



Promoting excellence in early childhood education

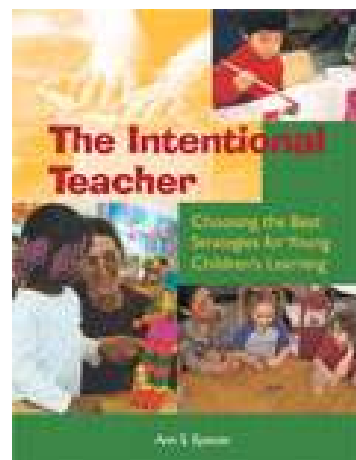
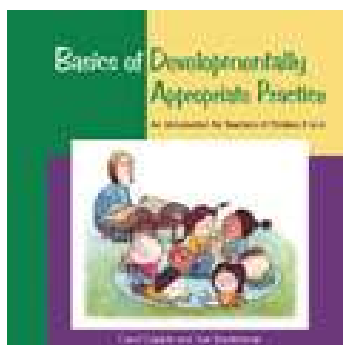
**naeyc**

National Association for the Education of Young Children

## ***Developmentally Appropriate Practice and Intentionality***

### **Online Professional Development Resource from NAEYC**

## **Handouts**



Includes excerpts from three NAEYC publications: *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, *Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, and *The Intentional Teacher*



## Guiding principles of intentional teaching

### **Intentional teachers support child-guided learning experiences when children . . .**

- are actively exploring materials, actions, and ideas and making connections on their own
- are establishing interpersonal relationships and learning from one another
- are turning to one another for assistance
- are considering and investigating their own questions about materials, events, and ideas
- appear motivated to solve problems on their own
- are so focused on their enterprise that adult intervention would be an interruption
- are challenging themselves and one another to master new skills
- are applying and extending existing knowledge and skills in new ways

Although these behaviors and attitudes signal to teachers that child-guided experience will be particularly fruitful, this does not exclude using other teacher strategies and planned activities. Even when teachers pick up on cues like these, they will likely want to make strategic use of adult-guided experience to optimize children's learning.

### **Intentional teachers employ adult-guided learning experiences when children . . .**

- have not encountered the material or experience at home or in other settings
- cannot create established systems of knowledge (such as letter names) on their own
- do not see, hear, or otherwise attend to something likely to interest them
- do not engage with something teachers know they will need for further learning
- explicitly ask for information or help are bored or distracted and need help focusing
- appear stalled, discouraged, or frustrated
- appear ready for the next level of mastery but are not likely to attain it on their own
- are not aware of the potentially unsafe or hurtful consequences of their actions
- appear to use materials or actions very repetitively over time
- are conscious of and upset about something they cannot yet do but wish to

For knowledgeable teachers, although these child behaviors and attitudes suggest that adult-guided learning experiences will benefit children, this does not mean that child-guided experience will not also be an important part of the full learning picture.

[From Epstein, Ann S. 2007. *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning*. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 129]

## Intentional use of formats

**Large groups.** Sometimes referred to as whole group, group meeting, or circle time, the large group is ideal for class discussions, making plans, and providing children with information and experiences the teacher wants to make sure *all* the children share. Ideas may be introduced or investigations launched in the large group and followed up in small groups. The large-group setting also offers opportunities for children to learn and practice skills such as talking to the group about their experiences, listening to their classmates, responding appropriately with questions or comments, working cooperatively, and using and processing new information.

There is no hard-and-fast rule as to the recommended duration of large-group meetings. To be part of a large group and to focus attention for periods of time are themselves learning goals that young children must practice. Keeping them in large groups only briefly early in the year is wise, then lengthening the duration as the year progresses. The most important principle is to read the children's cues and not keep going after they start to lose interest. If the children are getting restless, move to a lively ending to finish on a high note.

**Small groups.** Working with children in small groups greatly expands the teacher's opportunities to observe them and involve each child actively. Teachers often use this format for more focused experiences, perhaps introducing a new skill or concept or engaging children in working on a problem or applying a concept already introduced. Small groups may take place during the part of the day devoted to learning centers or at a separate period of the day.

