsible for any mess they make and to increase self-help skills

Make sure tissues and paper towels are accessible to children, so that they do not have to rely on adults for them

Sand &/or water play should be available daily

Use conflicts between children as opportunities for learning through problem-solving

Do not force children to participate in activities – offer choices

The easel should be open daily

Bring in "real" objects for exploration

Do not cut out patterns for children

Allow children to do what they can for themselves

Do activities in small groups vs. large groups

How "Creative" is Your Creative Art?

Is there a "right" way or a "wrong" way?
   Or is it open-ended?

Do all of the pieces look basically alike?
   Or is every child's piece original and unique?

Does it require a great deal of teacher preparation or assistance?
   Or can the child work independently?

Does the activity emphasize the end product?
   Or the process and experience?

Does the child need to follow a predetermined outline?
   Or can the child express his/her own ideas and feelings?

Is the experience "Teacher-directed" and initiated?
   Or child-directed and initiated?

and finally…

Whose hands are busier – the child's or the adult's?

Are Programmatic Decisions Made Based on the Children's Needs or the Adult's Needs?

Developmentally appropriate also means we must take into account the young children we serve, and be responsive to their needs. Routines and consistency are extremely important, but we also need to allow for flexibility at times, based on what the children "tell us" through their behavior. *Whenever possible*, our program decisions should be child-centered.

Examples of Adult-Centered Decisions:

- Breakfast is served daily at 6:45am because the Cook has to drive her daughter to middle school
- Naptime is over at 3:00, so that everyone can get breaks in; *&/or* so that the Teacher can write all of the daily notes
- The Teacher in the Pre-K Room doesn't use the sand table because she doesn't like the mess (it is used to store things on)
- If a Teacher doesn't like what is on the menu for snack, she grabs something else from the kitchen to serve
- The children usually stay outside longer on Mondays when the staff are discussing the weekend
- The Infant room staff work to get the babies all on the same schedule, so that they are able to have some "down time" in their day
- Teachers put the indoor riding toys onto the playground because they don't like them in the classroom

Examples of Responsive Child-Centered Decisions:

- A Teacher with a very active group of children incorporates a second outdoor time, early in the morning for about 20 minutes
- The children in the 5-year-old Room are outgrowing the need for naps, and none of them sleep for more than an hour. Naptime is shortened for them, and they do quiet activities for the remainder of the time allocated.
- When budget allows, the Director purchases a piece of large motor equipment for a classroom in which there is a lot of climbing on furniture
- Almost all of the toddlers are falling asleep during lunch. They are served first, 15 minutes earlier

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What You Will See In a Developmentally Appropriate Classroom…

- Respectful, frequent and responsive interactions
- Children offered choices, given opportunities to make decisions, and are active participants
- A print-rich environment with many opportunities for children to interact and explore the written word (including a writing area)
- Open-ended art materials available as a choice throughout the day; Art displayed at the children's eye-level (dictation present)
- A stimulating, interactive science area, with real objects
- Painting at the art easel available daily, as an on-going choice
- Media/Sensory Tables open daily
- Multi-cultural materials incorporated throughout the environment
- Pictures of "real" objects and people (vs. cartoons)
- Children employing problem-solving skills
- Learning areas that are well-defined and inviting
- Woodworking experiences available and utilized
- Self-help skills and independence encouraged
- Adults capitalizing on "teachable moments", and what the children express an interest in learning about
- Age-appropriate expectations *Ex:* Mistakes and accidents ok
- Children's individual needs and skill levels taken into account
- Many opportunities for children to experience success
- Smooth transitions with minimal waiting and lining up
- Children's feelings acknowledged and validated
- Role of the family acknowledged, with participation encouraged and valued
- Activities facilitated in small groups instead of large groups with forced participation
- Physical needs of children incorporated, with opportunities for large motor experiences available daily
- The goal of guidance and discipline with the children being to develop self-control and to make better choices
- The presence of music and laughter

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What You Will See in a Developmentally Appropriate Infant/Toddler Room…

- Loving and nurturing exchanges
- Frequent, respectful, and responsive interactions
- Babies dictating their own schedules
- Lights turned on throughout the entire day
- Acceptance of individual differences and rates of development
- Attempts to communicate acknowledged and reinforced
- Children not made to feel badly, with no negative comments related to bodily functions
- Babies talked to about what is happening to them, and what is going to happen to them, and what they are feeling
- Presence of music and laughter
- Stimulation provided, based on individual needs
- Children not confined or restricted, free to explore
- "No's" eliminated by the childproofing of the room
- Sleeping infants put into cribs (on their backs)
- Age-appropriate expectations – *Ex:* acceptance that children of this age dump toys out; are messy when they eat; don't share...
- Children are encouraged to explore and to learn new things
- Feeding time a pleasurable exchange, with the caregivers focus on the child (no bottle propping)
- Diapering viewed as an opportunity to interact and bond
- Children get "floor time" with an adult sitting by them - interacting, reading, and doing simple games and activities
- Frequent smiles and affection given by caregivers
- Crying infants acknowledged, and if teacher is busy, told that they will be taken care of next; children's feelings validated
- Multi-cultural items reflected throughout the environment
- Cues taken from children; physical needs acknowledged
- Pictures of the children and their families present (at childs' eye-level); pictures of real objects vs cartoon characters
- Role of the family is acknowledged and respected, with good, open, two-way communication about the child and his/her development and needs

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Benefits of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Give an example of a developmentally appropriate practice, and then list the ways in which children benefit.

