
DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE (DAP) – WHAT IS THE DEFINITION? AND HOW DO I USE DAP?

by Rick Roghair, Professional Development Manager

Early childhood professionals throughout Iowa – that’s you and me – recognize the need for developmentally appropriate learning for children from birth through age eight. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines DAP as an approach to teaching, grounded in research, on how young children develop and learn. More simply, DAP promotes each child’s peak learning and development.

DAP use materials, equipment, skills, and strategies necessary for quality early care, health, and learning settings. DAP includes positive relationships, meaningful experiences, play, and active hands-on use of materials to help children create their own understanding of the world. As adults, including family members, we pay close attention to each child's individual and social needs so we can adjust situations so each child is successful in her or his own way.

Do you know DAP serves as the foundation for the Iowa Early Learning Standards (IELS)? As we implement the IELS, it is critical to consider DAP to make decisions about children. The IELS define age-appropriate expectations to provide a framework when designing developmentally appropriate activities and lessons.

Effective and appropriate use of the IELS promotes good decisions about curriculum and assessment, and the thoughtful application of standards. Our goal is to align standards, curriculum, and assessment, as we remain sensitive to how children grow and develop in unique ways. As you and I implement the standards, we will appreciate the complexity of each child’s gradual acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Unique to all early learning standards is the impact of play for all young children. Play is important for the ideal development of every child. Initial and long-term benefits of play include development of self-control (self-regulation skills), language, reasoning, and social skills. Play is essential for children to develop healthy active brains, bodies, and relationships. Play is a natural method for children to learn about themselves and the world through self-created experiences and positive social interactions with other children and nurturing adults. Children need time, space, supportive adults, and open-ended materials to encourage creativity in safe, yet challenging environments. As a result, children develop confidence; ability to master their environment; deep-seated ties to and caring about others; and the ability to create environments of love, safety, security, and resilience. Play offers many opportunities to practice, to make mistakes, and to receive positive feedback when trying new things.

To explore the use of DAP, view these three short videos:

[Developmentally Appropriate Practice – ECE: Mrs. Candy Merritt](#)

[How to Help Teachers Understand DAP: Amanda Morgan](#)

[Preschool – Developmentally Appropriate Practice: ECETP](#) (fun, no words, play)

Additional NAEYC resources:

[Core Considerations in Developmentally Appropriate Practice](#)

[Infographic_DAP_5_guidelines](#)

[Infographic_DAP_10_teaching_strategies](#)

Next step: complete the IELS Orientation to understand how to use the IELS. Contact me with questions.