SEVENTH EDITION

# DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM

## BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

MARJORIE J. KOSTELNIK | ANNE K. SODERMAN
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# Preface

*"I touch the future. I teach."*
—Christa McAuliffe

- *What are developmentally appropriate practices, and how effective are they?*
- *How can you create the best programs for young children?*
- *As an early childhood educator, what is your role in shaping children's educational experiences? What is the child's role? What is the role of the family and community?*
- *How can you know if children are actually learning?*

Questions such as these are typically asked by early childhood professionals-in-training as well as by seasoned practitioners in the field. Our work with students and increasing numbers of educators probing for answers indicated the need for a comprehensive guide to support the exploration, planning, and implementation of developmentally appropriate programs for young children. Thus, our goal in writing *Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education* is to bring together the best information currently available for developing an integrated approach to curriculum and instruction in the early years. We also hope to bridge the worlds of childcare and early education, as well as those of preprimary and primary programs. This book addresses *early childhood professionals-in-training and professionals working in formal group settings with young children from 3 to 8 years old*. We realize that early childhood spans birth to age 8 years; however, we see infancy and toddlerhood as unique ages within this period, requiring specialized knowledge beyond the scope of this text. For this reason, we do not focus on infants or toddlers in our discussions.

We believe the information in this book will be *valuable to both newcomers to the field and to master practitioners*. The ideas in this text have been extensively field tested and found to be effective. All are designed to give you a cohesive view of the *what, why, and how of developmentally appropriate practices*.

Finally, we have had many years of working directly with young children and their families and with educators in preprimary and primary settings. We have participated in urban, suburban, and rural programs; large, medium, and small classes; public, private, not-for-profit, and profit-seeking organizations; half- and full-day programs; preschool classes; and the elementary grades. We have sought out experiences with diverse populations, with children who speak a language other than English as their home language, and with children who have special needs.

## New to This Edition

- A list at the beginning of each chapter that shows how chapter content aligns with *NAEYC Early Childhood Standards for Professional Preparation Programs*. This helps students familiarize themselves with the standards and connect those standards to the book's contents and to classroom practice.
- Notetaking, notemaking by instructors, highlighting, bookmarking, and other useful functions.

In addition, there are some significant content changes to the seventh edition:

- Expanded and more thorough coverage of STEM skills appears in Chapter 11 especially, as well as in other chapters. Our focus is on addressing STEM in the early years by integrating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics concepts and activities throughout the curriculum.
- A wider range of state early learning standards have been incorporated as examples throughout the text
- References have been significantly updated, with more than 300 new citations appearing throughout the text.

## Our Distinctive Approach

Among the popular elements we maintained from previous editions are a focus on developmental domains, a robust research basis for the information provided, and a strong emphasis on practical classroom strategies. This is very much a "how-to" book. The curriculum chapters include rationales and sample teaching strategies specific to each domain, objectives, and illustrative activities. Examples featuring children, families, and professionals from a variety of backgrounds, with a special focus on children with special needs, continue to be a feature of the chapters that compose the book.

*Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education* offers a distinctive approach that increases reader understanding and skill development.

- We treat curriculum as everything that happens to children in early childhood settings. Therefore, the text addresses all aspects of classroom life, including children and adults, the physical and social environments, and teaching and learning from a "whole child" perspective.
- The concept of developmentally appropriate practices is pervasive throughout the text. Each chapter addresses principles of age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and sociocultural appropriateness. All of the DAP material incorporates the latest version of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood (NAEYC, 2009).
- This book spans the early childhood years from 3 to 8. It provides a comprehensive, cohesive approach that results in greater continuity for children and practitioners.
- Each chapter progresses clearly from theory and research to practice. There is a strong emphasis on the *what*, *why*, and *how* of teaching.
- We use developmental domains to address early childhood curriculum. Doing so helps practitioners better understand the link between development and learning and program implementation.
- National and state standards for learning serve as the basis for curricular goals.
- Detailed directions facilitate the application of developmentally appropriate teaching strategies in relation to the content of each curriculum chapter.
- Every curriculum chapter includes sample activities.
- The text addresses individual curricular domains as well as curriculum integration.
- Readers learn a comprehensive approach to conceptualizing, planning, implementing, and evaluating curriculum within individual domains and overall (see Chapter 16).

# Format and Chapter Sequence

*Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education* has an Introduction and four parts. The Introduction offers an overview of early childhood education today. Part 1, Foundations of Early Childhood Education, consists of Chapters 1 and 2, which address the philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice. Characteristics of the field, the knowledge base associated with developmentally appropriate practice, and critical issues in early childhood education are all outlined in Part 1. Setting the stage for learning is the focus of Part 2, Chapters 3 through 8. In these chapters, we describe the overall understandings and skills necessary to create effective programs for young children. We begin with planning, implementing, and organizing small-group, then whole-group, activities. Organizing the physical space and selecting and storing materials used in the classroom are combined in structuring learning centers. Child guidance, authentic assessment, and family involvement are treated as fundamental building blocks of effective teaching, with individual chapters devoted to each of these topics. In Part 3, Chapters 9 through 14, the curriculum is explained within the context of six developmental domains: aesthetic, affective, cognitive, language, physical, and social. Each of the domain chapters has a discussion of theory, research, and educational issues related to children's development and learning in that particular arena, a suggested outline of goals and objectives, teaching strategies that characterize the domain, and examples of classroom activities. The curriculum domains are presented in alphabetical order to underscore the idea that no one domain is more important than any of the others. The last section of the book is Part 4, Integrating Curriculum. This part includes Chapters 15 and 16, both focused on creating a cohesive whole. First, we consider the integrative nature of pretend play and construction and, second, we consider the integrative aspects of using projects and theme teaching.

# Text Features

The seventh edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education* includes numerous features designed to pique reader interest in the material and provide a framework upon which to reflect on and apply the chapter content. Here are a few things to look for:

## A modular chapter organization built around critical learning outcomes and aligned to professional standards

- Chapter-opening learning outcomes align with the major text sections of the chapter.

**Learning Outcomes**

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe how affective development occurs in young children.
- Discuss conditions under which children cope with stress and develop resilience.
- Accommodate differences in children's development, needs, and abilities.
- Implement developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction in the affective domain.

**NAEYC Standards and Key Elements Addressed in This Chapter**

Standard 1c: Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments

Standard 4a: Understanding positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation of their work with children

Standard 4d: Reflection on own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child

## Concrete examples bring developmentally appropriate practices to life

- Chapter-opening scenario examples engage readers and set the stage for the chapter.
- Activity suggestions in a variety of instructional approaches—Exploratory Play, Guided Discovery, Problem Solving, Discussion, Demonstration, and Direct Instruction—provide students with high-quality learning activity models to try out with children and learn from.

### ▶ Problem-Solving Activity

***What's the Question? (For Children of All Ages)***

*Goal 30* ▶ Write original stories, poems, and informational pieces.

*Materials* ▶ Journals, markers, pencils, easel, easel paper

*Procedure* ▶ After reading or telling a story, stimulate the children to imagine what something looks like that cannot be seen, such as a leprechaun. Have them take out their journals and draw a picture of the thing on the left-hand page of the journal. Afterward, have younger children dictate a question they have (e.g., "How big is the leprechaun?" "Where does he live?"); older children can write a question they would like to ask. Tell the children to leave their journals open to that page, and sometime after they leave the classroom and before they return the next morning, an answer appears on the right-hand page of the journal. Although children know that the teacher is providing the answer, they love the fun of imagining that the answer has come from the leprechaun. Some teachers add to the fun by making small footprints across the page to accompany the answer.

*To Simplify* ▶ Children at the prewriting stage may act as a group to dictate some of their questions, which you write on the left-hand side of a piece of easel paper. That evening, the questions are answered on the right-hand side. The next day, in large group, ask the children to help you read each question and answer.

*To Extend* ▶ Challenge the children to illustrate and write to other imaginary or mythical characters (e.g., unicorn, fairy, or man in the moon) or real objects that are difficult to see (e.g., germs or a mouse that hides). When answering the question they have written, add a question they must answer in turn.

## Features help readers assess and apply their understanding

*Technology Toolkit* features provide concrete ideas for how to use new technology to support developmentally appropriate practice, for example, how to use Skype to connect children with guest speakers and other children around the world (see Chapter 14).

**Technology Toolkit: Using Projectors to Support Learning**

A topic of interest to children can be enhanced by projecting photographs or video clips regarding the subject onto a large screen. This allows everyone in the group to view the material at the same time. Children can be encouraged to describe what they see and identify what they would like to learn about the topic. This discussion can help the teacher decide how to best support children's investigation of the topic. Projecting images on a large screen also enhances the social nature of the experience as children share in the energy and excitement of the topic together. As children share their observations and knowledge with one another they also learn that their peers can be a source of answers for their questions (Puerling, 2012).

- *DAP: Making Goals Fit* features illustrate how to implement goals for children of different age ranges or abilities while keeping in mind the individual needs and the sociocultural background of the children.
- *Inclusion* features demonstrate the actions early childhood educators take to successfully include specific students and meet their goals.

**Inclusion ▸ Adapting Science Inquiry for Children with Special Needs**

Every child deserves to have the joy of acting on their curiosity about phenomena in their world, including children with special needs. For children who face greater challenges in exploring materials and the environment or conducting investigations, make use of volunteers or other professionals who can maximize potential. Put yourself in the situation from the child's perspective to think about what accommodations can help a child cope with the difficulties caused by the disabling condition. For example, while the child in a wheelchair may be mobile, he or she is hampered if the aisles in your classroom are too narrow to move easily from place to place.

Refer also to the Center for Multisensory Learning, Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley, California, 94720 and the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) for ideas to provide more satisfying experiences (Harlan & Rivkin, 2012).

- Chapter-ending *Applying What You've Read* sections provide readers the opportunity to extend their understanding of chapter content to their professional lives. Every chapter ends with discussion questions, potential observations to make in early childhood settings to help readers recognize developmentally appropriate

practices in action, application activities, guidelines for journal entries, suggested items to add to a portfolio, and finally, activities to help readers explore standards for learning that are most relevant to them and the children in their charge.

# Supplementary Materials for Instructors

The following resources are available for instructors to download at www.pearsonhighered.com/ educators. Instructors enter the author or title of this book, select this particular edition of the book, and then click on the "Resources" tab to log in and download textbook supplements.

## Instructor's Resource Manual (0-13-474757-7)

This comprehensive instructor's manual describes how to organize a course by using the textbook; how to find, select, and maintain appropriate field placements for students; how to model skills for students to imitate; and how to provide feedback to students assigned to field placements on campus or in the community. In addition, we have included a series of role-playing and conversational activities to be carried out in class. They are designed to show students how to use particular skills prior to implementing them with children and to clarify basic concepts as they emerge during class discussions. A rubric for self-evaluation of the certification or licensure exam examples offered in the chapter-end activities is also provided here. Finally, the instructor's manual contains a criterion-referenced observation tool, the Curriculum Skills Inventory (CSI). This is a unique feature of *Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education*. The CSI can be used by instructors and practitioners to evaluate the degree to which students demonstrate the skills taught.

## Test Bank (0-13-474759-3)

The Online Test Bank consists of multiple-choice, true–false, short-answer, and essay questions for each chapter. The questions are aligned to the chapter-opening learning outcomes.