Example:

A spiral notebook with an attached pen (accessible to children) is located by where the parents sign in daily, so that the children can choose to "sign in" too if they wish.
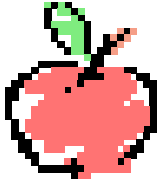
How does this benefit children?

Conveys that they are welcome in this environment
Conveys that we have thought about them too
Makes them part of this process and routine
Allows them to imitate adult behavior and roles
Serves as a literacy activity
Eliminates waiting with nothing to do

Example:

How does this benefit children?

Staff Training Ideas:

Age Appropriate Expectations:

Materials Needed: easel paper, markers
Approx. Time: 20 minutes

Have staff members break up into small groups. Each group will have several large sheets of easel paper, and be "assigned" a children's age group. Participants will list what children can and can not be expected to do at the given age/level.
Example: You could not expect a toddler to sit through a 20 minute GroupTime.
Use the responses of staff as a discussion springboard. Discuss individual differences in children. Also talk about what happens when we *do* expect children to do things that they are not ready for, or that are not within the age-appropriate range. Read then discuss "Toddler Property Laws" poem (included.)

Conformity/Varying Skill Levels:

Materials Needed: modeling clay, figurine to use as sample
Approx. Time: 15 minutes

Give each staff member a hunk of modeling clay. Bring out ornate figurine (an angel figure works well.) Instruct participants to "make one just like the example." Allow several minutes.
Encourage those who had difficulty and/or poor results to share how they felt. Ask questions to lead the discussion such as – "How did it feel to have others look at yours in comparison?" "Did anyone want to make something other than an Angel?", etc.

Toddler Property Laws!

(Age-Appropriate Thinking Socially/Emotionally)

1. If I like it, it's mine.

2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.

3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.

4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.

5. If I am doing or building something, all of the pieces are mine.

6. If it looks just like mine, it's mine.

7. If I think it's mine, it's mine!

Review of D.A.P. Concepts

1. What does the phrase "developmentally appropriate practices" (DAP) mean?

2. Why are developmentally appropriate practices better for children?

3. List 10 things you *would* see in a developmentally appropriate classroom for young children:

4. List 5 things you *wouldn't* see in a developmentally appropriate classroom:

Additional Resources on D.A.P.

On Line at www.earlychildhood.com

"Developmentally Appropriate Practice"
by Evelyn Peterson
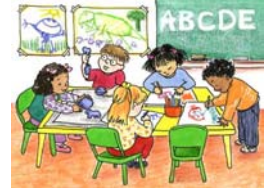
"The Worksheet Dilemma: Benefits of Play-Based Curricula" by Sue Grossman

"Exploration and Discovery! Creating an Enthusiastic, Exciting Classroom" By Sue Miles

On Line at www.ericeece.org
(Search words – *"Developmentally Appropriate Practice"*, *"problem solving"*, etc.)

Eric Digest: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice: What Does Research Tell Us?" by Loraine Dunn and Susan Kontos

Eric Digest: "Developmentally Appropriate Programs" By Margorie J. Kostelnic

Eric Digest: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs" by Sue Bredekamp and Carol Copple

On Line at www.naeyc.org

NAEYC Position Statement: "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children Birth – Age 8"

NAEYC Position Statement: "Guidelines for Decisions about Developmentally Appropriate Practice"

Articles on (and related to) D.A.P.

"Myths Associated with Developmentally Appropriate Programs" by Marjorie Kostelnik; *Young Children*, May 1992

"In Praise of Developmentally Appropriate Practice" by Barbara Kantrowitz and Pat Wingert; *Young Children*, Nov '99

"The Butterfly Garden: Developmentally Appropriate Practice Defined" by Sandra Cosser; *Early Childhood News,*July96

"The Facilitators Role In Play" by Sylvia A. Ford; *Young Children*, September 1993

"Changes – How Our Nursery School Replaced Adult-Directed Art Projects with Child-Directed Experiences and Changed Into an Accredited, Child-Sensitive DAP School" by Lou Swanson; *Young Children*, May 1994

"Moving From Traditional to Developmentally Appropriate Education: A Work in Progress by Marion Passidomo; *Young Children*, September 1994

"Taking Positive Steps Toward Classroom Management in Preschool: Loosing Up without Letting It All Fall Apart" by Cele M. McCloskey; *Young Children*, March 1996

"Do Worksheets Work? by Jean Marzollo; *Parents Magazine*, October 1988

"What Children Can't Do...Yet" by Dan Hodges *Early Childhood News*, January/February 1993

"The Problem Solver" (bi-monthly column) by Eleanor Reynolds; *Early Childhood News*

"What You Don't Learn From Coloring an Elephant. What About Color Books?" by Victor Lowenfield; *TX Child Care Quarterly*