Small groups vary in size, usually ranging from three to five children. The groups may be formed on the basis of a common interest or need or may simply be several children the teacher thinks would work well together. In a small-group setting, the teacher can give children more focused attention and provide support and challenges tailored to their individual levels. He can give clues, ask follow-up questions, and notice what every child is able to do and where each has difficulty. Giving children the opportunity to engage in conversations with peers and solve problems collaboratively is yet another major plus of small-group time. Finding ways to work with children in small groups is sometimes a challenge with a large class of children.

**Play and engagement in learning centers.** At the preschool and kindergarten levels, part of the classroom is typically divided into learning centers, or interest areas that offer children a range of options for engagement. Commonly found centers include blocks, dramatic play, library, art, and discovery/science; a teacher may also opt to use interest areas such as computers, writing, music and movement, and cooking. The play that takes place in these centers such as blocks and dramatic play is vital to children's learning and development. For each center, the teacher carefully selects materials and activities to support educational goals. She also makes a point of observing what children are doing in each center, in order to guide later planning.

An effective teacher also interacts with children frequently and purposefully during play and other center activities. She engages children in conversation, gives information or feedback, and models for children things they might do or say—using a new method with clay or paint in the art center, for example, or wondering, "Let's see, what on this menu looks good today?" in dramatic play.

**Daily routines.** Much valuable learning also occurs throughout the day in routines such as arrival, departure, room cleanup, hand washing, meals and snacks, and transitions. For example, in ending circle time, the teacher might have the children join in a song that plays

with and highlights the phonological features of language, such as rhyme, that they need to be familiar with in order to read. At snack time they might examine a message the teacher gives them in order to see how many crackers each child gets.

Skills practiced and applied during daily routines are often practical and functional, and thus especially meaningful for children. Mealtime and snack time and other routines are times when children talk to one another, and teachers have excellent opportunities to engage children in extended conversation.

[From Copple, C. and S. Bredekamp. 2005. *Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice: An Introduction to Teachers of Children 3 to 6*. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 38–39.]

### **Excellent teachers make purposeful use of various learning formats**

Besides choosing from a repertoire of teaching strategies and scaffolding children's learning, effective teachers are also intentional in using different learning venues or formats for different purposes. In most early childhood settings (for children 3 years of age and older), at least four learning formats occur: large groups, small groups, play/learning centers, and daily routines.

**Large groups (whole group, class meeting, or circle time).** One function of whole-group time is sharing experiences—singing together, welcoming a new classmate, contributing ideas for naming the class hamster, and the like. Further, large-group time gives children opportunities to practice skills such as talking to a group, listening to their classmates, responding appropriately with questions or comments, working cooperatively, and using and processing new information. These skills and times are increasingly important in the primary grades, and whole-group time is a great venue for young children to begin learning them. To a greater extent than is the case in preschool, kindergarten and primary teachers are able to make effective use of large-group time to introduce a concept or skill and then have children take it further, apply the new knowledge, or practice a new skill individually and in small groups.

As for the recommended duration of large-group meetings, there is no hard-and-fast rule. The most important principle is to be alert to the children's cues and not keep going after they start to lose interest. If the children are getting restless, they usually are not benefiting from the large-group activity at hand. Changing to a movement activity or transitioning to small groups or centers will finish the large-group time on a high note.

**Small groups.** Working with three to six children in a group enables teachers to offer more focused experiences, perhaps introducing a new skill or concept, engaging children in solving a problem, or applying a concept already introduced. In a small-group setting, the teacher can give each child more attention and can provide support and challenges tailored to children's individual levels. He can give support, ask follow-up questions, and notice what every child is able to do and where each has difficulty. Giving children opportunities to engage in conversations with peers and solve problems collaboratively is another major benefit of the small-group experience. Small-group interactive book reading, for example, has been found to be very effective in promoting vocabulary learning among children from low-income families and children who are English language learners.

In preschool, small groups tend to take place during the part of the day devoted to learning centers. In a two-teacher classroom, some children might work in a small group with one of the adults while the other children are engaged in the centers, where the second adult monitors

and supports their activities. In the primary grades, teachers might work with children in a small group while the others write in journals or read silently or in pairs.