## TestGen Computerized Test Bank (0-13-474756-9)

TestGen is a powerful assessment generation program available exclusively from Pearson that helps instructors easily create quizzes and exams. You install TestGen on your personal computer (Windows or Macintosh) and create your own exams for print or online use. It contains a set of test items organized by chapter, based on this textbook's contents. The items are the same as those in the Test Bank. The tests can be downloaded in a variety of learning management system formats.

## PowerPoint® Slides (0-13-474758-5)

For every chapter, a series of PowerPoint® slides has been created to highlight key concepts and strategies.

# Acknowledgments

We would like to recognize the major contributions to this text by our colleagues in early childhood education: Barbara M. Rohde, early childhood educator and artist from Durham, North Carolina, wrote Chapter 9 for the earlier versions of this text; in addition, she supplied artwork for the classroom floor plans and the pictograph that appears in Chapter 5. Laura C. Stein, early childhood consultant, Stein Associates, East Lansing, Michigan, produced Chapter 14 for the first four editions of this book. It was an important contribution on which we continue to build. We owe these initial authors much for their insights and for helping our ideas come alive on the page. Their influence remains. Carolyn Pope Edwards, professor emeritus, Child, Youth and Family Studies and Psychology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, contributed the section "The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education"; and Ann S. Epstein, former director of the Early Childhood Division, HighScope Educational Research Foundation, wrote the portion titled "The HighScope Approach to Early Childhood Education." These two segments appear in Chapter 1. Sylvia Chard, professor emeritus, University of Alberta, wrote the original material describing the project approach, featured in Chapter 16. This work has broadened the scope of the text and has enabled us to present multiple voices describing developmentally appropriate curriculum.

We appreciate the generous assistance of David Kostelnik, photographer, who provided excellent images taken at a number of preprimary and elementary sites. We are also indebted to the teachers in the child development laboratories at Michigan State University for their early work on the curriculum, for providing continuous and easy access to their classrooms for observation, and for inspiring many of the ideas represented in this book. Teachers in the Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory School also contributed to our work, especially in regard to working with children with special needs as well as developing outdoor activities and classrooms. We are grateful to Grace Spalding, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, for the group time described in Chapter 4; and to Donna Howe, head teacher emeritus, for materials related to learning centers (Chapter 5) and theme-related material (Chapter 16).

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# Introduction

David Kostelnik/Pearson Education, Inc.

*Self-portraits created by "Moira's Head Start Class."*

## Learning Outcomes

After reading this introduction, you should be able to:

- Define early childhood education and explain why the field is growing.
- Describe the children and families served in early childhood programs.
- Differentiate among early childhood programs.
- Talk about what makes someone an early childhood professional.
- Discuss the importance of program quality now and in the future.

### NAEYC Standards and Key Elements Addressed in This Chapter:

Standard 1b: Knowing and understanding multiple influences on development and learning
Standard 2c: Involving families and communities in their children's development and learning
Standard 4b: Knowing and understanding effective strategies and tools for early education

- *It is open house day at Head Start. Moira and her mom walk down the hallway to Moira's classroom. Moira hesitates at the door. Her teacher comes over and says, "Hello Moira. I'm so glad you're here. When I came to visit you at your apartment you said you liked to play with markers. We have some markers right over in the art area. Come see. Bring your mom so she can see too."*
- *Evan blows out the candles on his birthday cake. Everyone says he is getting to be such a big boy—after all, this is the year he will go to kindergarten! He can't wait!*
- *Hector has been anticipating the first day of second grade for weeks. He is excited about his new backpack and the list of reading words he learned over the summer to give to his new teacher, Mr. Pérez-Qui. He wonders what his teacher will be like and who will be in his class. He and his brother Jorge walk the five blocks to their school. A large banner hanging above the doorway announces:*

***Bienvenida a los estudiantes!***
***Welcome students!***

Moira, Evan, and Hector are among the millions of children enrolled in early education programs in the United States. One day soon, you will be welcoming children into your own classroom. What you do, what you say, and how you interact with children and their families will have a profound impact on children's learning. This is an exciting prospect and an awesome responsibility!

## A Good Beginning Is Essential: The Importance of the Early Childhood Years

For most children, going to any organized early childhood program outside their home is "going to school." This means that most children begin their "schooling" well before they ever get to kindergarten and beyond. The whole time that children are participating

in programs ranging from preschool to grade school, they form opinions about themselves as learners and about the whole concept of "school." Depending on their experiences children may conclude:

*"I am a good learner.*
*School is exciting, challenging, and fun."*

Or, children may decide:

*"I am not a good learner.*
*School is boring or difficult. It's no fun at all!"*

Which conclusions children reach early in life influences their thinking and actions for years to come. Children whose notions are positive have a strong foundation for subsequent life success. They look forward to coming to the program every day and find joy in learning. You can see this happy feeling reflected in the self-portraits created by Moira's Head Start class that appear at the beginning of this chapter. On the other hand, children whose self-evaluations and school evaluations are negative have bleak future prospects. These children are more likely to require extensive remedial assistance in school, encounter mental health problems, endure academic failure, and drop out before graduation (Heckman, Pinto, & Savelyev, 2012). Which opinions children form are greatly influenced by their early education experiences.

As an early childhood professional, you play a major role in shaping these experiences. The more you know about the field you are entering, the better prepared you will be to create effective early childhood programs. This introduction provides an overview of early childhood education today. We define the profession and discuss its significance now and in the future. In addition, we describe the children, families, and professionals who learn together in early childhood settings. Finally, we consider differences in quality among early childhood programs and what this means for children and for you. Let's get started.

## What Is Early Childhood Education?

Which of the following programs would you classify as early education programs?

Pre-K classroom
Second-grade classroom
Family childcare home

If you answered "All of the above," you are correct. **Early childhood education** involves any group program serving children from birth to age 8 that is designed to promote children's intellectual, social, emotional, language, and physical development and learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Such education translates into a wide array of programs, including those for infants and toddlers, as well as preschool, kindergarten, and primary programs. These programs may be half day or full day; public or private; enrichment or remedial in focus; targeted at low-, middle-, or high-income families; and administered by a variety of community institutions. Currently more children than ever are involved in early childhood education.

## The Early Education Field Is Growing

There has never been a better time to begin a career in early education. The demand for early learning programs is increasing. Today close to two-thirds of all the 4-year-olds and about 34% of all the 3-year-olds in the United States are engaged in some form of early childhood experience outside the home and four in five states now have public prekindergarten programs for 4-year-olds (Barnett et al., 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The number of 5- and 6-year-olds in preprimary programs and kindergarten is even greater, reaching up to 95% of the U.S. population. By age 6, nearly every child in the United States is involved in some form of classroom-based program ranging from prekindergarten through

first grade (Redford & Desrochers, 2017). This boom in early education is happening for several reasons:

1. People are becoming increasingly aware that the early years are critical learning years.
2. Increasingly more families want their children to become involved in early learning experiences before mandatory schooling starts.
3. Evidence indicates that high-quality early education has the potential to increase children's lifelong success and provide economic and social benefits to society.

Each of these trends is fueling a demand for more and better early childhood programs and the professionals who work in them.

## The Early Years Are Important Learning Years

During early childhood, rapid growth occurs in children's aesthetic, cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical competence. This lays the foundation for adolescent and adult dispositions, concepts, and skills in every developmental domain. See Table 1 for highlights of the early competencies children are developing from birth to age 8.

## Family Interest in Early Learning Is High

> *My neighbor used to look after my daughter, but I really wanted Taylor in a learning environment. I moved her here because I didn't want her watching TV all day. When it comes time for kindergarten, I want her to be prepared.*
>
> —Parent of a child in a pre-K program (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009, p. 2)

For the past 40 years there has been steady growth in the number of families seeking out-of-home care for their young children (Barnett et al., 2016). This has paralleled an increase in women going to work while their children are very young as well as an increase in single

**TABLE 1 Early Competencies That Form the Foundation for Future Learning**

| | |
|---|---|
| Aesthetic | • Appreciation of beauty in the world<br>• Self-expression<br>• Cultural awareness |
| Cognitive | • STEM concepts, processes, and skills (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)<br>• Critical-thinking skills<br>• Problem-solving strategies<br>• Concepts of time, space, order, patterns, and categories |
| Linguistic | • Language<br>• Communication skills<br>• Associating meaning and print<br>• Emergent literacy |
| Social | • Social awareness<br>• Work habits and attitudes<br>• Prosocial understandings<br>• Development of conscience<br>• Understanding expectations and rules |
| Emotional | • Emotional awareness of self and others<br>• Empathy<br>• Resilience<br>• Coping strategies |
| Physical | • Body awareness<br>• Attitudes toward food/nutritional habits<br>• Body image<br>• Physical mastery—fine motor/gross motor |

parents needing childcare support (Schulman & Blank, 2009). When arranging care for infants and toddlers, most families seek such care so adult family members can work, go to school, or participate in job training. However, by the time children are 3 years of age, parents say that enhanced learning is the number one reason they want to enroll their children in a formal early childhood program prior to kindergarten or first grade (Barnett & Frede, 2010).


Darko64/Fotolia

*What early competencies are these children developing as they play the game?*

### *Early Intervention Pays Off for Children and Society*

Based on four decades of research, we know that high-quality early childhood programs can help children succeed in school and later in life. This is especially true for children who are at high risk for potential school failure due to the burdens of poverty (Carter & Welner, 2013). Long-term studies have compared the experiences of low-income children who have gone to preschool with children from similar backgrounds who have not. Preschool alumni are less likely than nonprogram children to repeat a grade, to be referred to special education programs, or to fail to graduate from high school on time (Heckman, 2013). The positive outcomes associated with early childhood education also contribute to a better quality of life years later. At age 40, adults who had participated in a high-quality early childhood program for at least 2 years were less likely to be on welfare or to be chronic lawbreakers than was true for non preschool-going individuals (Schweinhart et al., 2005). As adults, preschool attendees were also more likely to own their own home, to be employed, to have a savings account, and to report higher satisfaction with life. Such positive outcomes benefit the children involved as well as the families and communities in which they live. Families are aware of these benefits; thus, more families of all kinds are increasingly choosing to send their children to "school" early in life.

## Children and Families in Early Childhood Education

Mary Hughes was making nametags for the children in her class: Juan, Un-Hai, Rachel, Steven, LaTanya, Clarissa, Heidi, Mohammed, Molly, Sally, Keiko, Mark, LeRoy, Indira, Jennifer, Kami, Lance, and Sasha. As she finished each nametag, she thought about how different each child was. Her students represented many racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The children varied greatly in terms of their parents' educational level and their families' socioeconomic status. Some children spoke English, and several spoke languages other than English at home. Some had prior preschool experience, and some had none. Some children lived at home with two parents, some were living in single-parent households, one child lived with his grandparents, and one youngster was a foster child, newly arrived in her foster home. The children also functioned at varying developmental levels. Mary marveled at the group's diversity.


David Kostelnik/Pearson Education, Inc.

