

53 - Developmentally Appropriate Practices

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to try.

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We are so excited today because we have a colleague and friend with us. Dr. Frank Guevara is an assistant professor in the AA Early Childhood Education program at the University of Arizona Global Campus.

Prior to teaching in education, he served as a center director for programs in Colorado, North Carolina, Texas, and California in a variety of different roles and contexts, such as school districts, Department of Defense, healthcare, and non-profits. On a personal note, Frank and his wife are former foster parents having adopted many children from traumatic backgrounds. Frank, today you are here to talk to us about the National Association for the Education of Young Children, some may say NAEYC, and their updated developmentally appropriate practices and their core considerations.

So, so much in one, but Frank, why is this important to you?

Dr. Frank Guevara Speaker: Well, thank you so much for having me today. And as I look at the early childhood field, DAP, or developmentally appropriate practices, is really our measure tool for deciding what are appropriate activities, expectations, materials, and the way that we interact with the children around us. And having been in the field for a couple of decades, both as a classroom teacher and then moving into administration and doing teacher education, I have consistently been approached by teachers who have questions that are very real and valid to their work.

They'll ask me things like, is it okay to have a 30-minute circle time? Are doing worksheets developmentally appropriate? That's not right. Or can toddlers and infants play on the same playground or be on the playground at the same time?

And the wonderful thing about our professional organization, NAEYC, is that they have given us this incredible resource, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, or DAP, to help us discern those answers to these very pressing questions. Now, NAEYC defines developmentally appropriate practice as the methods that promote each child's optimal development, and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning.

But it's not a tool that says, from a black and white perspective, yes or no to the question that teachers ask. So, when we ask the question, is it okay to have a 30-minute circle time, there's not an immediate yes or no response to that. DAP requires educators to seek out and gain knowledge and understanding using what NAEYC has defined as three core considerations.

The first of those is the new terminology they're using is commonality. What does the current research, and our understanding of how children develop and how they learn, what does all of that information tell us about what might

be an appropriate expectation, appropriate material, or appropriate way to interact with a child? So, let me give you an example: typically, a four-month-old child is not able to sit by themselves.

So, it would not be developmentally appropriate if I were to try to make them sit on their own or have that expectation that they sit on their own on the carpet and play with materials.

Because how children's bodies develop at four-month-old, they're still gaining that core strength, lifting their head, learning how to roll over. And in a few months' time, we might see them sitting up without support.

But for most children, based on our understanding of physical development and the milestones, at four months old, that would be an inappropriate expectation. And so, as we think about this factor of commonality, it's very important for educators to have a very firm foundation into the ages and stages or what some people might call typical milestones for each age group. And there are a lot of different wonderful resources out there.

The CDC has a tool called *Watch Me Grow* that provides milestones for the different domains, cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical. And each state has developed early learning guidelines, and many curricula have guidelines based on expectations grounded in research that can inform, an educator making a decision on this first core consideration, whether a practice, a material, or an interaction would be appropriate for children. Let me give you another example.

When I was director of an infant-toddler program that served children from six weeks to three years old, I recognized that for most children at 10 months old, we have a peak in stranger anxiety in Western cultures. And that would make it very difficult, for a child to start daycare because they would have that hesitation to trust the new teachers that they're being introduced to.

And so, using that knowledge of child development, when I was the director, I made it a policy to say, typically for 10-month-old children, we won't enroll them at that age.

We'll encourage families to enroll earlier or a couple of months later so that we don't add an undue stress to the child because of what we understand in terms of their social and emotional development. It's not fair to the child to add that extra burden of trying to create a relationship with the teacher if we already know, that stranger anxiety is at its peak in that window of time and their development. Another example is toddlers and two-year-old children who are still learning language.

They are still overall kind of self-centered. We call it egocentric. And they think, well, if this toy is sitting here and I pick it up, it is now my toy and I'm going to use it.

And I've seen some teachers who have an unrealistic expectation that toddlers have to share. Because from the teacher's perspective, they recognize that sharing is an important lesson, which it is. But if we go back to what our research has told us about children in that age range, it is very hard for a two-year-old child to understand that social compromise of sharing. They are much more apt to hold on to that toy if one of their peers comes and tries to take it away from them.

So that's the first element of DAP, is going back to our foundational knowledge of how children grow and develop, and using that to make informed decisions about what might be appropriate for children in that general age range, that general developmental level.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, Dr. Guevara, great examples, great ideas. When I was teaching, I constantly, it was a green book back then, grabbed my NAEYC book, looked up the developmentally appropriate practice.

How was I going to differentiate constantly? I mean, I wanted to make sure I was doing it right because I think other things can be overlooked, like standards and objectives, and what we need to be doing, and what's being forced upon us, when we really need to be going back to these developmentally appropriate practices.

So, we have a lot of teachers that are listeners. We have families.

How can we share with them what the first steps are into incorporating some developmentally appropriate practice, and know and trust your gut that you're doing the right thing? And this is at home and at school.