**Play/learning centers.** In preschool and kindergarten (and to some extent, in first and second grade), part of the classroom is often divided into learning centers, or interest areas, that offer children a range of options for engagement. Teachers establish centers for blocks, dramatic play, art, and books. There are also places—sometimes set up as separate centers, sometimes not—where children can find math manipulatives and games, science materials (which may include a sand and/or water area), writing supplies, and a computer or two.

Vital to young children's learning and development is having significant periods of time in which they choose what they want to do and, together with other children, direct their own activities. Such times, which include outdoor play as well as "choice time" in the classroom interest areas, require a degree of teacher support and involvement to be of optimal value to children. Teachers' thoughtful planning of the materials and activities to support educational goals in each center is essential. And observing children during this time guides teachers in their on-the-spot interactions with children and in their subsequent planning. As children involve themselves in the various activities, the teacher talks with them, gives them information or feedback, and extends their thinking and engagement. Children largely direct their play along the lines of their ideas and interests, with teachers getting involved at times to provide support and interact with them.

**Routines of the day.** Many valuable learning opportunities occur in daily routines such as arrival and departure, cleanup, hand washing, meals and snacks, and transitions. For infants and toddlers, there are also diapering, feeding, napping, and dressing. In all these routines, the excellent teacher interacts with children, from imitating an infant's vocalizations while diapering her to chatting with children over lunch about what they did in the weekend snowfall. During a transition, the teacher may choose to sing a song with funny rhymes that promotes phonological awareness. And later she may ask the snack helper, "How many crackers will we need so that each person can have two?" When children apply and practice new skills during such routines, the skills become meaningful to them.

[From Copple, C. and S. Bredekamp, eds. 2009. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, 3d ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 39–41.]

## Intentionality in using a range of teaching strategies

An effective teacher makes use of the strategy that fits a particular situation and the purpose or purposes she has in mind. She considers what the child or children already know and can do and the learning goals for the specific situation. Often she may try one strategy, see that it doesn't work, and then try something else. She has a variety of strategies at the ready and remains flexible and observant so that she can determine which to use. Here are some of the strategies excellent teachers have at their disposal:

- Teachers **acknowledge** what children do or say. They let children know that they have noticed by giving children positive attention, sometimes through comments, sometimes through just sitting nearby and observing (*"Thanks for your help, Kavi," "You found another way to show 5"*).
- Teachers **encourage** persistence and effort rather than just praising and evaluating what the child has done (*"You're thinking of lots of words to describe the dog in the story—let's keep going!"*).
- Teachers **give specific feedback** rather than general comments (*"The beanbag didn't get all the way to the hoop, James, so you might try throwing it harder"*).
- Teachers **model** attitudes, ways of approaching problems, and behavior toward others, showing children rather than just telling them (*"Hmm, that didn't work and I need to think about why," "I'm sorry, Ben, I missed part of what you said. Please tell me again"*).
- Teachers **demonstrate** when they show the correct way to do something. This usually applies to a procedure that needs to be done in a certain way (e.g., using a wire whisk, writing a letter P).
- Teachers **create or add challenge** so that a task goes a bit beyond what the children can already do. (For example, when the teacher removes several chips from a set, asks how many are left, and finds the children can count the remaining chips accurately, he may then add difficulty by *hiding* the remaining chips. Figuring out how many are left just from knowing the number that were removed is more challenging.) In other cases, teachers **reduce challenge** to meet children where they are (e.g., by simplifying the task).
- Teachers **ask questions** that provoke children's thinking (*"If you couldn't talk to your partner, how else could you let him know what to do?"*).
- Teachers **give assistance** (e.g., a cue or hint) to help children work on the edge of their current competence (*"Can you think of a word that rhymes with your name, Matt? How about bat . . . Matt/bat? What else rhymes with Matt and bat?"*).