*What message do you think this childcare center intends for its families?*

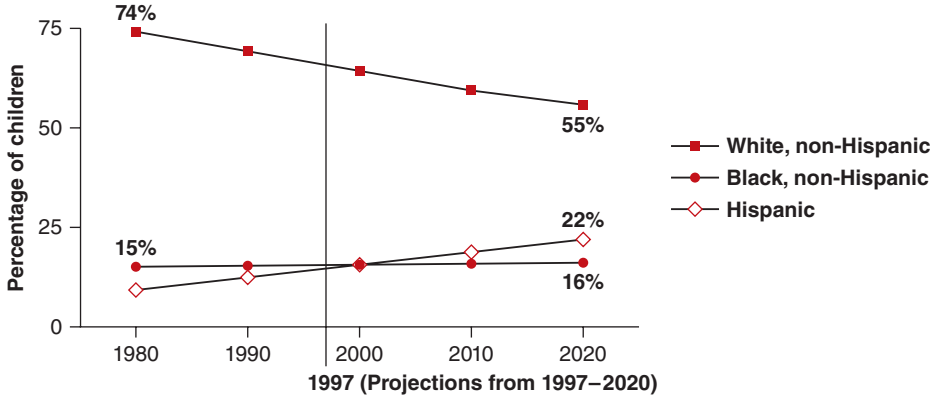
## Early Childhood Programs Serve a Diverse Population of Children and Families

Like Mary, you will likely work with a diverse array of children and families throughout your career in early childhood education. You will do so because the United States is becoming more diverse every year. For instance, racial and ethnic diversity has increased substantially in the United States over the past 40 years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), the population of white children in the United States is declining, whereas the proportion of children who are nonwhite is growing (see Figure 1). Also, in many parts of the country, up to 50% of the birth-to-age-8 population speaks a home language other than English (Reid & Kagan, 2015). Such ethnic and linguistic diversity is predicted to increase in the coming decades.

Family structures are also shifting. Today, children may live in a variety of family arrangements—two-parent families, single-parent families, blended families, extended families, families with opposite-sex parents and families with same-sex parents, adoptive families, cohabiting families, and foster families. Overall the percentage of children living in two-parent households has decreased, while the proportion of young children living in single-parent homes has risen significantly. In 2016, 68% of children in the United States under the age of 17 lived with two parents. Of these, the vast majority (90%) lived with their biological or adoptive parents; the other 10% lived with at least one stepparent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Approximately 28% of children live with only one parent. Of these, 24% live with their mothers and 4% live with their fathers. Another 4% of young children live in families headed by a grandparent (see Figure 2). Grandparent-headed households are found in all socioeconomic groups, all ethnicities, and all geographic locations in the country, with more than 4 million children living in intergenerational households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

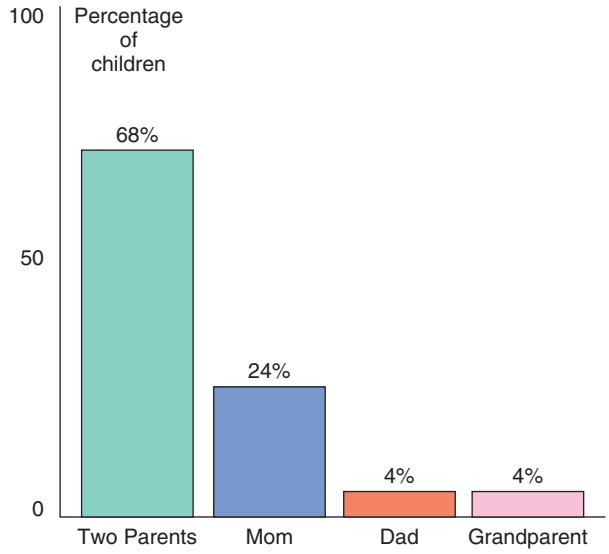
Income is another differentiating variable among families. Early childhood programs serve families who have limited financial resources as well as families who have large financial reserves. Some programs serve families whose income levels are within the same range; other programs serve families whose socioeconomic circumstances vary widely. All parents

**FIGURE 1** Shifting Population




*Source*: U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Retrieved from http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren07/famsoc1.asp.

**FIGURE 2** Family Living Arrangements




*Source*: U.S. Census Bureau (2017).

ultimately are responsible for food, clothing, shelter, and medical care and for making sure children go to school during the years of mandatory education. Yet, for many families, simply providing the basic essentials of life is a challenge. More than 16.1 million children from birth to age 17 in the United States live in low-income families. In fact, children under age 5 are the poorest age group in the country, with one out of four——infants, toddlers, and preschoolers—living without adequate resources (Children's Defense Fund, 2015). Growing up in a low-income family does not necessarily mean that family members are not in the workforce. As of this writing, more than two-thirds of poor children lived in families with at least one working family member. Poor families are of every race and live in rural, suburban, and urban communities (Berns, 2016).

Another factor that has influenced diversity in early childhood classrooms is inclusion. Children with disabilities have been provided a free public education in the **least restrictive environment** since 1986. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 provided additional protections to people with disabilities, including freedom from discrimination and equal access to public programs. IDEA was updated in 2004, governing how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million infants and toddlers (from birth to age 2) and children and youth (age 3–21) with disabilities. IDEA underscores a U.S. commitment to educate all children, to the maximum extent appropriate, in regular classrooms on a full-time basis. Support services are brought to children as needed; the children are not removed from the early childhood setting to receive the services. Thus, children with disabilities are not clustered into groups of persons with similar disabilities. They are no longer served only in separate classrooms labeled "learning disabled" or "emotionally impaired."

As a result of these demographic and social trends, increasing numbers of children of all kinds are being served in early childhood settings outside their homes. This requires us as early childhood educators to create responsive early childhood programs that treat all people with respect. Rather than viewing one set of life experiences or demographics as "appropriate" and others as "inappropriate," we must integrate children's beliefs, history, and experiences into programs in ways that make sense to children and enable them to flourish as learners. In addition, we must recognize that

*Early education programs are inclusive.*

Deposit Photos/Glowimages

we have a responsibility to get to know children and families as individuals, recognizing that our personal frames of reference do not necessarily mirror those of all the children and families we serve.

### Families Are Children's First Teachers

During early childhood, the immediate context of the family has the greatest influence on the child. The family is responsible for meeting children's physical needs and for socializing the younger generation. Family members provide children with their first social relationships, their models for behaviors and roles, a framework of values and beliefs, and intellectual stimulation (Berns, 2016; Institute of Medicine [IoM] & National Research Council [NRC], 2015). All these functions take place through direct and indirect teaching, in constructive and sometimes destructive ways, more or less successfully. In addition, most environmental influences are channeled to some extent through the family. For instance, through their families, children gain access to economic resources and learn the customs of their cultural group. The first attitudes toward health practices, education, work, and society that children encounter are in the family. Parents arrange for out-of-home care and make the initial entrée into a school for their children. They also promote or inhibit opportunities for peer and community contact. If parents are stressed by the hardships of poverty, the uncertainty of losing a job, or the prospects of their marriage breaking up, their ability to meet the needs of their young children may be jeopardized. If parents receive help or support from relatives, friends, or social institutions, the home environment they create for their children may be enhanced.

## Early Education Programs Vary in Scope and Structure

During your years as an early childhood professional, you may work in a variety of settings and programs. Education programs for young children come in all forms. Programs for young children operate under different funding sources (public or private) and vary in location and size (private home, church or temple, small-group center, or large school). Such programs encompass a wide range of educational philosophies and curricula. Early childhood education programs also vary in their target audience, their scope (full day to half day, full year to partial year, every day to some days), and the training background of key personnel. An overview of the vast array of services currently available is offered in Table 2.

These variations in programs serving young children evolved from distinct needs and traditions. For instance, modern childcare programs were devised in response to societal demands for protected childcare environments during parents' working hours. Historically, childcare programs have emphasized the health and safety of the children enrolled, and, although currently some involve government subsidies, many rely on corporate or private sponsorship and parent fees. Supplementing the learning experiences children have at home has long been the function of the nursery school movement. Usually financed through parent fees, today's preschools have nurturance, enrichment, and school readiness as their primary aims. Early intervention programs such as Head Start and Title I are the result of federally mandated and supported efforts to remediate unfavorable developmental or environmental circumstances. These compensatory education programs focus on a particular segment of the population: children and families who are disadvantaged. Such programs are designed to change children's life opportunities by altering the course of their development for the

**TABLE 2 Early Childhood Education Programs for Children Age 3–8 Years**

| Program | Children Served | Ages | Purposes | Funding |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Early Head Start | Pregnant women, infants, and toddlers from low-income families | Prenatal to 3 years | Promote healthy pregnancies and enhance child development of very young children | Federal |
| Head Start | Children from low-income families and children with disabilities | 3–4 years | Comprehensive early education, health, nutrition and medical services, parent involvement | Federal |
| Private preschools | Mostly middle class | 2–5 years | Enrichment and school readiness experiences | Parent tuition |
| Parent cooperative preschools | Children of participating parents | 2–5 years | Enrichment and school readiness experiences as well as parent education | Parent tuition and in-kind support from families |
| Faith-based preschools | Children of church, temple, or mosque members | 2–5 years | Educational experiences and spiritual training | Church subsidies and parent tuition |
| State-sponsored pre-K programs | Children identified as at risk for economic, developmental, or environmental reasons; in some states, all 4-year-olds whose parents wish to enroll them | 4 years | Development of readiness skills for future schooling | State taxes and special allocations |
| Group childcare homes (varies across states) | All | 6 weeks to 12 years | Comprehensive care of children, covering all aspects of development | Varies. Sources include employer subsidies; parent tuition; state agencies; the federal government by means of Title XX funds, the USDA Child Care Food Program, and childcare tax credits; and private and charitable organizations. |
| Family childcare homes (varies across states, ranges from six to eight or fewer children and one provider) | All | 6 weeks to 12 years | Comprehensive care of children, covering all aspects of development | Varies. Sources include employer subsidies; parent tuition; state agencies; and the federal government by means of Title XX funds, the USDA Child Care Food Program, and childcare tax credits; and private and charitable organizations. |
| Center-based childcare | All | 6 weeks to 12 years | Comprehensive care, addressing all areas of development, includes full-day and part-time care | Varies. Sources include employer subsidies; parent tuition; state agencies; and the federal government by means of Title XX funds, the USDA Child Care Food Program, and childcare tax credits; and private and charitable organizations. |
| Title I | Children who are educationally disadvantaged (poor, migrants, disabled, neglected, or delinquent) | 4–12 years | Supplemental education for children and parents | Federal funds |
| Kindergarten | All | 5–6 years | Introduction to formal schooling | State and local taxes or, in the case of private schools, parent tuition |
| First, second, and third grade | All | 6–8 years | Transmission of society's accumulated knowledge, values, beliefs, and customs to the young | State and local taxes or, in the case of private schools, parent tuition |

better. On the other hand, primary education reflects a history that emphasizes the commitment of public funds to mass education. The goals of primary education have focused on transmitting society's accumulated knowledge, values, beliefs, and customs to children of all backgrounds and educational needs. Compulsory in some states, not required in others, but available in all, kindergarten straddles the two "worlds" of early childhood. Long considered a transition into formal schooling, kindergarten programs have been the center of much current controversy. Should they be structured more like preschool or more like the elementary grades? Traditionally, more similar to the former than to the latter, today's kindergarten programs vary greatly, depending on the philosophy of the school or district. Awareness that many children have previously attended early education programs and concern about children's subsequent school success have resulted in increasingly adult-centered, academic kindergarten programs (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009; Moore, 2010). This trend has ignited renewed debate, not yet resolved, about the true function of kindergarten and its role in children's lives. It also has spawned new early childhood programs such as state-funded pre-K classrooms.

The program variations just described are implemented by a large group of practitioners trained to work with young children. Let us briefly consider how people become early childhood professionals and what distinguishes a professional from an amateur.

