

GROWING IDEAS

Thoughtful Teaching: Developmentally Appropriate Practice



What do I do with the three-year-old who can't sit still at circle?

How can I talk with family members about their child?

What kinds of materials and activities should I plan to promote children's growth and development?

How can I teach children about feelings, their own and others?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has created guidelines to help answer these questions and to support the decision-making process care and education professionals use to plan their environment and teaching practices. These guidelines describe an approach known as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

What is Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)?

DAP describes an approach to education that guides early childhood professionals in their everyday practice. DAP comes from more than 75 years of research on child development and early learning. It gives early childhood professionals information from which to make decisions based on their knowledge of child development and what is known about how young children learn.

DAP considers the following:

- Age appropriateness: what is best for most children of a particular age?
- Individual appropriateness: what is best for a specific child's development?
- Cultural and social context appropriateness: what is most relevant to and respectful of the child and the child's family, neighborhood, and community?

What are some keys to success in providing DAP?

- Focus on developing supportive relationships and building a caring community of learners where all children, staff, and family members are valued and included.
- Understand age-related child development. Create a learning environment that supports children's growth and development. Provide safe, healthy, interesting experiences, and encourage exploration and discovery.
- Know each individual child. Develop a curricula that considers knowledge about each individual learner including interests, temperament, gifts, talents, needs, rate of learning, and social and cultural background.
- Be flexible and responsive. Routinely use assessment systems to gather information about each child to use in planning learning goals for the individual and the group.

- Establish partnerships with families. Work together to support each child's development and the success of mutually agreed upon goals.

How to start using DAP to create a successful learning environment for all children:

- Review information about development and learning for the age group in your program.
- Observe and record each child's interests, level of development, learning style, and temperament.
- Use observation information when selecting learning materials and activities.
- Set up indoor and outdoor learning environments so all children can participate in activities and use the materials and space.
- Allow children enough time to fully engage in activities and complete projects.
- Create defined work areas so children can work alone, with a friend, or in a group.
- Rotate materials and activities, as needed, to meet individual and group needs.
- Incorporate culturally appropriate learning materials into each learning center.

DAP supports meaningful learning.

Children learn by doing. Promote learning in multiple ways by providing a variety of materials that support rich and involved play experiences. For example, when preschoolers use wooden unit blocks and animals to build a zoo, they...

- use their imagination and creativity to represent their theories and ideas about zoos;

- experience the need to problem-solve, focus, and work for extended periods;
- learn how to work cooperatively with others and resolve conflicts;
- and build muscle control and strength.

DAP also supports play activities that address development in a variety of learning domains:

Literacy: Children make signs or tickets for their zoo, or read to the animals.

Math/Science: They consider the weight, size and shape of blocks needed.

Art: They paint and draw scenery or decorations for the cages.

Social Studies: They learn where the animals live and what they eat.

Technology: They ask to have a photo taken of their zoo. They type up their stories.

Examples of materials and activities appropriate for young children include the following:

- Blocks and other construction materials.
- Books and other language arts materials.
- Water/sensory play table.
- Dramatic play.
- Art and modeling materials.
- Music and movement.

Every day, care and education professionals are faced with choices that have a great impact on children's learning, growth, and development. Applying the principles of DAP supports care and education professionals to be intentional in their approaches with every child.

Where to learn more:

See "[Thoughtful Teaching: Developmentally Appropriate Practice — Selected Resources](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/dapres/)" online at <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/dapres/>

See "[Thoughtful Teaching: Developmentally Appropriate Practice — Virtual Toolkit](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/dapvtk/)" online at <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/dapvtk/>



This update and expansion of the Growing Ideas Resources for Guiding Early Childhood Practices was completed by the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies with funding from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child and Family Services, Early Childhood Division. © 2011

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Updated: 04/08/13