APPENDIX A

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Action

Educator Snapshots and Reflections

This collection of vignettes and reflections, written by early childhood educators, provides snapshots of the educators' interactions with children and what they have learned through their everyday experiences. The writers describe a specific learning experience, reflect on what the children learned and what they learned as educators, and make connections to the 2020 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice.

As you read through this collection, consider the following questions to self-reflect and go deeper into understanding developmentally appropriate practice or to engage staff or students as they reflect on developmentally appropriate practice.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe the learning experience. What were the learning goals? What happened? What did the children learn? How did the teacher adapt their practice in response to the children?
2. Describe your thoughts. What did you observe and notice? What did you learn? What questions arose?

Connections to Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Each piece in the collection highlights specific connections to various principles and guidelines from the 2020 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice. After reviewing the position statement, discuss how the learning experience reflects those principles and guidelines. What connections do you see to other parts of the position statement? Make connections to joyful learning, if applicable.

Collection of Vignettes and Reflections

- Funds of Knowledge in Action: Expanding Children's STEM Knowledge with Neighborhood Connections: How One RISE Teacher Integrates Children's Lived Experiences in Her Preschool Science Curriculum
- More than One Way to Tell a Story in Kindergarten
- We Put Paper on the Floor: Supporting the Emergent Literacy Skills of Infants and Toddlers
- The Power of Play in the Kindergarten Classroom: Transforming Centers into Places of Engaged Learning
- "Why Are We Doing This?" A Conversation with Preschoolers About Similarities and Differences
- A Scribble Is Never Just a Scribble: Art, Story, and Process in a Classroom of 2s and 3s
- Exploring Perspective Taking and Environmental Protection Through Stories in First Grade

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The Power of Play in the Kindergarten Classroom

Transforming Centers into Places of Engaged Learning

Amy Blessing

Overview

As a kindergarten teacher in a public school in North Carolina, I began my teaching career believing that the more organized and in control I was, the more the children I taught would learn. My classroom had learning centers for literacy, science, and math; however, like many other teachers, I did not use the centers as tools for children to make choices, explore, play, and tinker as they pursued their interests or problem solved with peers. My classroom ran like a well-oiled machine. I told children exactly what to do and where to go. But what were the children learning? Was I preparing them to be problem solvers and creative thinkers, or was I training them to be passive in their own learning? Through years of experience and professional development, I learned the value in autonomy, both for myself and for young children. I began to give children opportunities to make choices. I learned that in the letting go came freedom and joy!

What My Classroom Used to Look Like

My very first classroom came equipped with centers such as dramatic play and block areas, sand and water tables, and various toys and tools that encourage building and tinkering, such as LEGO bricks. I knew from my college classes and student teaching experience that these were important elements of an early childhood classroom, but I didn't fully know why or how to connect them with learning goals. Instead, these centers were pushed to the perimeter of the room and used during "free time" after we completed our "work." The main focus of my classroom was a group of tables in the center of the room. They were used most often for whole group learning and teacher-directed small group activities, many of which featured worksheets. The children spent time in the centers daily, but I dictated who could go where and with whom. Their play was stifled by my control. The table work was not engaging, meaningful, or effective, and center play felt like time-filling busywork to us all.

Turning Things Around

This center play time, without intentional teacher scaffolding and support, helped create a belief that play was not a rigorous way to reach academic goals. As centers were being removed from many kindergarten classrooms across the country, my colleagues and I educated ourselves on how to advocate for what we knew deep down was right for young children. I applied for and was accepted to a three-year professional development opportunity to build teacher leaders across North Carolina called The Power of K: Quality Kindergartens for the 21st Century (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction 2007). To guide us on this journey, participants were given copies of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8,* Third Edition (Copple & Bredekamp 2009), and every aspect of our classroom day was looked at through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice.

Through this initiative, I gained valuable knowledge about how powerful child-directed play could be and how academic standards could be met *through* play. With this new understanding, I began to make changes both in how I scheduled our daily routines and in the physical layout of my classroom. I rearranged the furniture to enlarge the play centers. The block center was relocated to the middle of my

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classroom and became the largest learning area in the room other than our whole group carpet. Student tables were no longer bunched together in the middle of the room; instead, they were incorporated across the various centers. I also provided more time to engage in play in our daily schedule, with a goal of at least one hour of uninterrupted child-directed play. Play centers became a major tool for developing social-emotional and academic skills. These changes also allowed me to relinquish some control to the children, and it was at this point that I started to see children as capable thinkers who can make decisions in their own learning.