# Becoming an Early Childhood Professional

- *When Scott arrived at Lakeland College, he majored in business administration. After taking some classes, he realized business was not his forte, but he had no clear idea of what he wanted to do. One afternoon he went with some friends to help supervise a Halloween party for kindergarteners at the local YMCA. He had a great time with the children. They were fun and smart. After several more experiences with children at the Y, Scott decided to talk to his adviser about the school's major in early childhood education.*
- *Jackie is the mother of three children. When she began working in a Head Start classroom as a parent volunteer, she became intrigued with preschoolers' development and learning in the classroom. She vowed that someday she would earn her associate's degree in child development. Today, she is close to fulfilling that dream—just one class to go!*
- *Lourdes knew she wanted to have a classroom of her own from the time she was a little girl. She played teacher with her friends and took a child development course in high school. Every chance she had, Lourdes found ways to work with children. She tutored at the local elementary school and participated in the Big Sister program in her town. During her freshman year in college, Lourdes signed up for courses in early childhood education, determined to make her lifelong dream come true.*

## What Makes Someone a Professional?

As demonstrated by Scott, Jackie, and Lourdes, early childhood educators come to the field in a variety of ways. Some begin their training on the job; others start in a 2- or 4-year institution. Some are hoping to fulfill a long-held goal; others "discover" the field as a result of different life experiences. Whatever their motivation and entry point, individuals eventually decide to move from layperson status to the professional world of early childhood education. This shift is the result of education and training, not simply desire.

Consequently, certain characteristics differentiate the professional early childhood educator from a layperson (Feeney, Freeman, & Pizzolongo, 2012; Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, & Rupiper, 2018; Morrison, 2017).

### Access to Knowledge

Professionals have access to specialized knowledge and skills that are unavailable to amateurs and that are acquired as a result of prolonged education and specialized training. The Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC), and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) have made recommendations for the training of professionals in early childhood education. Recommended course content and skills include general studies (humanities, mathematics, technology, social sciences, biological and physical sciences, the arts, physical health and fitness); child development and learning; curriculum development and implementation; family and community relationships; assessment and evaluation; professionalism; and field experiences with young children under appropriate supervision.

Although valuable, life experience alone is insufficient to provide the full range of technical know-how and professional skills necessary for maximum effectiveness on the job.

### Demonstrated Competence

Professionals also differ from amateurs in having to demonstrate competence in their field before they can enter the profession. The most formalized evidence of mastery requires earning a license or certification, which is usually governed by state or national standards. Slightly less formal monitoring involves having to take tests, pass courses, and demonstrate proficiency either in a practicum setting or on the job. All these experiences occur under the supervision of qualified members of the profession.

### Standards of Practice

Professionals perform their duties in keeping with standards of excellence generally accepted for the field. Such standards arise from research and professional reflection. Some standards are enforced through self-monitoring within the profession, whereas others are maintained through governmental regulation. Whatever the case, professional standards provide a gauge by which early childhood practitioners assess their performance and the overall quality of the services they offer children and families.

### Lifelong Learning

To keep up with the standards in their field, early childhood professionals constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills both informally and formally. Such efforts include attending workshops, consulting with colleagues, participating in professional organizations, reading professional journals, and pursuing additional schooling. Regardless of the means, professionals treat learning as a lifelong process.

*It takes specialized knowledge and skills to be an early childhood professional.*

### Codes of Ethics

Although useful, the personal moral code most people bring to their work is inadequate to govern professional behavior. What is common sense to an individual may or may not be congruent with agreed-upon standards within the profession. Professionalism requires you to adopt an ethical code of conduct that has been formally approved within the field. Such codes provide guidelines for making judgments about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the work place. Specific ethical codes govern professionals whose work involves children. Even if the particulars vary, all ethics codes focus on ensuring confidentiality; providing safe and beneficial experiences; and treating people with respect regardless of sex, race, culture, religion, and ability.

Karam Miri/Fotolia

**Technology Toolkit: Start Building Your Electronic Library Today: Electronic Ethics**

Two early childhood professional organizations that have published code of ethics documents are the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children. These documents are available at the NAEYC website and the DEC website. Go to both websites and check out the ethics sections you find there. Download the pdf for each of these documents. Create a folder on your computer or a dropbox to begin storing the early childhood education resources you need at your fingertips. Make these two documents your first entries.

## Quality Matters in Early Childhood Programs

How will you know if the program in which you are participating benefits young children? According to materials prepared for prospective clients, most early childhood programs claim to be outstanding. Is this true? Let us look at some examples.

A brochure describing the early childhood program at the Westover Child Development Center states:

> *Here at the Westover CDC, we offer a high-quality early childhood program for children from three to five years of age. Our teachers all have degrees in child development or early education. We focus on all aspects of children's learning using a play-based curriculum.*

An advertisement posted on the community bulletin board of a local grocery store reads:

> *High-quality childcare in my home. Loving environment. Lots to do. Fun, safe, reliable. References available.*

A headline of an editorial in a local newspaper states:

> *Blue Ribbon Panel Outlines Criteria for High-Quality Elementary Schools*

Although each example focuses on a different early childhood program, they all mention quality. People who talk about "high quality" are referring to excellence. When something is described as having high quality, we understand that it represents more than the minimum standards and has value exceeding the ordinary. On the contrary, "poor quality" suggests an image of substandard conditions and negative outcomes.

Obviously, early childhood professionals want what's best for children, so our goal is to strive for excellence in every program with every child. Parents, too, are concerned about the quality of their children's education and care. This is true for all families, regardless of

background or income level. In national polls, more than 90% of the parents surveyed cited quality as a highly important variable in determining which early childhood programs they wanted their child to attend (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007; White House Summit on Working Families, 2014). Yet, there is a difference in the quality of education and care that children receive. Some children are in high-quality early childhood programs, but many others have poor-quality experiences. High-quality programs benefit children and their families; poor-quality programs are detrimental to them.

## Poor-Quality Programs

Every day, thousands of children are subjected to program practices that threaten their immediate health and safety as well as their long-term development and learning (Carter & Welner, 2013). For instance, poor-quality experiences lead to increased behavioral problems and poorer academic progress in children. Such children are also more likely to have poor social skills. These negative effects appear to be long lasting: Evidence of poor quality is apparent up to 5 years later. To make matters worse, families may not be able to compensate for the negative impact of poor-quality programs, at least for children who spend 20 or more hours a week in such circumstances (Edwards, 2005). Because high-quality care and education may be more expensive, children in low-income families are the most likely to be enrolled in poor-quality programs at both the preprimary and primary levels. In this way, poor-quality programs compound the challenges children living in poverty face.

## High-Quality Programs

Children whose education and care are described as high quality enjoy a variety of benefits. Such children demonstrate higher levels of language development, greater social competence, a better ability to regulate their behavior, and better academic performance than do their peers in poor-quality programs (Heckman et al., 2012; Wechsler, Melnick, Maier, & Bishop, 2016). Additional evidence indicates that children who have high-quality early childhood program experiences outperform peers who have no such experiences prior to entering school. These results hold true in the short term and across time. Therefore, our aim as early childhood professionals is to create high-quality early childhood programs for children and families. To do this, we must have a better picture of what such programs involve.

*High-quality programs are joyous places in which children play and learn with confidence.*

David Kostelnik/Pearson education, Inc.

## Quality Essentials

With so much at stake, we must ask, "What do high-quality programs look like?" Fortunately, there is a growing research base we can draw on for the answer. The essential components of high-quality early childhood programs are found in the following list (IoM & NRC, 2015; Kauchak & Eggen, 2017; Wechsler et al., 2016).

### *Practitioners are Well Prepared and Well Compensated*

- Adults have specific training in child development; early childhood education; and subject-matter content such as literacy, math, and science.
- Adults have specific training in content and subject matter relevant to what they are teaching.
- Adults vary their teaching strategies and expectations on the basis of what they believe is age appropriate, individually appropriate, and socially and culturally appropriate for each child.

- Adults in high-quality programs are paid reasonable wages and receive satisfactory benefits.

### *Staffing is Stable*

- Teachers remain with the program and the same group of children long enough for children to develop a trusting relationship with them.

### *Group Sizes are Small, and the Adult–child Ratio allows for Meaningful Individualized Interactions Each Day*

- The group size and adult–child ratios are small enough that children can engage in firsthand interactions with adults, receiving individualized instruction and personal feedback about their learning experiences.

### *Warm, Attentive Relationships are Established between Adults and Children*

- Adults are warm, respectful, understanding, affectionate, and friendly toward children.
- Adults listen to children and comfort, support, and guide them in ways that make sense to children and help them become more successful in their social interactions.

### *Environments are Safe and Healthy*

- Health and safety provisions are in place to support children's well-being.

### *Environments are Stimulating*

- Adequate, appropriate materials are available to support children's explorations and development of more advanced knowledge and skills.
- The program promotes motivation and confidence among children.
- Curricula address the whole child (aesthetic, affective, cognitive, language, physical, and social development), are developmentally appropriate, and are effectively implemented.

### *Program Assessments are Meaningful*

- Assessments measure the environment, learning strategies, and classroom interactions.
- Assessments provide information teachers and decision makers use to improve practice.

### *Family Engagement is Evident*

- The program is designed to support and complement families in their childrearing role.
- Family members are welcome to observe, discuss, and recommend policies and to participate in the program's activities.

### *There are Links to Comprehensive Community Services*

- Families are referred and have access to a wide array of services necessary to support their child-rearing responsibilities.

Adults are not the only ones who differentiate the features of high-quality programs versus poor-quality ones. Lillian Katz (2013), an international leader in our field, helps us understand what high quality looks like from the children's point of view (see Figure 3).

Although the youngest children may not "speak" in the exact terms outlined in Figure 3, their actions and reactions tell us clearly that these are some of the program features that matter most to them (UNESCO, 2013). Chances are they matter to you too,

**FIGURE 3** A Child's High-Quality Program Checklist

- ✓ Teachers are glad to see me when I arrive. They are not indifferent or preoccupied.
- ✓ Adults in the program know me and like to be with me. I am not just another face in the crowd.
- ✓ I feel respected and protected by the adults. I do not feel ignored, belittled, or unsafe.
- ✓ I usually feel accepted by my peers. I am not generally isolated or rejected by them.
- ✓ I find most of the activities meaningful, absorbing, and challenging. They are not trivial, boring, too easy, or too hard.
- ✓ My family, culture, and language are visible and welcome in the program. They are not disregarded or treated with disrespect.
- ✓ Most of my experiences are satisfying. They are seldom confusing, frustrating, or a waste of my time.
- ✓ I am usually glad to be here. I am seldom reluctant to come or eager to leave.

*Source:* Katz (2013).

even today, in the adult learning environments in which you participate. Your understanding of what constitutes high-quality programming will be a key factor in your professional development as an early childhood educator.

## Looking Toward the Future

The children with whom you will be working will be adults in a world we have yet to know. Although specific details are difficult to predict, researchers generally agree that to function successfully in the mid-21st century, people will have to demonstrate the following core abilities (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2013):

**Possess a solid education and be able to apply what they know and can do in relevant situations.** Demonstrate knowledge and skills in the areas of literacy, numeracy, science, social studies/civics/global awareness, music and the visual arts, physical education, and health.

**Work well with others.** Communicate well, respect others, engage with colleagues to resolve differences of opinion, work well across cultures, and function well as members of a team.

