

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Developmentally Appropriate Practices are based on research that proves overwhelmingly that quality early childhood experiences foster optimal development of the whole child. Studies demonstrate that developmentally appropriate teaching ensures success in the early grades. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) supports research that has shown children's success or failure during the early grades often predicts the course of later schooling. Hence, the importance of developmentally appropriate practices in our early childhood programs. The goal of this document is to provide a vision and agreed upon standards of professional practice for all adults who are in a position to influence a young child's learning and development.

The following guidelines were adapted from *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* published by NAEYC. We have divided the guidelines into four major areas: Environment, Curriculum, Assessment, and Instructional Strategies.

Environment

The classroom serves as a developmentally appropriate learning environment which supports children's initiatives to explore, investigate, observe and experiment, while allowing for appropriate risk taking within safe boundaries. Teachers create an intellectually engaging, responsive environment to promote each child's learning and development. This environment fosters self-esteem, self-concept and social competence. The following guidelines describe aspects of a developmentally appropriate environment:

- The classroom contains areas in which children can select and plan their activities.
- The classroom has areas for quiet and active social interactions.
- The classroom contains clearly labeled areas with words and pictures to encourage independence.
- The classroom has a variety of materials to encourage meaningful experiences.
- The classroom setting is not over-stimulating.

Curriculum

Research suggests that curriculum planning and design should be based on what is known about how young children develop and learn. Therefore, a thorough understanding of developmental continuums is essential, as is an understanding of the enormous variation among individual children. Combining this knowledge with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and the Franklin benchmarks, educators are equipped to plan appropriate learning experiences that will provide each child with the opportunity to reach his/her full potential. The following guidelines can assist in constructing developmentally appropriate curriculum:

- Curriculum is integrated across all domains of child development – physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive.
- Curriculum is relevant, meaningful, and based on prior experiences allowing children to make connections.
- Curriculum is challenging yet achievable with sufficient adult support.
- Curriculum is designed based on where each child is developmentally.
- Curriculum is designed to allow children to be active learners.
- Curriculum is integrated across content areas.

Instructional Strategies

Teachers develop and use a wide variety of instructional strategies to ensure each child's progress in accomplishing the expected, age-appropriate learning objectives. Teaching strategies are used to strengthen children's confidence as learners so that they will be motivated and willing to take risks. Teachers observe and interact with whole groups, small groups, and individuals. They pose problems, ask questions, make comments and give suggestions to stimulate children's thinking and extend their learning. The following instructional strategies are helpful to use while taking into consideration the developmental age, skills, interests, and background of the children:

- Include a balance of active and passive activities.
- Offer a wide variety of novel experiences, stimulating ideas, and opportunities for problem solving.

- Encourage children to choose and plan their own learning activities.
- Model and demonstrate specific skills.
- Use knowledge of differentiated instruction to plan learning experiences.
- Provide a balance between self-initiated and teacher directed learning.
- Encourage children to “revisit” and reflect on their learning experiences.

Assessment

In a developmentally appropriate classroom, assessment of young children is ongoing, authentic, and purposeful. Observational assessment shows children’s progress over time, while work samples and documentation of students’ work help to guide the curriculum plan. Teachers adapt instruction to the developmental needs and learning styles of the students; results of assessment are used to improve and individualize instruction. Developmentally appropriate assessment practices are based on the following guidelines:

- Assessment helps to show progress and growth over time.
- Assessment includes anecdotal notes and observations to enhance curriculum development.
- Observation and evaluation of each student’s learning styles are keys to assessing learning and growth.
- Assessment is standards based and authentic.
- Teachers and parents share useful information about children’s learning strengths and needs.
- Assessment is ongoing, with many opportunities for teachers to observe and reflect on students’ accomplishments.

In conclusion, research indicates that implementing developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood programs is critical. The preceding guidelines are to be used when developing learning experiences for our young children.