What My Classroom Is Like Now

Using the position statement on developmentally appropriate practice as a guide, I try to maintain a balance between child-directed activities and the many necessary skill-based activities. This is done by providing ample time for free play and exploration in centers as well as embedding child choice in skill-based activities in stations. Centers in my classroom include blocks, dramatic play, art, science, writing, puzzles and games, math, sand/sensory table, light table, library, and STEM engineering. During the block of time allotted for child-directed play in our daily schedule, the teachers can be found supporting and scaffolding the children's learning while they are playing in their center of choice. Our role during this time is to observe, facilitate, and ask questions to guide and promote learning.

The centers reflect and support what the children are learning. In each center, children are given access to a range of materials. They decide what to work with and what they want to create. For example, if the class is learning about seasonal changes in the fall, children might be found investigating pumpkins and leaves in the science center and light table, painting pictures using fall colors in the art center, or pretending to work at an apple market in the dramatic play center. Whole and small group read-alouds and discussions about things we notice happening outside during the fall (e.g., what the animals are doing, what is happening to trees and plants, how the weather is changing, events taking place in our community) provide children with an opportunity to connect their play to their learning.

While literacy and math skills are naturally embedded in children's play, stations are skill-based activities that provide children with opportunities to practice specific skills and standards in a playful way. Children work at literacy and math stations during a time separate from centers in our daily schedule, most often when I am working with small groups for reading and math learning experiences. At the literacy station, children might work on reading and writing sight words, blending and segmenting consonant-vowel-consonant words, alphabet recognition, and comprehension skills. Meanwhile, children at the math station can play partner games that develop their number sense, count sets of objects, and compare sets and numerals. All of these are important skills in the kindergarten year that require ongoing practice to build mathematical fluency and flexibility of thought (the ability to see and represent numbers in multiple ways and to solve problems using multiple strategies). When these stations are presented in a fun, inviting way, children will want to visit them again and again. The children in my class often choose to revisit these games and activities during any free time they have.

The Vignettes

A.4 Studying Bears in the Early Winter

While studying the habits of animals in winter, we take a deeper dive into the lives of American black bears, animals that make their homes in our region. Our whole group discussions and learning experiences incorporate a wide range of resources, including nonfiction books, digital presentations and videos (like feeds from cameras placed in the dens of hibernating bears), and visits from guest speakers with expertise on bears.

Using different centers to promote free play and learning. In the block center, one small group of children uses real tree branch blocks and construction paper to create a forest habitat for black bear figurines. They enlist their friends in the art center to assist in making trees and bushes. Two children, Jonathan and Estrella, are in the writing center. Hearing that their friends are looking for help to create a habitat, they look around and decide a hole puncher and blue paper are the perfect tools for making blueberries—a snack black

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bears love to eat! Now multiple centers and groups of children are involved in making the block center become a black bear habitat.

Bringing child development skills and learning concepts together. While developing their fine motor and collaboration skills, the children display their understanding of science concepts, such as the needs of animals and living things. In the dramatic play center, some of the children pretend to be bear biologists, using stethoscopes, scales, and magnifying glasses to study the health of a couple plush black bears. When these checkups are complete, they write reports describing the health of the bears (exercising their literacy and writing skills). A few children at the easels in the art center are painting pictures of black bears, and they later add captions and labels, helping to integrate literacy skills into their play.

Discovering how skill-based literacy and math work fits into the centers. The literacy and math stations also support our study of black bears. Many children enjoy making books in the writing center using our Black Bear Word Wall. Others use word cards to build and write sentences that correspond to photographs of bears. They write captions and labels for black bear pictures taken from old calendars or printed off the internet. They solve addition and subtraction story problems using black bears as a topic.

As children's skills developed, so did the ways they worked at the centers. Since our study of American black bears, the skill levels and independence of the children I teach have grown immensely. Often, kindergartners return from winter break and experience an "aha!" moment. For the children in my class, it was like a lightbulb turned on: they discovered that their writing has meaning, and that's all they needed to take off as readers and writers. They were excited to create signs and labels for the room, taking risks by attempting to sound out and write multisyllabic words. This excitement for writing as a way to communicate what they are thinking only increased as the kindergarten year unfolded, and it played a huge role in their next interest.

