

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Kindergarten

“I teach kindergarten!” teachers proudly respond when asked what they do for work. In this exchange, they are often met with responses of delight and respect—as well as comments that highlight the challenging work of a kindergarten teacher. Teaching kindergarten is hard work, and it is extremely rewarding. This book was created with you, the kindergarten teacher, in mind. Focusing on the unique joys, needs, challenges, and opportunities that occur in working with kindergarten children, it shares ideas and key concepts outlined in NAEYC’s position statement on developmentally appropriate practice through a kindergarten lens. This book also models practices that you can adapt to use in your own program to enhance children’s learning and well-being.

Typically, children arrive in kindergarten having met only one requirement: age. Therefore, children come to you from a variety of cultures with a wide array of experiences. Some children have had many experiences interacting with other children; others have had few opportunities for such interaction. Some children have received early interventions that supported their growth and development; some arrive with unforeseen challenges that require further investigation. Some children have experienced a language-rich environment, in which storytelling, books, singing, and interactive dialogue have been part of their everyday lives. Other children arrive with similar experiences in a language other than English. Some children have benefited from a safe and healthy home environment; some children come from trauma-based environments in which basic physiological needs such as food, shelter, and clothing have not been a constant. Children are unique, and effective teachers both value each child for what they bring to the kindergarten classroom and seek to understand how to provide what each one needs in order to thrive.

You, too, are unique! You come to the teaching of kindergarten students with your own set of experiences, training, skills, hopes, and aspirations. Your knowledge of child development and your teaching philosophy about how young children learn,

grow, and develop guide the many decisions you make each day. You strive to build on the children’s strengths and provide engaging, meaningful learning opportunities that are designed to move each and every child forward to the best of their ability. What a wonderful—and important—job you have!

Our hope is that this book affirms, inspires, and challenges you as you strive to provide the best kindergarten experience for each of the children. You will see examples of nurturing environments in which the social and cultural contexts of children and families are supported and how teachers foster trusting relationships and teach, model, and support prosocial behaviors so that children are better able to solve social conflicts, build friendships, self-regulate, and manage strong emotions in a healthy way. The chapters also provide examples of how teachers value families as members of the kindergarten team and use strategies for capitalizing on opportunities to learn from and partner with them. Authentic assessment practices are highlighted as they are shown being integrated within daily learning experiences and used to inform decisions. The authors share insights about providing integrated learning opportunities that you can adapt to create a robust, rigorous learning environment that is play oriented, where children touch, hold, and manipulate objects; predict; observe; and explore concepts with wonder, excitement, thoughtfulness, curiosity, and questioning. You will see examples of how teachers offer choices and use strategies that help children to develop a sense of agency while also meeting required mandates and expectations.

The chapters provide multiple examples of how purposeful play is integrated throughout the day, illustrating how play is not a *break from* the curriculum but rather the *best way to implement* the curriculum (Tepperman 2007; Zosh et al. 2022). You will read about selecting teaching strategies and making curriculum decisions that are “just right” for each child—in which they are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery with opportunities to reflect on and practice newly acquired skills. Last, you’ll be inspired to further your

own professional growth as an advocate and leader by reading about various roles and activities that kindergarten teachers like you have embraced.

Educators do not teach in vacuum. Having supportive administration that supports and prioritizes play-based learning and other facets of developmentally appropriate practice is a critical piece of implementing it in the classroom. Recognizing that not all educators have this support, we encourage you to examine your own context—what you *are* able to do and the support you have or potentially could grow in your school and greater community—as you consider this book and the strategies illustrated. Use and adapt what you read here to your own context; band together with others who are invested in this work; and develop your ability to advocate for practices and environments that facilitate equitable, joyful learning for all kindergartners.

What Is in This Book?

Each of the six parts of this book highlights one of the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice. The chapters have been carefully selected to reflect various aspects of the guidelines, including equity, inclusion, and instruction that is culturally responsive. The educators featured in these chapters have successfully implemented and strive to continue implementing the guidelines in their kindergarten classrooms. Although these chapters don't cover every topic in the position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, you'll find important ideas and strategies that you can integrate into your work as you support children and their families.

The introduction to each part discusses the guideline addressed in that part and includes overviews of each chapter. Although the guidelines are addressed in separate parts, you will find common themes across the six parts. The guidelines work together to support your use of developmentally appropriate practice. While the practices described in each chapter work well for the children in those particular settings, remember that developmentally appropriate practice is not a scripted, one-size-fits-all approach to early learning. Instead, use the material to reflect on the practices and approaches that could be effective with the kindergartners *you* work with. Be inspired to think about ways you establish goals and create experiences

that fit who and where the children are and that are challenging enough to promote their progress and further their interests.