- Teachers **provide information**, directly giving children facts, verbal labels, and other information (“*This one that looks like a big mouse with a short tail is called a vole*”).
- Teachers **give directions** for children’s action or behavior (“*Touch each block only once as you count them,*” “*You want to move that icon over here? Okay, click on it and keep holding down, then drag the icon to wherever you want!*”).

Some of these strategies involve less action and direction on the part of the adult and more on the part of the child; in others, the adult is more proactive or directive. Both kinds of strategies may be used in any context. The classroom example below illustrates how a teacher makes use of various strategies, first to extend children’s play and then following up on their play interests to promote literacy learning.

Marica teaches 4-year-olds in a Head Start program. Early in the year, she observes that although the children like to play in the house area, they do little more than pile the dishes on the table, dump them in the sink, or open and close cupboards. Their play lacks focus and conversation, and it often breaks down into arguments. She wants to introduce other possibilities and help the children learn to play at a higher level.

One day when Ashley, Elizabeth, and Josue are in the house area, Marica joins their play. Choosing a theme that she knows these three children have experienced—birthdays—she enters the area and **models** the role of the birthday person. “Hi, I’m planning to have a party for my birthday. Can you help me?” When she **asks a question**, “What will we need for my party?” the children respond, “A cake!” “We’ll need balloons!” “Presents!”

Marica brings the shopping cart over and the children seize on it, pushing it around the room and pretending to find various party items. Marica steps back while the children are immersed in playing that they are shopping. When this winds down, she asks, “Whom shall we invite to the party?” The children start shouting out names, and Marica says, “I can’t remember all those names. We need to make a list.” She **creates a challenge**—one she knows will vary for each individual child—by asking, “Who can write their name on the list?”

Paper for the list is found, and the children begin to take turns “writing” their name or the name of a friend. For Elizabeth, Marica **gives assistance** in the form of a name card the child can copy. For Ashley, she **demonstrates** how to make the first letter of her name. For Josue, who can write at least some letters of his name on his own, she **adds more challenge**. “What comes after your J?” she asks Josue. “What letter do you think your friend Dariska’s name starts with?” As the children write, Marica **acknowledges** and **encourages** their efforts. “You made an N, like in your last name, Nuncio,” she tells Josue. “I know you’ve been practicing writing that letter every day.” When she sees that two children are ready to go further with the spelling of their names, Marica **provides information**, telling them what the next letter in each name is and how it is made.

Although play is inherently an open-ended and child-guided activity, the teacher may directly provide information, create challenges, supply vocabulary, and otherwise enhance what children gain in the play setting. Likewise, in a planned small or large group, the teacher may ask questions and use other techniques to engage the children in problem solving or generating ideas. All these strategies are also effective in teaching children with disabilities and other special needs. However, teachers may use more systematic instruction to help children acquire a skill or change an unacceptable behavior. For example, when working with children with challenging behaviors, an effective strategy is for teachers to identify the conditions that tend to

propel the behavior and the consequences that usually follow. Then, teachers can anticipate and work to prevent problem behavior, as well as make sure that the negative behavior does not achieve its goal—as when hitting makes another child give up a toy. At the same time, teachers can “catch them doing something right,” giving such children positive attention and encouragement for desired behaviors when they occur.

[From Copple, C. and S. Bredekamp, eds. 2009. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, 3d ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 36–38.]





## Scaffolding children's learning

Developmentally appropriate goals are both challenging and achievable. The most effective learning experiences build on what children already know and can do, but also make them stretch a reasonable amount toward what the children don't yet know or cannot yet do. But learners cannot spend all their time stretched "on their tiptoes." They also need plenty of opportunity to practice the skills they are in the process of acquiring. They need to feel solid mastery and a sense of being successful, of the goal having been achieved, not just rushed on to the next challenge. Once children have mastered a skill or concept, they are ready for the next stretch.

Then, as a child begins a new challenge, he may need some support from the teacher to enable him to manage it. At the same time, a skilled teacher doesn't overdo the help. The aim is to provide the least amount of support that the child needs to do something he cannot quite do on his own. For example, if the goal is to walk a balance beam, a good teacher might stand beside the child as he walks the beam, so that he can put his hand on the teacher's arm as needed to keep from falling. If, instead, the teacher held the boy's hand throughout, he would be less likely to learn to balance on his own.

