Developmentally Appropriate Practice
How Can We Recognize It in an Early Childhood Setting?
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The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) sets standards for excellence in early childhood education. Centers across the country aim to provide Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in their classrooms. How can parents recognize the use of DAP?

DAP focuses on three important principles:

* knowledge and understanding of child development
* valuing children as individuals
* treating children and families with respect

Early childhood programs that are developmentally appropriate have teachers who know norms for physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth. They plan their activities and expectations accordingly. Early childhood educators understand there is a range in the developmental ages within their groups.

Though growth patterns are predictable, each child is a unique individual. Teachers in DAP programs observe each child and are intentional about learning each child's particular interests, strengths and needs. Activities are chosen that strengthen each child's emerging and developing abilities and also stretch the child to continued growth. Learning takes place through active interactions with people, ideas, materials, and the environment. Teachers take the time to build a trusting relationship with each child and to be fully present in their interactions. Children are encouraged to learn through following their own interests and through teacher directed activities.

Children grow and learn when they feel safe and secure in their families, communities, and early childhood programs. Professionals in developmentally appropriate programs are interested in the social and cultural backgrounds of the children and families in their care. They use what they learn about their children to aid them in planning activities that are meaningful, relevant and respectful. Such programs are ones in which children of all ages, abilities, races, cultures, socio-economic, family and lifestyle backgrounds feel loved, safe, and valued.

What Does DAP Look Like at CCC?

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

Teachers get to know each child’s personality, abilities, and ways of learning (family info sheets, intake meetings, interactions).
Children feel they belong and are safe here (family pictures, pictures of children and their artwork displayed, character development, safety drills).

Children are given support communicating and being involved (modeling problem solving, learning social skills).

Environment is orderly and comfortable (natural lighting, quiet and active spaces, shelves and materials displayed, labeled and rotated).

Plans are made for children to work and play together (areas for two children or small groups, inviting children to play).

**TEACHING**

A wide range of teaching strategies are used (acknowledging, encouraging, giving specific feedback, modeling, demonstrating, creating or adding a challenge, scaffolding, giving directions, giving a clue, providing information.) Classrooms use small groups and large groups, play and engagement in learning centers, and daily routines.

**CURRICULUM**

Weekly goals include social-emotional, cognitive (literacy, math, science, technology, creative expression, appreciation of the arts, learning about ourselves and our community) and physical development.

**ASSESSMENT**

The center uses child development summaries, Ages and Stages, hearing and vision screenings, speech evaluations, classroom meetings, daily reflections and 4-C collaboration to assist in assessing the development of each child.

**FAMILIES**

Parents and teaching staff form reciprocal relationships of respect and cooperation, working together toward shared goals. Communication takes place at the beginning and end of the day. Other opportunities for families to share are during classroom orientation, intake/welcome back meetings, and conferences. Teachers provide a parent information board with daily reflections and weekly goals. The center communicates with e-mail notes, informational displays, parent education opportunities, and a monthly newsletter. Family programs are offered each semester, and welcomes all family members to participate. Volunteer and involvement opportunities exist within the classroom and center.

Source: NAEYC’s *Developmentally Appropriate Practices Revised*, S. Bredekamp and C. Copple.