Dr. Frank Guevara Speaker: That's a great question. And Tisha, I was the same way.

That green book was the standard as we were coming up in our education. And now it's a blue book.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Okay, blue.

Dr. Frank Guevara Speaker: Beyond the look of that, yes, it's the fourth edition. And you made a very interesting point, is that we have general standards based on how children go and develop. But then you also talked about differentiating your instruction or your materials or your expectations.

And so, my first piece of advice is to make sure that you understand, okay, what are the milestones and developmental steps that a child in this age group, this developmental level, because we know that it's flexible. Just because a child turns 12 months doesn't mean that they're automatically going to be on a different level. We have to consider it as a spectrum.

But as you mentioned that individuality and that differentiation, that's the second core consideration that DAP presents to us is that individuality. So, we have to take into consideration the characteristics and experiences that are unique to each child and within the context of their family and their community. So, here's a great example.

When I was managing a program in North Carolina, we had a family whose child was born extremely premature. And so, because of that life experience, her development was significantly delayed. And like most programs, children are assigned to classrooms based on their age.

So, you might have an infant classroom, zero to 12 months, then a toddler classroom, one year old to two-year-old, a twos classroom, and then your pre-K classrooms. Well, this child, because of that developmental delay, it didn't make sense for her to move up out of the infant classroom at 12 months, because she hadn't developed the requisite skills, capacity to be successful in a toddler classroom yet. So, we held her back another six months, until she had gained that set of developmental skills and abilities and competencies to be able to move into a toddler classroom.

By 12 months, she wasn't walking yet. She was barely crawling. But when we gave her that extra bit of time, then she had the locomotion abilities to be able to enjoy, and participate and take advantage of a toddler classroom.

And even then, she stayed in that toddler classroom until she was three, not two, like her typically developing peers. Because again, we recognize that for this child, they needed some extra time to be in a more secure, safe environment than what would be expected in the next classroom. I also had a child who was extremely shy.

And there were some home issues going on, but this child gravitated towards these set of elephant figures, that we had in the classroom. And all day long, this child just played with the elephants, took the elephants from blocks to dramatic play, outside, everywhere. And for whatever reason, they needed those elephants to feel secure.

Now, some teachers might say, well, this child needs to let go of the elephants and go play in the other materials, and let other children have an opportunity to play with those elephants. But the amazing thing was that their peers recognized and saw this child's innate need for that security and comfort, in having those elephants. And if ever an elephant was found elsewhere, his peers would take that elephant to him because they recognized, yeah, you need these elephants right now.

They make you secure. They make you feel safe. And that's what you need.

And that's that level of individualization and differentiation that we also need to take into account, as we're making decisions about DAP. So, we have our knowledge of what's typical in terms of age ranges, but then we have to look at

the individual child as well. As a complete opposite example, let's think about a child like Mozart, who was composing music at five years old.

So, for most five-year-olds, you know, spending five to six hours playing the piano would probably not be developmentally appropriate. But for a prodigy like Mozart, yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And so, we have to adapt our teaching strategies based on what are the needs, what are the skills, what are the abilities of this one particular child that's part of my entire classroom.

And we do that for every child that's in our program.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Frank, you're really speaking to how we can make the most difference for our children. Meeting where they're at, and providing them with an adequate level of support, is really going to create the most optimal growth for them.

That's just great. Frank, as we wrap up, do you have anything else that you want to tell us about this new version? We are going to go check it out, that blue book. Or three takeaways you want to leave us with.

Dr. Frank Guevara Speaker: Sure, let me just talk really briefly about the third consideration, and it's tied into the first two. Is that context is everything. So, the social context, the community that you live in, what part of the world you're in, the socioeconomic status, the race, the culture, the language, all of those pieces play a role as well. And it was shocking to me when I worked at Telluride Early Childhood Program, which is up in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, that the preschool children there had ski school.

And so, one day out of the week, we would file into the hallway, put up all our snow clothes and snow boots, and skiing boots, and we would ride the gondola up the mountain, and these preschoolers would have about an hour and a half to two hours of ski instruction. And so that context in a ski town, made a lot of sense for that decision. We wouldn't expect that in the middle of New York City or down in South Texas because there's no snow there.

But context makes a huge difference, and we have to keep that in mind as well. The last piece that I want to share with you is to remember that DAP is a fluid concept that's going to change, depending on the developmental level, the child that I'm thinking about, the specific context that they're growing in. And one of the key takeaways that I learned when I was watching some of the webinars from NAEYC is to keep in mind that no practice is always developmentally appropriate.

To determine whether something's developmentally appropriate, we always have to come back to these three considerations. What do we understand about how children grow and develop? What makes sense for this particular child and their abilities and skills? And what makes sense in the larger context that I'm teaching in?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Those are spot on. This helps so much new teachers, veteran teachers, even families at home.

So, Frank, thank you so much for being with us today. We appreciate all of this wonderful information and these updates.

Dr. Frank Guevara Speaker: It's been my pleasure.

Thank you so much.