A.5

Studying Birds in the Spring

The children are fascinated by the birds that visit the feeders outside the classroom windows. Following the children's interests, we again dive deeper into studying animals, this time birds. Books are gathered from classroom collections and the school library to invite children to read more about birds. The children decide to build a tall tree to make a bird habitat. They begin by creating a tall structure with hollow blocks from the block center. Using brown paint, they cover large pieces of easel paper and work as a team to wrap and tape the painted paper to the blocks to make the tree trunk. Next, they twist long pieces of bulletin board paper to make branches. Some children use scissors to cut out a variety of leaves to tape to the branches. Carefully referencing bird books and photographs, they draw, paint, and fold construction paper birds to put in the tree. The children also decide to build a "window blind" to be able to sit, observe, and write about birds in the tree undetected.

Using developing skills at play-based centers. The dramatic play center becomes a bird watching tour center. Children take turns role-playing as park rangers, bird experts, ticket sellers, and bird watchers. After making reservations and selling tickets, bird watchers meet with the park rangers, who explain the rules of bird watching. The park rangers then guide their classmates around the room, equipped with binoculars and bird checklists, to go on a bird watching tour. When birds (photos of birds hung around the classroom) are found, they record and tally it on their checklists. Children can be heard reminding each other to be as still and quiet as possible, strengthening their self-control. Their excitement in their pretend play is evident as they ooh and aah at every new bird they spot. Through these activities, they develop language skills, literacy and math skills, and executive function skills.

Creating complex informational books, posters, and presentations about birds. The children are excited to make books using the Bird Word Wall in the writing center. No longer making simple word books, they now compose informational books about birds or create works of fiction with birds as the main characters. Jonathan writes a multipage book about a bird and all of his bird friends. Some

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children also work in research teams to become experts on a bird of their choice. They create bird posters with facts and pictures and present them to the rest of the class. Dollar store bird calendars are cut apart, laminated, and placed in the art center for inspiration. As times goes on, the bird paintings done at the easel become more intricate and detailed. Estrella becomes very skilled at looking closely at the details in bird shapes and feather designs. After watching her work, her classmates are excited to use similar strategies in their own art. While her expressive language skills are still developing, she becomes a leader in our classroom.

Self-Reflection

What I once thought would bring chaos to the classroom actually helped the children I teach become independent learners, making decisions in their own learning while collaborating with their peers. When the children's play was controlled by me, it was rigid and never grew in complexity—often, that controlled play resulted in the chaos I was striving to avoid, as children were not engaged in a meaningful way. I did not give them opportunities to revisit the same center each day, denying them a chance to make plans in their play. Their block structures were simple and basic. Why would they spend time building something intricate if they knew it had to be cleaned up before they went home for the day? Now children know they can come back to their structure in the following days to change and add to their designs or make it more complex. Children who create stories in the dramatic play center can return for days, continuing to tell and refine the stories. The children in my class are heard making plans with their peers as well as collaborating and negotiating with them. I find children returning to play where they have found success, helping to build upon their strengths.

Letting go of my control helped the children's learning and play elevate. The power of choice coupled with ample time to explore interests has led to children displaying their learning in ways that I never anticipated. Children with expressive language delays or who are dual language learners have used play as a tool to show what they know. They are able to shine and become leaders in our classroom in ways beyond traditional academics. For example, one of the children who made blueberries with a hole puncher and blue paper has expressive language delays and preemergent writing skills, which made it challenging for him to show what he knows through oral or written communication. The provided materials and tools offered him a different kind of opportunity to demonstrate what he learned about what black bears eat. He became so proficient at using the hole puncher and designing and creating blueberry bushes for the block center that other children went to him for guidance to make their own. Children who are not yet reading or writing as independently as their peers are often able to excel in the creative arts or in designing and engineering in the block center. Child-led writing increases in this type of play because they are writing for authentic purposes—that is, because they *want to*—not because they have been told it is time to write.