As the child begins to master the new skill or acquire the new understanding, the teacher gradually reduces the support provided. Soon the child who has been receiving assistance will be able to handle the skill or task without support. Because the teacher provides the support only as long as it is needed, providing support in this way is called scaffolding—like the temporary structures that builders or painters stand on to get to spots high up on a house they couldn't otherwise reach.

Teachers use scaffolding to help children make progress in all areas of learning and development throughout the day. The scaffolding can take many forms; for example, the teacher could

- ask a question or give another sort of hint to alert the child to some aspect of the task that has been missed (e.g., "Are you going to keep the big and little spoons together, or put them in separate piles?");
- add cues in a different form (e.g., provide a picture or diagram along with text to help children read a message);
- pair the child with another child who has complementary strengths— they will be able to do things together that neither initially could do alone; or
- use software that gears the cues and prompts to the individual child's needs (depending on his performance) and thus allows children to be as independent as possible and yet as "assisted" as needed.

[From Copple, C. and S. Bredekamp. 2005. *Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice: An Introduction to Teachers of Children 3 to 6*. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 35–36.]

Developmentally appropriate goals are *both* challenging *and* achievable. The most effective learning experiences build on what children already know and can do, but also encourage them to stretch a reasonable amount toward a new level of achievement.

Of course, learners cannot spend all their time “on their tiptoes.” They also need plenty of opportunity to practice the skills they have just begun acquiring. They need to feel solid mastery and a sense of being successful, of the goal having been achieved, rather than always feeling rushed on to the next challenge. Young children will often practice newly acquired or developing skills during their play, as when a toddler repeatedly fills and dumps a bucket of toys, or when a preschooler continually counts every peg or every block in a tall tower. Once children have mastered a new skill or concept, they are ready for the next stretch.

As a child begins a new challenge, he may need some support from the teacher to enable him to manage it. A skilled teacher doesn’t overdo the help. The aim is to provide the least amount of support that the child needs to do something he cannot quite do on his own. For example, if the goal is to walk a balance beam, the teacher might stand beside the child as he walks the beam, so that he can put his hand on the adult’s arm as needed to keep from falling. If, instead, the teacher held the boy’s hand throughout, whether he was unsteady or not, he would be less likely to learn to balance on his own.

As the child begins to acquire the new skill or understanding, the teacher gradually reduces her support. Soon the child who has been receiving assistance will be able to handle the skill or task independently. Because the teacher provides support only as long as it is needed, what she does is called *scaffolding*—like the platforms painters stand on to reach spots high up on a house they couldn’t otherwise reach and then take away when the job is done. For example, for a child who is usually rejected by the other children, a teacher may at first directly coach her in how to successfully enter play (“*Try saying, ‘I could be the customer in your grocery store.’*”). If the child’s overtures are successful, her new behavior is encouraged by the other children’s responses, and the teacher can withdraw.

Excellent teachers use scaffolding to help children progress in all areas of learning and development throughout the day. And their scaffolding can take many forms. They might ask a question, point out a discrepancy, give a hint about an aspect of the problem or task that the child has missed, add a cue or support such as a picture or diagram, take the child’s hand, or pair the child with a peer so that the two can be successful with their combined strengths.

[From Copple, C. and S. Bredekamp, eds. 2009. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, 3d ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 38–39]

## To be an excellent teacher means being intentional



Whenever you see a great classroom, one in which children are learning and thriving, you can be sure that the teachers (and the administrators who support them) are highly intentional. In everything that good teachers do—creating the environment, considering the curriculum and tailoring it to the children as individuals, planning learning experiences, and interacting with children and families—they are purposeful and thoughtful. As they make myriad decisions, big and small, they keep in mind the outcomes they seek. Even in responding to unexpected opportunities—“teachable moments”—intentional teachers are guided by the outcomes the program is trying to help children reach and by their knowledge of child development and learning.