**Act as problem solvers.** Analyze situations, make reasoned judgments, and solve new problems.

**Utilize skills broadly and engage in flexible thinking.** Apply knowledge and skills across multiple areas, generalize knowledge and skills from one situation to another, and regroup and try alternative approaches when standard solutions fail.

**Function as information seekers.** Gain access to information through various modes, including spoken and written languages, and intelligently use complex new tools and technologies.

**Envision themselves as lifelong learners.** Continue to learn new approaches, skills, and knowledge as conditions and needs change.

As early childhood educators, we are becoming increasingly aware that in addition to *what* children learn, we must consider *how* children learn so that we can best promote the development of these core abilities (Wechsler et al., 2016). In trying to describe how to achieve programs that enhance this kind of learning, educators have created the concept of developmentally appropriate practice. The remainder of this book is devoted to exploring this concept as a means for achieving high quality.

We designed *Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education* to help you develop the knowledge base you will need to function as a professional in the field. While you are reading, we encourage you to reflect on the content in terms of your experiences with children and early childhood programs. We hope you will select some topics to explore further and that you will ask questions and

*Successful citizens of the 21st century need to know how to work well together.*

Risquemo/Fotolia

challenge concepts you doubt. Most important, we urge you to use the material provided in this text to develop personal ideas about how to create and implement high-quality programs for children. You are the emerging generation of early childhood educators. We are looking to you to add to our store of knowledge about best practices in early childhood education.

## Summary

Early childhood education involves group programs serving children from birth to age 8 that are designed to promote children's development and learning. Many programs fit this definition. However, there is no one model that represents all. Instead, there are significant variations in size, sponsorship, location, and the scope of services offered. These variations reflect the needs of an increasingly diverse population of children and families. Today, there is also growing awareness that early intervention is beneficial for both children and society. This is especially true for children who are at high risk for potential school failure due to the burdens of poverty. As demand has gone up, so has the need for greater numbers of educated early childhood professionals.

Professionals differ from talented laypersons through their access to specialized knowledge, demonstrated competence, their adherence to certain standards of practice, their dedication to lifelong learning, and their adherence to a formal code of ethics. In spite of the wide variations within the field, one thing all programs and professionals must have in common is dedication to quality. High-quality programs enhance children's development and learning; poor-quality programs may actually harm children and make their lives more difficult. The characteristics of high-quality programs are clearly supported by the research and can be translated into effective practices. The purpose of this text is to increase your understanding of both the research and best practice.

## Applying What You Read in the Introduction

### 1. Discuss

a. On the basis of your reading and your experience in the field, discuss why you think early childhood is an important area of study.

b. *The Scotts are looking for a childcare program for their 3-year-old son, Tony. They consider three options: a family childcare home, an employer-sponsored childcare center, and a church-based cooperative nursery school. Although the features of each program differ, the Scotts are most interested in finding a high-quality program for their child.*

- Describe three characteristics of high-quality early childhood programs.
- Discuss two ways in which high-quality programs benefit young children. Name two problems experienced by children enrolled in poor-quality programs.

### 2. Observe

a. Observe two early childhood classrooms that address the needs of two different age groups of children within the birth-to-age-8 range. Describe how the experiences children have in these classes are alike and how they are different.

b. Observe two early childhood classrooms whose sponsors (e.g., Head Start, private pre-K, public school) or structures (full day, half day, after school) differ. Describe how the experiences children have in these classes are alike and how they are different.

### 3. Carry out an activity

a. Make a list of each of the children in the practicum class you are taking in conjunction with this course. Identify a strength you observe in each child.

### 4. Create something for your portfolio

a. Make a list of the strengths you bring to your work as an early childhood professional as you begin your work in this course. At the end of the course, add to your list of strengths.

b. Insert your child strengths list into your portfolio when it is complete. Add a photograph of the whole class as a group.

### 5. Add to your journal

a. What are three things you hope to accomplish as an early childhood professional?

b. Describe three things you hope to improve over the course of this class. Keep track of these and update your ideas over the term/semester.

### 6. Consult the standards

a. Consult the early childhood learning standards for your state. Choose one area of development to read carefully. Reflect on how following these standards contributes to high-quality early childhood programming. If you were writing the standards for this developmental area, consider ones you might add or leave out.

PART

# 1

# Foundations of Early Childhood Education


CHAPTER 1

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice: An Evolving Framework for Teaching Young Children**

CHAPTER 2

**Teaching and Learning in Developmentally Appropriate Programs**

CHAPTER 1

# Developmentally Appropriate Practice

## An Evolving Framework for Teaching Young Children

Scott Griessel/123RF.com

## Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define developmentally appropriate practice.
- Explain why there is a need for DAP.
- Discuss the historic influences and empirical support for DAP.
- Describe how developmentally appropriate programs vary.
- Discuss ongoing issues regarding DAP and how this relates to professional practice.

### NAEYC Standards and Key Elements Addressed in This Chapter:

Standard 1c: Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments

Standard 4a: Understanding positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation of their work with children

Standard 4d: Reflection on own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child

Consider the learning going on in this early childhood classroom.

- *The pretend area has been transformed into a hair salon. The children have created the following signs:*

  *Hr cataz (haircuts) 2$*
  *Shampoo 99c*
  *Karlazz (curlers) 2$ and 99c*
  *Prmz (perms) 2$*

- *Both boys and girls move into and out of this area and take turns as customers, receptionists, haircutters, and cashiers. They enact cutting hair, giving permanents, having manicures, making appointments, writing down appointments, writing out receipts, using the play cash register, and making change.*

*In other areas of the classroom children are also engaged. Three children are observing fish in an aquarium and using watercolors to create fish paintings.*

*Several children in the block area are working together to recreate the neighborhood where their school is located. They discuss what buildings to include, which materials would be best to use, and how to arrange the buildings to represent the neighborhood. When disagreements arise they refer to hand-drawn maps of the neighborhood they made earlier in the week. One child writes signs for the buildings—Peza parlr (pizza parlor) and Gas stashun (gas station)—and tapes them to the block structures. A few children are in the book area, some looking at books and one using felt pieces to retell a familiar story on the felt board. Others are sorting rocks according to their own criteria, some are writing in their journals, and two children are measuring the seedlings in the windowsill and recording their findings on a chart near the plants.*

*All this time, the teacher and an aide are moving among the children, observing, asking questions, modeling problem-solving skills, and helping children to record their findings.*

As you can see, this classroom is characterized by action.

- ***Children show action*** *by discussing, experimenting, investigating, building, exploring, interacting with one another, and engaging in play.*
- ***Adults show action*** *by carefully observing children, guiding their actions and activities, asking questions, and assessing children's learning and modeling.*

Action-oriented practices like these are sometimes described as **developmentally appropriate practices (DAP)**. These practices are based on our knowledge of how children grow and develop, and we use this knowledge to make thoughtful and appropriate decisions regarding our work with young children (Gestwicki, 2014). DAP provides a framework to make decisions about how to teach and what to teach young children. DAP has had a powerful influence on people's ideas about early childhood education and has moved to center stage in the definition of what constitutes a good program for young children. In this chapter, we explore DAP and what it means for you as an early childhood educator. Let us begin by looking at what it means to be developmentally appropriate.

# What It Means to Be Developmentally Appropriate

Suppose you wanted to buy a gift for a child you know. How would you decide what to purchase? You would probably first consider the age of the child—you might choose one thing for a young toddler but a very different item for a first grader. You would probably also think about the interests or abilities of the specific child. Finally, you might consider the beliefs or values of the child's family and how this might influence your choice. Effective teachers consider similar issues in their work. Practitioners who use DAP make decisions about the well-being and education of young children based on three important sources of knowledge (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009). They consider the following:

1. What they know about how children develop and learn
2. What they know about the strengths, needs, and interests of individual children
3. What they know about the social and cultural contexts in which children live

Using this knowledge to guide their thinking, early childhood educators ask themselves, "Is this activity, interaction, or experience age appropriate? Is it individually appropriate? Is it socially and culturally appropriate?" Let's look at each of these issues in more detail.

## DAP Is Age Appropriate

Although age is not an absolute measure of a child's abilities and understandings, it does help to establish reasonable expectations of what might be interesting, safe, and achievable yet challenging for children (NAEYC, 2009). To address age appropriateness, we first think about what children are like within a general age range. Next, we develop activities, routines, and expectations that match and support these characteristics. Mrs. Omura, a teacher in a class of 4-year-olds, is thinking about age appropriateness when she selects wooden puzzles that contain 8–25 pieces for the fine-motor area of her classroom. She makes selections on the basis of her observations of the number of pieces 4-year-olds typically find doable but challenging to complete. Mr. Allison, a second-grade teacher, also makes an age-related choice when he chooses jigsaw puzzles consisting of 50–100 pieces for the children in his group. He is aware that 7- and 8-year-olds find the more complex puzzles stimulating and fun to try. In both cases, the teachers make decisions about age appropriateness on the basis of their understanding of child development, which they acquired through formal study and classroom observation.

## DAP Is Individually Appropriate

All children within a given age group are not alike. Each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as an individual personality and learning

style (Berk & Meyers, 2016). Certain children are more verbal than others, some enjoy time alone, others crave company, some are fairly skilled readers at 5 years of age, and others may not achieve reading proficiency until 1 or 2 years later. Children also vary in the kinds and amounts of experiences they have had in relation to the new things they are learning. Each child enters the classroom with differing familiarity with such things as books, numbers, or puzzles. Sharing, asking for help, or listening to a story are common human interactions with which individual children will be more or less familiar. You can probably think of hundreds of variations like these, all of which must be considered in designing, implementing, and evaluating activities, interactions, and expectations. It was the concept of individual appropriateness that prompted both Mrs. Omura and Mr. Allison to choose puzzles varied enough in complexity to fit the particular needs of individual children within their classes. These teachers knew that some children would need simpler puzzles to match their current levels of functioning and that other children would benefit from more challenging versions. Individualizing to meet all children where they are and help them develop their full potential is often referred to as **differentiation of instruction or differentiated instruction**. To *differentiate* means to change or adjust to meet the individual needs of each child. Differentiation strategies are not only used with children with disabilities but also with children with differing linguistic abilities and to serve exceptionally bright children in the early childhood classroom (Gadzikowski, 2013).

Early childhood educators consider individual appropriateness for every child in a group. However, if a class includes one or more children with special needs, the concept is often expanded to include the development of an **individualized education plan (IEP)**. Read Inclusion: Spencer's Individualized Education Plan for additional information about an IEP and how it relates to individually appropriate practice as follows.

## Inclusion ▶ Spencer's Individualized Education Plan

Federal law mandates that all children with a documented special need receive special education services early in life. These services must take place in the least restrictive environment possible. For young children, that often includes an early childhood classroom. What services children receive, how services are provided, and the outcomes a child might reasonably be expected to accomplish in a year are described within an individualized education plan (IEP). Every IEP includes the same elements: a description of the child's strengths, needs, goals, short-term objectives, special education services, program modifications, and the frequency, duration, and location of the services to be provided. In each case, these elements are individualized to address the educational needs of a specific child.

In our example, 4-year-old Spencer is such a child. He has been identified as having autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Spencer likes to play with blocks, draw at the art table, and swing on the tire swing at school. He prefers solitary play and appears not to notice others even if they are playing nearby. If a teacher draws his attention to a peer or an activity, he will join in, but he needs help interacting. Currently, he does not use words, but is learning to use picture cards and simple voice output devices (assistive technology) to communicate. Spencer is enrolled in a special education preschool in the morning, which includes six children who have all been identified as having a special need. In the afternoon, Spencer is in a pre-K classroom, which includes children who are developing typically and children who have special needs.