One of the strongest outcomes of giving children choice and autonomy has been an increase in independence. Many teachers and administrators from across the state have visited my classroom over the years, and one of the observations I hear most frequently is how independent the children in my class are. They can be seen getting classroom materials when needed, taking care of these materials, and cleaning up with little guidance from teachers. They do not look for permission to get paper or tools needed for their work. While this is a great load lifted off the teachers in the room, the greater benefit is for the children. Their independence in their play directly translates to their independence as learners. They are learning to try challenging tasks and recognize when to ask for help. They know how to be responsible with materials in their play as well as in their work. They are developing a sense of ownership over their thoughts and ideas. They are no longer passive in their own learning.

Connections to Developmentally Appropriate Practice

"Play promotes joyful learning that fosters self-regulation, language, cognitive and social competencies as well as content knowledge across disciplines. Play is essential for all children, birth through age 8" (NAEYC 2020a, 9). Centers are powerful tools to enhance learning and invite deeper exploration of specific topics. They allow educators to integrate content areas, tapping into

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how children learn best. “Self-directed play, guided play, and playful learning, skillfully supported by early childhood educators, build academic language, deepen conceptual development, and support reflective and intentional approaches to learning—all of which add up to effective strategies for long-term success” (NAEYC 2020a, 10). While there is intentionality in providing materials to support children’s interests and explorations, the children always have agency and choice in the specifics of the play. It is the educator’s role to facilitate, support, and encourage that play.

In my classroom, I offer suggestions and provide materials, but I value where children decide to take their play (guideline 1). Often, I have placed materials in the dramatic play center thinking that they would be of high interest to the children, only to find the materials sitting to the side while the children take their play in an unexpected but equally meaningful direction. Other times, the materials and prompts I have provided are in high demand, carrying the children’s play for extended periods of time. It is my job to not only honor the children’s learning in both situations but also embed literacy and math into their play and foster their curiosity and social and emotional skills (guidelines 1 and 5). Above all else, my job is to help them discover the joy of learning.

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A Scribble Is Never Just a Scribble

Art, Story, and Process in a Classroom of 2s and 3s

Ron Grady

Overview

At the beginning of the year, the 2- and 3-year-olds in our class often asked us, the teachers, to draw particular things: family members, dogs, and other people and animals they encountered regularly. The children enjoyed the work we teachers produced but remained convinced that any work they themselves did was subpar because it did not match their teachers' style. Typically, their drawings were done hastily, left just as quickly, and forgotten.

We wanted the children to see the value of their work and be proud of what they created, so we stopped drawing for them. Instead, we focused on encouraging them in the work they did. Here's how we made the shift and got the children excited and talking about what they drew.

A Process of Inquiry

"Tell me about what you have here" is a statement that invites a response. It does not demand a particular right answer, offer a value judgment, or seek to change the process or product a child has made or is working on. What this statement *does* do is ask a child to bring the inquirer a little deeper into their thinking; as teachers, this is one of the most important and fulfilling features of the work we do each day.

Through informative statements and invitations like this one, we encouraged the children in the work they did. For example, we might pick up a scribble left behind on the table and say things like "Wow! Tell me about this. It looks like you worked hard on it," "I see a lot of lines going really far across the page. It's all in red. Tell me more," or "Whoa. That was all done really fast (slow). You seemed focused on it." These instances of scaffolding offer children opportunities to begin deconstructing their own processes of thinking and creating and reinforce the value of their processes and products.

With time, scribbles that were once abandoned began to have value for the children. The children held on to them and even sought out their teachers to share their work. The pieces of work assumed stories and identities that demanded to be not only valued but *written* and *shared*. Along with the children's names, we also began adding these stories about the art to the art itself.

The Vignettes

In the following vignettes, I offer two examples of the ways we incorporated process and assessment through this work. In each, you will see how assessment was integrated into a child's ongoing and unfolding work. By doing so, I was able to see the children's level of performance in contexts that reflected their unique ability and skill and in which they were intrinsically motivated, focused, and engaged.

A.7 "A Monster, I'm Not Afraid of Anything at All"

Three-year-old Jiro runs over to me, clutching in his right hand a white half sheet with loopy lines of crayon etched across the front. "Ron! Ron! I made this. It's called 'A Monster, I'm Not Afraid of Anything at All.' I did it."

"Whoa, that is a lot of color!" I exclaim. "Look at the work you did—such hard work."

"Yeah," he replies. "Write it down."

