

# The What and How of Integrating Developmentally Appropriate Practice into the Preparation of Early Childhood Educators

The 2020 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice rejects the notion that “one best practice” exists and instead emphasizes gaining knowledge about and integrating practices that support child, family, and community context and individual needs. This shift means those who prepare early childhood educators must engage students in more critical and complex self-reflection and experiences that require them to apply what they’ve learned and document the evidence on which their decisions are based. Faculty must braid together content and context to create cohesive, integrated sequences of learning opportunities, field experiences, and targeted applications so that students can understand that the process of considering and arriving at an effective solution is complex. (See Chapter 1.)

To prepare future early childhood educators to understand the complex nature of developmentally appropriate practice, those who prepare them need to consider their ages, assets, challenges, experiences, and diversity. In addition, faculty need to consider the “what” and the “how” (National Professional Development Center on Inclusion 2008). The “what” is the content addressed in the higher education program and is generally defined by state, regional, and national professional competencies, standards, and credentials. The “how” is the organization and facilitation of learning experiences used to support learning.

This appendix focuses on the intersection of the “what” and the “how” by offering early childhood faculty examples of ways to integrate strengths-based, hands-on sequences of learning, watching, questioning, practicing, and reflecting that support students to acquire and apply the values and

actions of developmentally appropriate practice through coursework and field experiences. The revised position statement and book highlight new expectations for what early childhood educators need to know and be able to do. Both also offer multiple examples of how to prepare early childhood educators to meet these new expectations.

## Start with the Core Considerations for Intentional Decisions

Early childhood faculty must provide learning opportunities that support students’ developing competence in making informed intentional decisions. These intentional decisions are based on the three interrelated core considerations noted previously: commonality, individuality, and context.

With commonality, faculty engage in activities and experiences that support students in gaining knowledge of children’s development and the ways in which they are influenced by social and cultural contexts. Faculty must move students toward understanding that developmental progressions are not universal norms but rather must be viewed critically from diverse perspectives.

With individuality, faculty support students in understanding that each child brings multiple assets to learning and that supporting learning starts with recognizing and then building on those strengths.

With context, faculty support students in considering and understanding the critical role of child and family social and cultural contexts in the decision-making process. It is at this point that faculty engage students in reflecting on their own social and cultural contexts and confronting biases that they bring to the teaching and learning process.

This edition of the book offers many resources to advance the understanding of learners vis-à-vis the core considerations. Chapters such as Chapter 2, “The Principles in Practice,” includes many vignettes faculty may use to help students find and apply resources that enable them to make decisions consistent with developmentally appropriate practice.

## Adopt and Align Coursework

To build students' competence in basing decisions on the core considerations, faculty use approaches that begin with knowledge acquisition (e.g., readings and discussions) and move to knowledge application (e.g., simulations, practice-based assignments, and field experiences). An effective method to support knowledge application is the use of multifaceted vignettes or stories.

Using the information in the story and other evidence-based resources, students actively engage in applying the concepts to develop strategies or make decisions. The use of vignettes provides an opportunity to try their hand at application before doing so within the real world of children and families. Here's an excerpt from vignette 3.1 in Chapter 3 with illustrations of how this and other vignettes in each chapter may be used:

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### Making a Pie to Support Vocabulary Development

Ms. Hall observes Paola, a child in her kindergarten class who speaks Spanish at home and is learning English, as she plays with playdough. The child pats a playdough circle and says the word "tarta" in Spanish and "cake" in English. She rolls out small round shapes and places them on top of the circle. Paola then places snakes of playdough in a crisscross pattern over the top and again says, "Cake!" Ms. Hall notices the detail in Paola's playdough creation and reflects that she is probably making a pie or a fruit tart but does not yet have the expressive language to describe what she is making more specifically in English. She leans over the child and says, "That looks like a delicious pie!"

(Adapted from Riley-Ayers & Figueras-Daniel 2018)

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After students read the vignette, faculty might consider the following options for next steps:

- › How might this be an opportunity for Ms. Hall to connect with Paola's family and to learn about *tartas* and other pastries that might be part of Paola's family traditions?
  - › How might this be an opportunity to learn about where in the community there are bakers making the pastries that are part of Paola's tradition?
- › How might this be an opportunity for Ms. Hall to consider the domains of development that might be involved in following and implementing a recipe?
  - › How might it be possible to develop a unit around the vocabulary, process, and production of a pastry that is part of Paola's tradition?
  - › How might all the children contribute to a conversation about the diverse baked goods they love and what the names of those items are? Imagine making a graph of how many of the children enjoy each type of baked good (math), or following a recipe together (math, language, literacy, fine motor), or adding measuring spoons and other necessary items to the housekeeping area to support playful preparation of favorite items. And how might individual children help with the preparation in ways that support their unique learning goals (e.g., stirring to develop eye-hand and motor coordination)?

Faculty can instructionally use a single vignette like this to help students learn how to create opportunities for engaged, playful learning that integrates the three core considerations of developmentally appropriate practice.

## Make Direct Connections to the Book and Other Resources for Teaching Developmentally Appropriate Practice

This section outlines opportunities for authentically and effectively incorporating the revised position statement, this book, and other resources into higher education preparation programs.

Included in the online resources for this book are six charts, each of which corresponds to a standard in the professional standards and competencies (NAEYC 2020b). These standards reflect consistency with the guidelines in the statement on developmentally appropriate practice. Each chart offers sample readings from NAEYC's foundational documents and this book as well as additional resources, activities, assignments, and reflections that faculty can incorporate into courses across their higher education programs. See Table C.1 for a sample chart for standard 3 from the