



Identifying and Creating Child-Centered Environments

Shared with you by Lisa Murphy, M.Ed.

Lisa Murphy believes in developmentally sound, play-based, child-centered, hands-on early childhood environments that are grounded in best practice. Early childhood is defined as birth through age 8. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published a 3rd edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP) in 2009. High quality early childhood environments are grounded in best practice and that means that their programs target all four developmental domains: PHYSICAL, SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL, COGNITIVE and LANGUAGE & LITERACY.

Quotes from NAEYC's DAP book:

"good early childhood educators are purposeful in the decisions they make about their practices."

There is a "commitment to the whole child, recognition of the value of play, respect and responsiveness to individual and cultural diversity, and partnerships with families."

Our profession must be "more precise and clear when advocating or criticizing practices."

"healthy development cannot occur without attention to children's interest."

WHAT IS DAP?? DAP is the commonly used abbreviation for *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. "Being DAP" requires meeting children where they are (which means you have to know them well) and enabling them to reach goals that are both challenging and achievable = ZPD

All practices should be appropriate to their ages and stages and their cultural and social contexts

DAP does NOT mean making things easier for kids. It means that experiences are suited to their learning and development and challenging enough to promote progress and interest

DAP is best practice based on knowledge and evidence, not assumptions, and leads to the following 12 principles of DAP:

1. The four domains are interrelated
2. There are sequences of development
3. Development occurs at varying rates
4. Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience
5. Early experiences have profound effects on a child's development and learning
6. Development proceeds towards greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic (this can stand for that) and representational (left/right) capacities
7. Children develop best when they have secure, consistent, responsive relationships
8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social/cultural contexts
9. Children learn in a wide variety of ways
10. Play is an important vehicle for development
11. Development and learning progress when children are challenged within their ZPD and when they have ample time to practice and repeat new skills
12. Children's experiences shape their motivation, initiative, persistence and flexibility and these dispositions shape their learning and development

Guided by DAP as well as current research that reinforces the importance of nurturing REALTIONSHPIS, Lisa approaches her work with children and families using the following framework:

Principle 1: TIME

Children are provided with long periods of uninterrupted free time for exploration and interaction within the environment. Schedules are predictable, realistic, and flexible. Posted schedules do not unintentionally under-mind the role of playful learning within the space.

Questions to ponder: If you could change one thing about your schedule, what would it be? Can you think of an example of a “fake” question you find yourself asking children?

Principle 2: OUTDOORS

There is lots of outdoor play time. The outdoor environment is not considered a separate space, but instead is seen as an extension of the indoor space, and just as credible! Everything that is IN should and could be OUT. What would happen if you stayed outside all day? Be mindful of “I’m cold we’re going in” syndrome!

Questions to ponder: Do you have recess? If yes, how long do you have? If not, how has the elimination of recess impacted YOUR particular program?

Principle 3: RULES

Children have the freedom to explore this environment with few restrictions. Examine your RULE SHEET. Consider the fact that all of the no-no’s are developmentally appropriate, yet socially unacceptable. We have one overarching rule: “People are not for hurting.” We are able to provide this level of freedom because...

Question to ponder: Who makes the rules in your room? How do the kids know what the rules are? Are there any that might be unnecessary as I shift my focus to controlling the SPACE?

Principle 4: THE SECRET

The secret to good teaching is **controlling the environment**. If you don’t want them touching, smelling, tasting, putting it in their pocket, fiddling with it – GET RID OF IT! What are the invitations within the space? Are there invitations you didn’t realize you were sending? Get rid of the no-no’s!

A pondering: Please share an example of YOUR understanding of this concept of controlling the space vs. controlling the child.

Principle 5: FACILITATING

Consider the difference between being a facilitator vs. an instigator. How do we provide rich, deep, meaningful opportunities for investigation? We use observation, scaffolding, and provocations. This allows us to be more than, “the keeper of the keys.”

Question to ponder: How comfortable am I with the thought of children directing their own learning?

Principle 6: ARTICULATION/BEING INTENTIONAL

Teachers must be able to articulate the intention behind the choices they make in the classroom. They ask (and can answer!) three questions: WHAT am I doing? WHY am I doing it? And WHO am I doing it for? Their answers go beyond, “that’s how we’ve just always done it,” and deeper than, “because it’s so cute”.

A pondering: Think about an example of one of your personal “HAMS”.

Principle 7: THEORISTS

Teachers understand child development theory & know the history of their profession. They are aware of those who “paved the way” in our continual support of child-centered environments.

Question to ponder: Have you had an experience where a strategic name-drop assisted in a discussion with a colleague? Administrator? Parent?

Principle 8: KEEPING IT REAL

We celebrate where children are, *developmentally*, right now. Therefore, rooms are filled with relevant, meaningful experiences that engage all the senses. You will see children investigating real objects. Not coloring dittos of them. The activities provided will engage all the senses!

A pondering: Please share a success or challenge in regard to “keeping it real” in your classroom.

Principle 9: THE SEVEN THINGS

Children are provided time each day to: create, move, sing, discuss, observe, read and play. And it is believed that these seven things create the *foundation* that supports the *house* of academics.

How do these things link to DAP?

CREATE

Physical Development: Letter reversal is because they have not yet learned that print is not flexible. Writing, drawing, cutting = creative expression that is not fine-tuned yet. Clay, playdough, puzzles, collage & legos all contribute to fine motor development

Cognitive Development: Make believe pretend play leads to self-regulation skills

Language/Literacy: Self expression, communication with others, oral language (dress up), and early writing = scribbles

MOVE

Physical Development is one of the domains within DAP. Children should spend at least a quarter of their day in motion! Learning is transmitted through the large muscles – from the hands to the head, not the other way around. The YARD is seen as an ideal environment to be developing large motor skills. DAP specifically lists experiences that develop both FINE and LARGE motor muscles on pages 117-119.

SING

Social & Emotional Development: Rituals, welcoming songs, routines, reflection of home culture

Cognitive Development: Memory and recall, patterns and sequence

Language/Literacy Development: Songs and chants, finger plays, clapping out names (syllables)

DISCUSS

Social & Emotional Development: Positive social and emotional development provides an essential foundation for cognitive and academic competence. BAM! Social & Emotional Development must be seen as just as important as the other domains. They are all interrelated, it's impossible to build one up without impacting the other.

Social & Emotional Development: Friends/being with others and managing own emotions

Language/Literacy: Strengthening oral language and communication, offering new words

OBSERVE

Sensation and perceptions are under the Physical Development domain of DAP

TOUCH: All the sensory activities (ooblick, playdough, flubber, etc.)

TASTE: Children have more taste buds than adults! She might not necessarily be a “picky” eater, but rather super aware!

SEE: Children often have trouble switching between close and distant, still developing binocular vision (eyes working together)

HEAR: Hear patterns, rhyming, letter sounds, conversations, etc.

READ

Physical Development: Large print is often better

Language/Literacy: Kind of a no brainer! It has an entire domain dedicated to it!

Question to consider: As a KINDER teacher – what would you say is the strongest? weakest? part of the foundation of the majority of children who transition to you?

As a PRESCHOOL teacher, what are the parts you feel pressure to skip over or hurry through to get to the building of the house?



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