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After finding a pen, I write down Jiro's words, verbatim, on the work he created. I then ask him if he has a story to accompany it. He is ready for my question and excitedly dictates a story about a bear who loses his mommy and then finds her in a cave.

When Jiro is finished telling his story, he goes off to play. For today, at least, he has finished his work. His pride is evident, and seeing it, I know that one of the most important goals has already been achieved.

• • •

A.8 The Name

Another day, I am on the block rug when Raven, who is 2 years old, comes up to me with her work. I take a brief moment to revel in the comfort that this practice of close sharing has fostered in our classroom.

"Tell me about this," I say intently as she kneels next to me.

Her page is alive with colorful lines that dart across the paper at all angles. Fine motor control? Check. An appreciation of thorough composition? Check. There is a circular figure in orange in the background; three intense strokes of red, purple, and black race across the top. A squiggle of yellow is to the right. There is a series of blue lines that moves up and down across the whole page, and I quietly wonder what they are. Waves? Birds? Snakes?

"It's my name," Raven tells me, her voice gleeful.

"Your name? Whoa!" I point to another of the blue lines. "And what about that?"

"That's my mommy's name," she informs me.

As we talk about many of the lines, I learn that she has written the names of all of the members of her family, including her grandparents. By asking specific questions about her work, I am able to learn more about Raven's interests in literacy, her understanding of text and pictures, and her ideas about the information those elements convey. I am also showing her that I value her work *and* the thought she puts behind it.

How different our conversation might have been had I said only something like "Nice work" or "It's so beautiful!"

Self-Reflection

Over the following days and weeks, the children's interest in giving context to their art continued to deepen. One child was inspired to dictate a series of stories over multiple days; each story was illustrated with a similar array of swirling lines across a formerly stark white page. We teachers began putting the children's work on the walls—but, as I always insisted, never without at least a few words to accompany them. By adding children's words to their artwork in the form of titles, descriptions, and stories, we extended the process of learning. It is a critical part of integrated learning to show children that the work they do in art relates to the work they do on the reading rug—and that all their work has an overarching connection to themes and experiences that make up the content of their thinking.

A scribble is never just a scribble, and we should always be open to the true depth and beauty of a child's creative mind. Don't be afraid to say "Tell me about what you have here." You might just be surprised at what you find out.

Connections to Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In reflecting on these experiences integrating children's art, storytelling, and narrative insights into their work, the connections to the 2020 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice become clear.

For example, educators are urged to plan the environment, schedule, and activities in ways that promote each child's development and learning (guideline 4, section D). In our classroom, this meant thinking about and discussing the fact that we teachers were spending significant time drawing for the children. The situation invited us to make many adjustments in how we responded to the children, set up the classroom, and thought about children's work. These changes in our practice, including introducing a process of inquiry, helped us as teachers to better

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understand the children's thinking and helped the children value their own work more highly.

The position statement also emphasizes the necessity of collecting a child's work samples and considering their performance in authentic situations to construct a genuine understanding of that child (guideline 3, section D). Raven's squiggles and lines were genuine points of pride for her. Discussion of these marks was embedded in our authentic conversation, and her enthusiasm, intention, and skill gave me insight into multiple levels of Raven's relationship with mark making. Through the languages of story, mark making, and art, I see children demonstrating their strengths and competencies in different ways. I observe how one child is developing an emergent sense of narrative that he connects to his own life and how another is developing fine motor persistence while also honing her appreciation for the differences between letter forms and the forms used to convey artistic information. Jiro the storyteller and Raven the scribe are each right on track exactly where they are, and they should be celebrated for it.

In observing the children's creations, it was evident that while there were some similarities in their interest in and ability to draw, there were also variations in the themes they chose to focus on and their techniques. These variations contributed to our understanding of each child's creative and intellectual processes. Some children were making purely experimental marks on paper, while others were creating marks with the intention of representing specific information. The children's diverse range of interests, fine motor skills, experiences, and social contexts all contributed to them experiencing these activities in their own way (principle 4).

Finally, the position statement emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach to learning (principle 7). Learning and development in any given domain is not an isolated occurrence, and by considering multiple subject areas together, concepts can be made more meaningful and engaging for children. There is an inherent artistry in making literacy-related marks as well as a relatedness between narrative understanding and oral storytelling. Educators' awareness of this interconnectedness encourages children to build on their understanding in each domain.

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