Spencer's IEP was created in a group meeting that included his mom, dad, and grandmother (who often takes care of him after school). His special education teacher, his pre-K teacher, an occupational therapist, the elementary school principal, and a speech pathologist also attended. The adults first reviewed Spencer's assessment data, noting when his last formal assessment was given and the results. His family offered examples of what he likes to do at home. The teachers brought anecdotal records they had accumulated as well as checklists of behaviors they had observed Spencer display in their classrooms. The pre-K teacher also had work samples of Spencer's art and digital photographs of his block buildings over time.

## Inclusion ▶ Continued

Together, the team created specific social, behavior, and communication goals and objectives for Spencer to address during the year. They agreed that the plan would be reviewed and revised annually. Following are three examples of the individually appropriate goals identified for Spencer.

**IEP Goals**

- When shown a motor action by an adult (e.g., shaking a tambourine) and invited to do the same (e.g., "Do what I'm doing!"), Spencer will imitate the adult's actions with an identical object.
- Spencer will request a desired item by giving a picture to an adult or peer.
- Spencer will provide comments at group time with peers using a big mac switch (assistive technology).

**Supporting Practices**

Both preprimary teachers agreed to incorporate the following individually appropriate practices in to their classrooms to enhance consistency from one setting to another. Spencer's family will use some of these techniques at home, too.

*Create Communication Opportunities*

- Program Spencer's big mac switch to give him general comments/questions to use during play.
  - "Show me what you are doing."
  - "Can I have a turn?"
  - "I want to be next."
- Encourage peers to ask questions and make comments to Spencer.
  - "Laura, ask Spencer ___."
  - "Sam, tell Spencer ___."

*Facilitate Social Opportunities*

- If Spencer is playing alone, bring a peer to his play area or ask a peer to invite Spencer to play along.
- When transitioning in the classroom or going outside, have a peer hold Spencer's hand.
- Let Spencer's peers program his big mac by recording their voices.

## DAP Is Socially and Culturally Appropriate

We must also look at children and families within the context of their community and culture before we can create meaningful, supportive early childhood programs. Consider the following examples.

*Kyoko eats rice for breakfast at home. During a nutrition activity at school, some children insist that rice is only a dinner food. The teacher points out that people eat rice sometimes at breakfast, sometimes at lunch, and sometimes at dinner. Later she reads a story called* Everybody Cooks Rice *by Norah Dooley, which describes people eating rice prepared in various ways and at different meals.*

*Several families in the program share a culture in which humility is valued and expressions of group pride are encouraged more than expressions of personal accomplishment. Knowing this, the teacher praises the children as a group for working together to clean up the blocks rather than singling out individuals.*

*Powwows are very important in First Nations Cree culture, and most of the children in the grade 2–3 combined class on a First Nations Reserve in Alberta,*

*Canada, have experienced powwows. However, the teacher realizes that few of them know much about the traditions behind these important community events. This realization prompts her to introduce the topic* powwows *for the children to investigate.*

In each preceding situation, early childhood practitioners demonstrated respect for children and their families by taking into account the social and cultural contexts in which they live.

Culture is defined by values, traditions, and beliefs that are shared and passed down from one generation to the next.

> *All of us growing up, first as members of our particular family and later as members of a broader social and cultural community, come to certain understandings about what our groups consider appropriate, valued, expected, and admired. Among these understandings we learn "rules" about how to show respect, how to interact with people we know well and those we have just met, how to regard time and personal space, how to dress, and countless other behaviors we perform every day* (*Copple & Bredekamp, 2006, p. 11*).

David Kostelnik/Pearson Education, Inc.

*Teachers using developmentally appropriate practices choose materials based on children's interests and abilities.*

Because of the amount of variation among people, no single "correct" set of cultural beliefs exists. Instead, adults who work with children must recognize the legitimacy of multiple perspectives, including ones very different from their own (Trawick-Smith, 2014). Lack of cultural awareness by early childhood professionals can lead to erroneous assumptions and potentially negative outcomes for children. Consider the cultural misunderstandings depicted in Inclusion: Cultural Misunderstandings as follows.

## Inclusion ▶ Cultural Misunderstandings

A speech–language pathologist in an Inuit school in northern Canada asked a principal—who was not Inuit—to provide a list of children who had speech and language problems in the school. The list contained a third of the students in the program, and next to several names the principal wrote, "Does not talk in class." The speech–language pathologist consulted a local Inuit teacher for help determining how each child functioned in his or her native language. The teacher looked at the principal's notes and said, "Well-raised Inuit children should not talk in class. They should be learning by looking and listening. Not talking doesn't mean they have problems expressing themselves."

As noted above, sitting quietly in class meant different things to people from different cultures. From the principal's cultural perspective, not talking in class signaled a lack of expressive language skills; from the children's perspective, not talking in class represented polite, attentive behavior. Misunderstanding the children's silence could have led to unnecessary intervention, conveyed lack of respect for the children's home values, and undermined the credibility of the practitioners in the eyes of family members. To avoid such negative outcomes, adults who are engaged in DAP work hard to learn about the cultural beliefs of children's families. They understand that the more similar expectations are between home and the early childhood setting, the more productively children learn. And, as was true for the speech–language pathologist in the earlier story, when they are not sure, they make an effort to find out. Thus, understanding what may be interpreted as meaningful to and respectful of children and their families is a key element in determining developmental appropriateness.

Miguel Montero/Fotolia

*This child is learning by doing.*

## The Essence of Developmental Appropriateness

Weaving the strands of age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and sociocultural appropriateness into a cohesive philosophy requires deliberate effort and continuous reflection. First, as educators we must recognize that children are children, not miniature adults. Experiences and expectations planned for children should reflect that early childhood, or 3–8 years of age, is a time of life qualitatively different from that of the later school years and adulthood. This means we must take into account everything we know about how children develop and learn, and match it to the content and strategies used in early childhood programs. Second, we must think of children as individuals. This means recognizing that even children who share many similar characteristics are still unique human beings. Finally, we must treat children with respect. This requires us to learn about and value the families, communities, and cultures that shape children's lives. Considering these factors together we are able to design and implement curriculum to assist children in attaining challenging yet achievable goals. These beliefs form the essence of DAP. As you read the next section of this chapter, consider how these strands are apparent in the practices described.

## General Practices Associated with DAP

DAP provides guidance for thinking about, planning, and implementing high-quality programs for young children. It informs our decision making and gives us a basis for continually scrutinizing our professional practices. The essence of DAP, however, can be captured in 12 overarching principles (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009; Miller, 2013).

1. Adults develop warm, caring relationships with children.
2. Child guidance fosters self-regulation. Adults acknowledge children's positive behaviors, reason with children, and treat their misbehaviors as learning opportunities.
3. Curricula are whole-child focused. Programs address children's aesthetic, emotional, intellectual, language, social, and physical needs.
4. Programs address the learning needs of *all* children, including children who have special needs and those who do not speak English as their home language.
5. Indoor and outdoor environments are safe and stimulating; routines are well suited to the needs of young children.
6. Children have numerous opportunities to learn by doing through hands-on activities that are relevant and meaningful to them.
7. Children are active decision makers in their own learning. They have many opportunities to initiate activities and to make choices about what and how they will learn.
8. Children have many opportunities to play throughout the day.
9. Teachers are intentional in their teaching. They have specific goals in mind for children's learning and use relevant instructional strategies to address those goals.
10. Curricula are integrated across disciplines and developmental domains.

**FIGURE 1.1** Mrs. Clarkson's Kindergarten Classroom

Visiting Mrs. Clarkson's classroom we see a bright, attractive room organized into interest areas. Small groups of children are actively engaged in various activities. We see three girls working with plastic cubes to solve math problems and recording their answers on clipboards. Four children are sitting at a table writing in their journals. One child announces that he has edited the story he will read during the author's chair group time later that day. A second child offers to help another child spell a word she wants to write. Two children are near the windowsill measuring plants. Mrs. Clarkson explains this is part of an ongoing science experiment where children are comparing the growth of plants under differing conditions. Just then an adult enters the classroom. Mrs. Clarkson greets her and gives the other children a prearranged signal to gather at the meeting carpet. The parent has been invited to conduct a mini-lesson about American sign language since the children have been interested in various methods of communication.

11. Assessment takes place continuously throughout the day and addresses all developmental domains. Adults gather information about what children know and can do through observations, by collecting work samples, and by inviting children to document their own learning.
12. Early childhood practitioners establish reciprocal relationships with children's families.

Take a moment to consider the kindergarten classroom depicted in Figure 1.1. Which of the 12 principles of DAP just described are illustrated by the children and adults in this program?

Before we move on to other aspects of DAP, consider how these practices relate to the latest findings in brain science.

## Brain Science and DAP

Neuroscientists and pediatric researchers tell us that certain conditions are necessary to promote healthy brain development in young children (Shonkoff, 2009; Thompson, 2009). These conditions are closely tied to children's day-to-day experiences at home and in the community. For instance, children's brain development is enhanced when adults:

- Ensure children's health and safety
- Provide appropriate nutrition
- Establish close relationships with children
- Encourage children to explore and play
- Offer stimulating environments
- Establish routines
- Minimize stress

Now compare these "brain-healthy" conditions to the general practices typically associated with DAP that you just read. What commonalities do you see? What implications does this have for your work with young children? Keep these thoughts in mind as you begin to consider the judgments involved in DAP.

## Determining Developmental Appropriateness Requires Judgment

Referring to the practices just outlined, can you determine which of the following situations are developmentally appropriate and which are not?

Twenty 4-year-olds have been in circle time for 40 minutes. DAP or not DAP?

Suzanne wants the easel all to herself. Bianca wants a turn. The first-grade teacher helps the girls develop a timetable for sharing during the next several minutes. DAP or not DAP?

Kanye, a kindergartner, laboriously copies a series of words onto lined paper. DAP or not DAP?

*Adults develop warm, caring relationships with children in developmentally appropriate programs.*

Vadim Zakharishchev/Shutterstock

Your first impression may be that a 40-minute circle time is too long for most 4-year-olds and that copy work is not the best way to teach children to write. If so, you probably decided that these scenarios were examples of developmentally inappropriate practices. You may also have assumed that helping two children learn to share clearly illustrates DAP. However, after further examination you may reassess your original judgments.

For instance, you may change your opinion about the circle time after learning that the children are enthralled by a storyteller who actively involves them in the storytelling process and that the time has been prolonged in response to the children's request, "Tell us another one." Likewise, helping children to share is usually worthwhile. In this case, however, Suzanne's aunt, uncle, and cousins recently lost most of their belongings in a household fire. They are staying with Suzanne's family, and Suzanne is having to share many things—attention at home, her room, her toys, and some of her clothes. Knowing this, we may determine that making her share the easel today is unnecessarily stressful. Helping Bianca find an alternative activity that will satisfy her desire to paint could be a better course of action for now. A second look at Kanye reveals that he is working hard to copy the words *I love you* for a present he is making for his mom. He is using a model created by another child and is writing on paper he selected himself. Within this context, Kanye's copywork no longer seems questionable.