Having a clear sense of how all aspects of the program relate to and promote the desired goals contributes to an intentional teacher’s effectiveness. Learning goals are usually identified for groups of children within a given age span. But teachers must determine where each child is in relation to a goal and adjust their teaching accordingly. For example, some children from poverty backgrounds are behind what is typical for other children in their age group in such areas as vocabulary, math and literacy learning, and self-regulation. For these children, excellent teachers, schools, and programs provide more extended, enriched, and intensive learning opportunities—such as more small-group activities and one-on-one interaction—to accelerate their learning and help them to catch up.

Similarly, in serving children with disabilities and other special needs, teachers’ attention to individual variation is essential. In addition to age-appropriate goals, an individualized plan for such a child will identify individually appropriate goals, which teachers implement in conjunction with families and specialists. In many cases, the plan necessitates more systematic, intentional teaching for the child to function and learn well in an inclusive setting.

Having their objectives and plans in mind, intentional teachers are well prepared to tell others—parents, administrators, colleagues—about what they are doing. Not only do they know what to do, they also know *why* they are doing it and can describe their purposes.

[From Copple, C. and S. Bredekamp, eds. 2009. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, 3d ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 33–34]



## Both/And Thinking in Early Childhood Practice

One of the most well received and oft-quoted sections of NAEYC's 1996 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice was its challenge to the field to move from *either/or* to *both/and* thinking. The call was in response to a recurring tendency in the American discourse on education: the polarizing into *either/or* choices on many questions that were more fruitfully seen as *both/ands*.

Some of that polarizing continues today. For example, regardless of the subject area, heated debates continue about whether children benefit more from *either* direct instruction *or* child-guided activity. In reality, each approach works best for different kinds of learning, and elements of both can be combined effectively. In studying science, for example, the teacher in one kindergarten classroom may give a 20-minute lecture, while in another classroom children might be given materials and left to explore entirely on their own—neither approach is likely to be effective by itself. A more effective course would be to draw on *both* approaches, with children conducting hands-on experiments guided by teachers who provide clear explanations of concepts and introduce scientific language.

In the process of updating the position statement, it became evident that many in the early childhood field have moved toward valuing the *both/and* way of thinking. However, a new worry arises: that sometimes *both/and* thinking may be applied quite superficially as just a “pinch of this and a dash of that.” Most questions about what is and is not developmentally appropriate practice require more nuanced and evidence-based responses.

The following statements are offered as a few examples of the many ways that early childhood practice draws on *both/and* thinking and conveys some of the complexity and interrelationship among the principles that guide our practice.

- Teachers *both* need to have high expectations for all children's learning *and* need to recognize that some children require additional assistance and resources to meet those expectations.
- Children *both* construct their own understanding of concepts *and* benefit from instruction by more competent peers and adults.
- Children benefit *both* from engaging in self-initiated, spontaneous play *and* from teacher-planned and -structured activities, projects, and experiences.
- Children benefit from *both* opportunities to see connections across disciplines through integration of curriculum *and* opportunities to engage in focused, in-depth study in a content area.
- Children benefit *both* from predictable structure and orderly routine in the learning environment *and* from the teacher's flexibility and responsiveness to children's emerging ideas, needs, and interests.
- Children benefit *both* from opportunities to make meaningful choices *and* from having a clear understanding of the boundaries within which choices are permissible.

- Children benefit *both* from situations that challenge them to work at the edge of their developing capacities *and* from ample opportunities to practice newly acquired skills.
- Children benefit *both* from opportunities to collaborate with peers and acquire a sense of being part of a community *and* from being treated as individuals with their own strengths, interests, and needs.
- Children need to develop *both* a positive sense of their own self-identity *and* respect for other people whose perspectives and experiences may be different from their own.
- Children *both* have enormous capacities to learn and almost boundless curiosity about the world *and* have recognized, age-related limits on their cognitive and linguistic capacities.
- Children who are English language learners *both* need to acquire proficiency in English *and* need to maintain and further develop their home language.
- Teachers must commit themselves *both* to closing the achievement gap that exists between children of various socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic groups *and* to viewing every child as capable of achieving.

[From Copple, C. and S. Bredekamp. 2009. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, 3d ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 49.]