Each chapter includes sidebars (identified by an icon) that connect to the position statements on developmentally appropriate practice and advancing equity and to the fourth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*. Focusing on a certain aspect of developmentally appropriate practice and equity, each sidebar is intended to support your reflection on how that aspect relates to the chapter.

Throughout the book, we note the use of the guidelines of developmentally appropriate practice in action to illustrate how kindergarten educators can apply what is known about child development and learning to actual classroom practice. You will, however, want to spend some time reading more about the guidelines in the fourth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. This will give you a richer understanding of child development and how you can best nurture and support each child.

Part 1: Creating a Caring, Equitable Community of Learners illustrates ways that teachers create caring and equitable classroom communities in which children have a sense of themselves and others as valued members, develop meaningful relationships, and gain competence and confidence to thrive as learners. Building such a community begins with creating smooth transitions to kindergarten, including examining school readiness and the many ways families can engage in their children's educational experiences. You'll read about that here, as well as ways effective teachers purposefully incorporate opportunities throughout the day for relationships to be developed between and among children and adults. You'll also read how teachers can explore race and gender topics in a way that leads to powerful conversations and discoveries as kindergartners focus on their own strengths and unique stories. In addition, the chapters explore ways to use children's literature to open a world that is diverse and as unique as each kindergarten child, expanding their awareness of the world around them.

Part 2: Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections demonstrates opportunities for kindergarten teachers to establish a meaningful and

supportive partnership with families. Moving beyond a one-sided approach in which teachers focus solely on distributing information to families, the authors in this section discuss how reciprocal relationships can be formed and used throughout the kindergarten year to support children's learning and development. The authors also demonstrate strategies for how to support children's and families' home languages. Furthermore, you'll read about the importance of communication to develop trust when considering families' cultural perspectives on important topics such as play.

Part 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning illustrates the careful decisions teachers make when choosing how and when to assess students' development and learning, including using a variety of authentic assessment strategies that are aligned to state standards. Instead of considering assessment as something that distracts teachers from teaching, the authors describe how assessment practices are actually part of the instructional experience. Here you will find steps for thinking through assessment practices. The chapters also provide examples of assessment tools, including teacher-created assessment tools, along with strategies for using them throughout the day during play-based experiences to collect reliable and valid information.

Part 4: Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning discusses intentional, research-based teaching practices that support each child across all domains of learning and development. The authors of these chapters highlight the understanding that play is an essential way for children to learn. Strategies for individualizing learning experiences by using a variety of instructional practices that are play based, including the use of play as a healing agent for children with trauma, are discussed. The chapters describe the use of learning centers, storytelling, mentor texts, and inquiry-based investigations as effective ways to support children's diverse learning needs while addressing curriculum mandates. In addition, the delicate art of scaffolding is described and illustrated through vignettes and is unpacked for you to further your reflection on the topic.

Part 5: Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to Achieve Meaningful Goals highlights the ways teachers make curriculum choices that are developmentally appropriate as they

juggle mandates and expectations that may or may not be in the best interests of young children. The chapters explore the use of self-directed learning, inquiry-based instruction, effective questioning techniques, integrated units of study, and intentional opportunities to support rich vocabulary development. The authors also stress the importance of deepening your own understanding of content and how children learn so that you can teach rich content in meaningful, developmentally appropriate ways. Throughout, you will also read about ways the authors find and cultivate joy in teaching and learning despite setbacks and frustrations.

Part 6: Demonstrating Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator articulates the importance of being an informed professional and passionate advocate for promoting responsive educational practices. As you continue to learn and grow as a professional, the chapters in this part provides steps for you to identify and work against biases and injustices that your children and families may be facing. This part also recognizes your role as a teacher-researcher and provides insight into how you might conduct your own research as an effective professional development experience. In addition, you'll read about the impact that teacher leadership opportunities had on a group of kindergarten teachers and will be inspired to further develop your own professional practices within your own context.

We would be remiss if we did not stress the critical role of self-reflection in your daily practice. As you read and reread these chapters, use the reflection questions in the introduction to each part to engage in thinking and conversations with colleagues and families. Consider how your work is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for each child in your learning environment. As a lifelong learner, use the many tools and resources NAEYC offers and encourage others to do the same so that you support each and every child to achieve their full potential. (Visit NAEYC.org/books/focus-kindergarten for additional material related to this book.)