Scenarios such as these illustrate that determining developmental appropriateness requires more than simply memorizing a set of dos and don'ts or looking at children's activities in isolation. It involves considering every practice within the context in which it is occurring and making a judgment about what is happening to a particular child in a particular place at a particular time. The best judgments are those you make consciously.

Faced with having to determine the extent to which their actions are developmentally appropriate, many early childhood educators ask three questions:

1. Is this practice aligned with what I know about child development and learning?
2. Does this practice take into account children's individual strengths and needs?
3. Does this practice demonstrate respect for children's social and cultural lives?

These questions may address immediate concerns or long-term deliberations. They can stimulate individual thinking or consideration of program practices by an entire staff. In every circumstance, the answer to all three questions should be "yes." Answering "no" to any of them is a strong sign the practice should be reconsidered, revamped, or rejected. Your response will depend on your interpretation of what is age appropriate, individually appropriate, and socioculturally appropriate for specific children. Your knowledge of child development and learning, your understanding of curriculum, your awareness of family and community relationships, your knowledge of assessment, and your interpretation of your professional role will also influence what you do (NAEYC, 2009). All these factors, combined with an understanding of DAP, should guide early childhood decision making. See the Technology Toolkit feature to learn more about using professional judgment to choose appropriate computer games for young children.

### Technology Toolkit: Developmentally Appropriate Computer Games for Young Children

Effective teachers must carefully choose how and when to use technology to enhance the learning of young children. Although a variety of computer games may claim to be educational and appropriate for children, you will want to use your professional judgment to determine if these statements are accurate. Use the following checklist when considering computer programs or other technological activities for children.

- Contains age-appropriate content
- Includes diverse characters (gender and ethnic diversity)
- Offers chances to see and explore beyond everyday experiences (e.g., seeing animals of the rainforest)
- Content is connected to what children already know
- Children actively participate in the activity (children are not just passive viewers)

- Adults are involved and provide guidance and feedback to children
- Experience is engaging and rewarding for children
- Provides opportunities for follow-up activities to help children understand concepts

If any of the above criteria is missing from the game, reconsider its use.

# Why Is There a Need for DAP?

DAP evolved to address three significant early childhood issues: lack of universal high-quality early education programs, inappropriate curricula for young children, and growing concerns over differences in achievement among certain groups of children, especially children living in poverty.

## Program Quality

Quality is a key factor in how much children benefit from early childhood programs. High-quality programs enhance children's development and learning. Poor-quality programs do not. Establishing high-quality programs is not intuitive or automatic. Many children in the United States (and throughout the world, for that matter) attend mediocre or poor-quality early learning programs (UNICEF, 2008). This has prompted a call to identify and define practices that characterize high quality as an important step in expanding the availability of such programs to young children.

## Dealing with Pushdown Curricula

*District Drops Recess to Gain More Time for the Basics*
*Crisis in the Kindergarten: Playtime Disappears*
*Tutoring for Tots: 3-Year-Olds Prepare for College*

These actual headlines illustrate a trend that began in the 1980s and continues today in the United States—**pushdown curriculum** from the primary grades into kindergarten and preschool. Practices that traditionally were not encountered until first grade or later—such as long periods of whole-class instruction, written instruction out of workbooks, and letter grades—have become commonplace in kindergarten and some preschools (Miller & Almon, 2009). First and second graders, too, are often expected to perform tasks previously reserved for the upper grades, such as taking standardized achievement tests and dealing with possible retention.

Societal demands for more academics and a "back to the basics" philosophy have contributed to high-pressure practices like those just described. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, an initiative aimed at improving learning opportunities for *all* children, K–12, became law in 2001. Although the goals of NCLB were desirable, some applications were less positive, especially for young children. NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2016. ESSA preserves the spirit of NCLB while reducing federal oversight and allowing states to identify long- and short-term goals. State goals must address proficiency on tests, English-language proficiency, graduation rates, and closing gaps in achievement. With an emphasis on academic performance many teachers feel pressured to focus on skills they believe are not in the best interests of young children and were considered too advanced for children of this age in the past (Bassok & Rorem, 2014). Consequently, more young children find themselves sitting at desks, filling out worksheets, and

Jörg Lantelme/Fotolia

*Children in developmentally appropriate classrooms are excited about school and eager to learn.*

taking tests to get into kindergarten or first grade. Child advocates are alarmed at what they view as an erosion of childhood and the "miseducation" of the youngest members of society. Students report significantly more anxiety when completing high-stakes testing related to initiatives such as NCLB than typical classroom testing (Segool, Carlson, Goforth, Von Der Embse, & Barterian, 2013). Physicians report a dramatic increase in the numbers of young children who visit them for stress-related illnesses and conditions. Nationwide, people who understand child development warn that children are being hurried into functioning in ways that do not match their natural modes of learning (Miltner et al., 2012; NAEYC, 2009). All of this has signaled a need to describe what practices really are best for young children and what practices detract from helping children succeed in school and in life.

## Closing the Achievement Gap

*I have children in my class who have never handled a book, never drawn with a crayon, and who are constantly worried about whether or not they will get supper each night. This puts them behind from day one. Years later, I see these same kids and they have never caught up.*

—Kindergarten teacher (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009, p. 6)

Kindergarten teachers report that one of three children comes to school lacking the basic abilities needed to succeed. Most often, such children come from families living close to or below the poverty line (Bradbury, Corak, Waldfogel, & Washbrook, 2015). Children in poverty often experience low birth weight, malnutrition, poor dental and physical health, stress related to food insecurity and physical safety, homelessness, and child abuse and neglect (Gullo, 2014). None of these conditions contributes to healthy development or school achievement. Although living in a low-income family does not guarantee school failure, children from such families are more prone to low achievement than are children from more fiscally secure homes because most families living in poverty have a harder time meeting children's basic physical, social, and cognitive needs. These struggles and lack of opportunities can have a negative impact on children's learning, starting at birth.

By the time most children living in poverty are 5 years of age, they are twice as likely as other children to score at the bottom of their class in literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge. Many enter kindergarten or first grade 19 months to 2 years behind their peers (Barbarin et al., 2006; Chatterji, 2006). Unfortunately, these early lags hinder new skill development, making it hard for children to catch up. This contributes to an achievement gap between children living in poverty and their more financially advantaged peers. That gap continues to widen over the years and is more difficult to alter as children mature. Because the early years are so crucial, there has been a strong push to identify effective early learning strategies to address the needs of *all* children, including children most at risk for school failure.

## The Early Childhood Profession Responds

In response to these circumstances, the NAEYC developed a **position statement** in 1986 defining the concept of DAP as one means for improving early learning programs. This was quickly followed by an NAEYC book outlining support in the literature for DAP as well as describing examples of appropriate and inappropriate practices for programs serving children ages birth to 8 years (Bredekamp, 1987). These groundbreaking documents resonated with professionals in the field. They prompted action throughout the world and elicited much conversation and debate. As a result, the documents did not remain static, but have been revised twice (in 1997 and in 2009). Each new edition of DAP has incorporated observations and conclusions from professionals in many disciplines as well as the outcomes of relevant research.

The 2009 position statement describes recommended practices for teaching children from birth through 8 years (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). DAP is "informed by what we

know from theory and literature about how children develop and learn" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 10). Teachers utilize this knowledge as they make decisions about what is age appropriate, individually appropriate, and culturally appropriate for the children they teach. The statement describes guidelines of five key aspects of developmentally appropriate teaching:

1. Creating a caring community of learners
2. Teaching to enhance development and learning
3. Planning appropriate curriculum
4. Assessing children's development and learning
5. Developing reciprocal relationships with families

Each of these aspects is closely related, and failing to address one would critically undermine each of the other parts.

The document also presents examples of appropriate (effective practices supported by research) and contrasting (less effective or even harmful strategies) practices for infants and toddlers, children ages 3–5, children ages 5–6, and children ages 6–8. (Refer to Table 1.1 for an example.)

As you can tell from Table 1.1, inappropriate practices sometimes reflect errors of omission (never reading aloud to children) as well as errors of commission (interrupting the story with unrelated remarks). Appropriate practices are often defined between these extremes (reading aloud every day and engaging children in meaningful conversations about the story). The NAEYC document contains hundreds of specific examples of appropriate practices and less appropriate ones.

Some practices clearly promote children's optimal learning and development while others clearly do not. However, many require more careful consideration. For example, some professionals debate whether young children benefit more from either direct instruction or

**TABLE 1.1 Examples of Appropriate Practices and Inappropriate Practices Related to Book Reading with Children Ages 3–8**

| Age Group | Appropriate Practices | Contrasting/Inappropriate Practices |
|---|---|---|
| 3- to 5-year-olds | Every day teachers read aloud to children, in both small and large groups. To promote children's engagement and comprehension, teachers use strategies such as reading with expression and asking questions (e.g., "What do you think he'll do now?"). | Teachers do not regularly read to children.<br>Teachers often interrupt story reading to address unrelated teaching goals, which disrupts the narrative flow and reduces children's comprehension and enjoyment. |
| 5- to 6-year-olds | Teachers provide multiple copies of familiar kindergarten-level texts. Children are encouraged to return to books that have been read aloud to them for independent "browsing." Special time is regularly set aside for independent reading of self-selected familiar texts. | Books in the literacy center seldom change. Multiple copies of books are unavailable for individual reading or reading with a partner.<br>Teachers do not set aside time for independent reading. |
| 6- to 8-year-olds | Teachers read aloud to children each day. For those books that children read on their own, teachers engage children in discussions of interest and importance to them. Taking notes on individuals' comments and questions, teachers follow up on these in small groups or individually. | Teachers do most of the talking when books are discussed.<br>Teachers' questions in book discussions with children do not engage them in making inferences, thinking critically, or expressing themselves through use of new knowledge and vocabulary. |

child-guided activities. The idea is that direct instruction *either* is developmentally appropriate or it is not. Instead of engaging in either/or thinking, a more effective approach is to consider situations with a both/and approach.

> *Children both construct their own understanding of concepts and benefit from instruction by more competent peers and adults (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 49).*

## Historic and Empirical Support for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

The practices associated with developmental appropriateness did not emerge all at once, nor were they the product of any one person's thinking. Table 1.2 provides a brief description of early philosophers and child advocates whose contributions laid a foundation for the general practices that currently characterize DAP classrooms. This list is not complete, but it will give you a sense of who helped shape practices in early childhood education today. You will also see that ideas related to DAP have their roots in more than one country.

Now that we have considered the basic components of DAP, let us explore the effectiveness of this approach. For any framework to stand the test of time, it must be supported by demonstrable results.

Today, DAP is widely embraced by early childhood professionals throughout the world. This trend has led thousands of practitioners to use DAP as a basis for examining their practices and those of the programs for which they are responsible. See Figure 1.2 for a list of education associations who have endorsed the principles associated with DAP.

What began as a feeling for many people is becoming a documented reality. Evidence is mounting that integrated curriculum models utilizing DAP principles lead to positive educational outcomes for children. In contrast to programs that ignore such principles, DAP-based curricula are more likely to produce long-term gains in children's cognitive development, social and emotional skills, and life-coping capabilities (Payton et al., 2008; UNICEF, 2008; Weisburg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). Although more remains to be learned, we have a growing body of data supporting the idea that a DAP-oriented philosophy has long-lasting benefits for children. See Figure 1.3 for a brief summary of the research findings associated with DAP.

