

Iowa DE/AEA Early Childhood Network

Fact Sheet



# Developmentally Appropriate Practices



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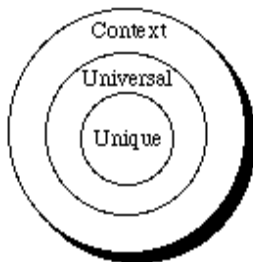
## Developmentally Appropriate Practices

**Definition:** Developmentally appropriate practice results from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge:

- *what is known about child development and learning*- knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging to children;
- *what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group* to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation; and
- *knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live* to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families.” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997)

### A Mental Model for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

A mental model can help articulate the complexity of developmentally appropriate practice. Four shapes serve as reminders of four components of DAP. *Development* represented by a circle, *learning* represented by a triangle, *partnership* represented by a square, and *guidelines for practice* represented by a star provides a mental model to use when communicating with others.



**Development**

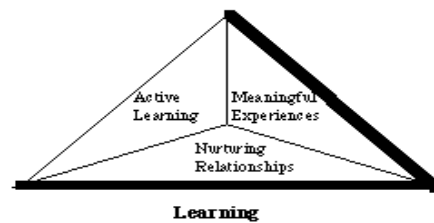
**Development** involves three concentric circles. The center circle represents the unique development of every child, the middle circle stands for the universal patterns of development in humans, and the outer circle represents the social and cultural context of the learner. The complexities of development and learning preclude following any one theory to the exclusion of others. Twelve basic principles serve as summary statements about current thinking on how children and learn.

These Principles of Child Development and Learning include:

- 1) Domains of children’s development (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive) are closely related. Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains.
- 2) Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.
- 3) Development proceeds at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly within different areas of each child’s functioning.
- 4) Early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children’s development. Optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning.
- 5) Development proceeds in predictable directions toward greater complexity, organization, and internalization.
- 6) Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
- 7) Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understanding of the world around them.

- 8) Development and learning result from interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds in which children live.
- 9) Play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.
- 10) Development advances when children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills, as well as when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery.
- 11) Children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning and different ways of representing what they know.
- 12) Children develop and learn in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure. (adapted from Bredekamp & Copple, 1997)

**Learning** is represented by three triangles within a triangle. Active learning, meaningful experiences, and nurturing relationships are integral facets of learning. Recent brain research supports the need for nurturing relationships, active participation by the learner, and the need for meaningful experiences to support optimal learning. (NAEYC/RISE, 1998)



Clarity about preferences	Ability to communicate
Ability to negotiate	Willingness to change and learn

**Partnership**

**Partnership**, represented by four squares within a square, serves as a reminder about the need for clarity about preferences, ability to communicate, ability to negotiate, and willingness to change and learn to from relationships. All adults involved in education of young children need skills for reflecting on their own beliefs, values and preferences. Clarity of preferences emerges from this reflection. Preferences are the context from which conflict occurs. The ability to communicate is critical for adults involved in the care and education of young children. Experience in communicating about routine matters and an assertive style of communications are helpful when more difficult issues must be discussed. The ability to negotiate offers adults a way to reach common ground and identify creative ideas for resolving differences. The ability of adults to be willing to change and learn indicates a commitment to life long learning. (RISE, 1996)

**Guidelines for practice**, represented by a five pointed star, help practitioners integrate the values and principles of developmentally appropriate practice in five inter-related areas of practice. Creating caring communities of learners is basic to developmentally appropriate practice. DAP occurs within a context that supports the development of relationships between adults and children, among children, among teachers, and between teachers and families. Teaching to enhance development and learning is achieved when there is a balance between a child's self-initiated learning and adult guidance or support. Constructing appropriate curriculum is based on decisions on many factors, including the various disciplines, social and cultural values, parent input, and the age and experience of the learners. Assessment of individual children's development and learning is essential for planning or implementing appropriate curriculum. Establishing reciprocal relationships with families is accomplished through building relationships with children's families. This provides information about the interests of the child and the social context of his/her family. (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997)



## **References and Resources:**

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Resources and Instruction for Staff Excellence, Inc. (RISE) (1996). *Winning Teams for Young Children*. Cincinnati, OH.

## **Internet Web Sites:**

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<http://www.carnegie.org/execsum.html>

Iowa Department of Education and Area Education Agency Early Childhood Network  
<http://www.state.ia.us/educate/prek12/>

National Association for the Education of Young Children  
<http://www.naeyc.org/>

NCREL (1997). *Pathways to School Improvement- Early Childhood*  
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/ea0cont.htm>