### Let's Consider Diversity

Most schools and early childhood programs today serve children from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds and with a range of abilities. You may be wondering, "How well does DAP contribute to the positive development, learning, and academic success of diverse children? Does DAP work for all? Or, does DAP suit certain children, but not others?" Studies conducted two decades ago seemed to indicate that DAP was widely applicable. Researchers at the time noted that DAP "has the potential to provide strong foundational experiences for males and females from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds" (Hart, Burts, & Charlesworth, 1997, p. 8). Later studies found similar results. The beneficial results reported in Figure 1.3 have been found to be true for boys and for girls; for children from higher-income families and lower-income families; for children of color as well as white children in the United States; and for children in many countries around the world (e.g., Australia, England, France, Greece, Poland, Indonesia, and Thailand) (Bennett, 2008; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2005).

**TABLE 1.2 People Whose Work Contributed to Current Practices**

| Person | Contribution |
|---|---|
| **John Amos Comenius** (1592–1670), Moravian philosopher<br>"All material of learning must be divided according to age levels." | Wrote that multisensory learning was more relevant than verbal learning alone<br>Urged parents to become involved in their children's education |
| **Jean Jacques Rousseau** (1712–1778), French philosopher<br>"A child should neither be treated as an irrational animal, nor as a man, but simply as a child." | Recognized individual patterns of development within children<br>Promoted the idea that children's natural curiosity was a strong source of learning<br>Believed that the school should fit the child, not that the child must fit the school |
| **Robert Owen** (1771–1858), Welsh industrialist and social reformer<br>"Physical punishment in a rationally conducted infant school will never be required and should be avoided as much as giving children poison in their food." | Created an employer-sponsored infant school that was a forerunner of the North American preschool<br>Favored multiage groupings among children 2, 3, 4, and 5 years old<br>Focused on hands-on learning and field trips as a way to observe how real things existed in the world<br>Emphasized the importance of positive discipline |
| **Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel** (1782–1852), German philosopher<br>"The prime purpose throughout is not to impart knowledge to the child but to lead the child to observe and think." | Became known as the father of kindergarten<br>Stressed the significance of play and the value of childhood as a time of importance for its own sake, not simply as preparation for adulthood<br>Created the first curriculum—including a planned program for children to follow, routines (songs, finger plays, and circle time), and specialized objects for learning (called *gifts*—objects for children to handle) |
| **Maria Montessori** (1870–1952), Italian physician<br>"The greatest sign of success for a teacher . . . is to be able to say, 'The children are now working as if I did not exist.'" | Emphasized active, self-directed learning through play and freedom within limits<br>Advocated the multiage class<br>Created child-scale furnishings and promoted the use of developmentally appropriate educational materials |
| **Arnold Gesell** (1880–1961), American psychologist and pediatrician<br>"All of his abilities, . . . are subject to laws of growth. The task of child care is not to force him into a predetermined pattern but to guide his growth." | Launched a child study laboratory at Yale University<br>Developed age-related norms for children's growth and development |
| **Jean Piaget** (1896–1980), Swiss psychologist and biologist<br>"The principal goal of education is to create [people] who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—[people] who are creative, inventive and discoverers." | Proposed a theory of stages children move through in achieving cognitive maturity<br>Described ways in which children's thinking is qualitatively different from that of adults<br>Stressed that children learn through experimentation with objects |
| **Lev Vygotsky** (1896–1934), Russian psychologist<br>"The only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it." | Described the influence of language, culture, and social interaction on children's learning<br>Emphasized the importance of appropriate instruction |
| **Margaret McMillan** (1860–1931), English reformer and teacher<br>"The teacher of little children is not merely giving lessons. She is helping to make a brain and nervous system, and this work is going to determine all that comes after." | First used the term *nursery school*<br>Focused on whole-child learning through play and sensory experience<br>Emphasized working with parents and suggested doing home visits<br>Stressed the importance of specially trained teachers for young children |
| **John Dewey** (1859–1952), American educator<br>"Education therefore is a process of living and not a preparation for future living." | Advocated children's learning by doing through hands-on activities, projects, units of study, and a child-centered, integrated curriculum<br>Highlighted the value of play<br>Promoted respect for children's individuality<br>Founded the first "laboratory" school to study child development and teaching through systematic research and practice |

(Continued)

**TABLE 1.2** *Continued*

| Person | Contribution |
|---|---|
| **Patty Smith Hill** (1868–1946), American educator<br>"Observe the children and follow their lead." | Promoted hands-on learning, experimentation, and self-discovery<br>Wrote the song "Happy Birthday"<br>Wrote a kindergarten manual to systematically define best practices for young children<br>Founded the National Committee on Nursery Schools (1926), which eventually became the NAEYC |
| **Lucy Sprague Mitchell** (1878–1967), American educator<br>"Know and understand each child as never before, to help each child grow in the way that is best for him." | Established the Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE) in 1916 to teach teachers and conduct research<br>Founded Bank Street College of Education (with Wesley Mitchell and Harriet Johnson)<br>Created a writer's workshop for authors of children's books<br>Instrumental in national efforts to expand early childhood education beyond laboratory schools |
| **Loris Malaguzzi** (1920–1994), Italian early education specialist<br>"The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences." | Founder of Reggio Emilia's educational philosophy<br>Developed the idea for the *The Hundred Languages of Children* exhibit |

**FIGURE 1.2** Professional Support for DAP

- National Council for the Social Studies
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
- International Reading Association
- Association for Childhood Education International
- Council for Exceptional Children
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Education Association
- National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education

*Source*: Based on Horowitz, F. D., Darling-Hammond, L., and Bransford, J. (2005). Educating teachers in developmentally appropriate practice. In L. Darling-Hammond and J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world* (p. 114). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**FIGURE 1.3** Research Findings Associated with DAP

Several research studies have compared the performance of children in DAP-oriented classrooms with the performance of children in classrooms not characterized by DAP. Here are sample findings related to children's social and cognitive learning:

**Social Outcomes**

Children whose teachers use DAP tend to exhibit:
- Better social problem-solving skills
- More cooperation
- More favorable attitudes toward school and teachers
- More positive attitudes about themselves as learners
- Fewer negative social behaviors
- Fewer stress-related behaviors

**Cognitive Outcomes**

Children whose teachers use DAP tend to exhibit better:
- Creative-thinking skills
- Memory skills
- Mathematical problem-solving skills
- Grasp of mathematical concepts
- Ability to generalize numeracy skills from one situation to another
- Reading comprehension
- Listening skills
- Letter–word identification

*Source*: Based on Barnett (2008); Dunn, Beach, and Kontos (1994); Hart et al. (1998); Jambunathan, Burts, and Pierce (1999); Mantzicopoulos, Neuharth-Pritchett, and Morelock (1994); Payton et al. (2008); Sherman and Mueller (1996); UNICEF (2008); Wiltz and Klein (2001).

**TABLE 1.3 DAP and DEC Practices**

***NAEYC Guidelines for DAP***

- Creating a caring community of learners
- Teaching to enhance development and learning
- Planning curriculum to achieve important goals
- Assessing children's development and learning
- Establishing reciprocal relationships with families

***DEC Fundamental Values***

- Respect for all children and families
- High-quality, comprehensive, coordinated, and family-centered services and supports
- Rights of all children to participate actively and meaningfully within their families and communities

DAP encourages the placement of children with and without disabilities (Filler & Xu, 2006) and exceptionally bright children (Gadzikowski, 2013) in the same classroom. Such programs are described as inclusive programs, serving children with disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers. A basic premise of DAP is meeting children where they are and assisting them in reaching challenging yet achievable goals. The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) supports the use of DAP and asserts that high-quality programs using such practices are necessary for all children and should be a foundation in all early childhood programs (Groark, Eidelman, Kaczmarek, & Maude, 2011). However, simply placing a child with special needs in an inclusive classroom may not be adequate. Many special education experts believe that DAP is necessary but not sufficient to meet the needs of children with disabilities (Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2013). Children with special needs may require individualized strategies and varying levels of support that go beyond DAP. These specialized services are most effective when they are built upon a developmentally appropriate foundation. DEC developed a set of Recommended Practices that are complementary to and an extension of the DAP guidelines. The DAP guidelines developed by NAEYC and the Recommended Practices proposed by DEC have many similarities. They both stress:

- Individualized instruction and experiences
- Appropriate and meaningful instruction
- Integration of curriculum and assessment
- Emphasis on child-initiated activities
- Focus on child's active engagement
- Importance of social interaction
- Social and cultural appropriateness

The DAP guidelines and DEC Recommended Practices work together to support the needs of all young children, including those with disabilities, who are gifted, who are at risk, or who present social, cultural, or linguistic diversity (Groark et al., 2011). See Table 1.3 to compare the NAEYC guidelines and the fundamental values of DEC.

As you can see, there is empirical support for using DAP with diverse populations of children. However, additional studies specifically structured to answer questions of diversity are necessary before we can say with certainty that DAP meets the needs of *all* the children and families that early childhood educators serve.

## DAP Programs Vary in Structure and Content

LaJoya Gatewood and her husband are looking for an early childhood program in which to enroll their 3-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter. During their search, they visit three facilities, all of which are self-described as using DAP.

> *The literature for the Burcham Hills Child Development Center states, "We offer a developmentally appropriate array of activities for children designed to foster the development and well-being of the whole child. With the support of caring teachers, children play and experiment, making their own discoveries about the physical and social worlds in which they live. Children learn indoors and outside, in the classroom, at home, and in the neighborhood. Field trips are an integral part of the program as are visits to the classroom by parents and other family members."*
>
> *During a visit to the Christian Children's Center, they are told, "The philosophy that guides the program at CCC is based on Christian values and developmentally appropriate practice. One of the obvious distinctions of our center is the Christian atmosphere we strive to maintain. Strong efforts are made to incorporate the loving presence of Jesus Christ throughout our program. This includes saying a short prayer before meals, having Bible stories in our book corner and at story times, and teaching children simple Bible verses. We also stress, as Jesus did, the importance of loving and caring for one another. In addition, we appreciate that children develop at varying rates and create programs that allow children to progress at a comfortable pace in learning the skills and concepts necessary for later success in school."*
>
> *The brochure for the African Enrichment Community School says, "At the African Enrichment Community School, children experience a dynamic infusion of African American culture into the early childhood curriculum. Framed within the context of developmentally appropriate practice, children come away with a love of learning and positive self-esteem gained through meaningful activity. Hands-on learning is central to the program. Children learn about Africa and their rich cultural heritage; they learn about African American and African heroes and heroines, music, arts and crafts, and folktales. Teachers come from Africa as well as the United States, and all have firsthand knowledge of African culture."*

All these programs have features the Gatewoods like, but each is distinct from the others. The family wonders, "How can programs that differ so greatly all be described as developmentally appropriate?" The answer to their question lies in the fact that DAP is a philosophy, a framework, and an approach to working with children. It is not a single curriculum (Bredekamp, 2017; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Consequently, early childhood programs that incorporate DAP into their overall design vary across program settings and across curriculum models. At the same time, they share a common commitment to the principles that are a hallmark of the DAP philosophy.

### DAP Is Adaptable Across Program Settings

The strategies associated with DAP can be carried out in a range of early childhood settings—part time or full day; home based, center based, or school based; private or public; nonprofit or for profit. They are applicable to programs serving infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-age children, children who are linguistically diverse, and children with special needs. DAP can be observed in large programs and in ones that are small, as well as in urban, rural, and suburban locations.