



References to *Play* in NAEYC Position Statements

Developmentally Appropriate Practice Guidelines

<http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/dap>

From: Principles of Child Development and Learning that Inform Practice

Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities... A pervasive characteristic of development is that children's functioning becomes increasingly complex—in language, social interaction, physical movement, problem solving, and virtually every other domain. Increased organization and memory capacity of the developing brain make it possible with age for children to combine simple routines into more complex strategies.

All young humans must negotiate the transition from total dependence on others at birth to competence and internal control, including learning to regulate their emotions, behaviors, and attention. For young infants, there are tasks such as learning to soothe themselves from arousal to a settled state. A few years later, self-regulation means developing the capacity to manage strong emotions and keep one's attention focused. Throughout the early years, adults play significant roles in helping children learn to self-regulate. Caregivers are important in helping very young children to modulate their emotional arousal; for example, soothing babies and then helping them learn to soothe themselves. In the preschool years, teachers can help children develop self-regulation by scaffolding high-level dramatic play, helping children learn to express their emotions, and engaging children in planning and decision making.

During the early years of life, children move from sensory or behavioral responses to symbolic or representational knowledge. For example, young children are able to navigate their homes and other familiar settings by recall and sensory cues, but later they come to understand and can use abstractions such as *left* and *right* or read a map of the house. It is around age 2 that children begin to represent and reconstruct their experiences and knowledge. For example, children may use one object to stand for another in play, such as a block for a phone or a spatula for a guitar. Their ability to use various modes and media to convey their meaning increases in range and scope. By the preschool years, these modes may include oral language, gestures and body movement, visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpting), construction, dramatic play, and writing. Their efforts to represent their ideas and concepts in any of these modes enhance the knowledge itself.

Always mentally active in seeking to understand the world around them, children learn in a variety of ways; a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting all these kinds of learning... Several prominent theories and bodies of research view cognitive

development from the constructivist, interactive perspective. That is, young children construct their knowledge and understanding of the world in the course of their own experiences, as well as from teachers, family members, peers and older children, and from books and other media.... Children take all this input and work out their own understandings and hypotheses about the world. They try these out through interactions with adults and other children, physical manipulation, play, and their own thought processes—observing what happens, reflecting on their findings, imagining possibilities, asking questions, and formulating answers. When children make knowledge their own in these ways, their understanding is deeper and they can better transfer and apply their learning in new contexts.

Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence... Children of all ages love to play, and it gives them opportunities to develop physical competence and enjoyment of the outdoors, understand and make sense of their world, interact with others, express and control emotions, develop their symbolic and problem-solving abilities, and practice emerging skills. Research shows the links between play and foundational capacities such as memory, self-regulation, oral language abilities, social skills, and success in school.

Children engage in various kinds of play, such as physical play, object play, pretend or dramatic play, constructive play, and games with rules. Observed in all young animals, play apparently serves important physical, mental, emotional, and social functions for humans and other species, and each kind of play has its own benefits and characteristics. From infancy, children act on the world around them for the pleasure of seeing what happens; for example, repeatedly dropping a spoon on the floor or pulling the cat's tail. At around age 2, children begin to demonstrate symbolic use of objects—for instance, picking up a shell and pretending to drink as from a cup—at least when they have had opportunities to observe others engaging in such make-believe behavior.

From such beginnings, children begin to engage in more mature forms of dramatic play, in which by the age of 3–5 they may act out specific roles, interact with one another in their roles, and plan how the play will go. Such play is influential in developing self-regulation, as children are highly motivated to stick to the roles and rules of the play, and thus grow in the ability to inhibit their impulses, act in coordination with others, and make plans. High-level dramatic play produces documented cognitive, social, and emotional benefits. However, with children spending more time in adult-directed activities and media use, forms of child play characterized by imagination and rich social interactions seem to be declining. Active scaffolding of imaginative play is needed in early childhood settings if children are to develop the sustained, mature dramatic play that contributes significantly to their self-regulation and other cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional benefits. Adults can use proven methods to promote children's extended engagement in make-believe play as well as in games with rules and other kinds of high-level play. Rather than detracting from academic learning, play appears to support the abilities that underlie such learning and thus to promote school success.

Development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery, and also when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills... Human beings, especially children, are motivated to understand or do what is just beyond their current understanding or mastery. Effective teachers create a rich learning environment to activate that motivation, and they make use of strategies to promote children's undertaking and mastering of new and progressively more advanced challenges.

In a task just beyond a child's independent reach, adults and more-competent peers contribute significantly to the child's development by providing the support or assistance that allows the child to succeed at that task. Once children make this stretch to a new level in a supportive context, they can go on to use the skill independently and in a variety of contexts, laying the foundation for the next challenge. Provision of such support, often called *scaffolding*, is a key feature of effective teaching.

At the same time, children need to be successful in new tasks a significant proportion of the time in order for their motivation and persistence to be maintained. Confronted by repeated failure, most children will simply stop trying.

Repeated opportunity to practice and consolidate new skills and concepts is also essential in order for children to reach the threshold of mastery at which they can go on to use this knowledge or skill and apply it in new situations. Young children engage in a great deal of practice during play and in other child-guided contexts.

From: Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Creating a caring community of learners... Relationships are an important context through which children develop and learn. Children construct their understandings about the world around them through interactions with other members of the community (both adults and peers). Opportunities to play together, collaborate on investigations and projects, and talk with peers and adults enhance children's development and learning. Interacting in small groups provides a context for children to extend their thinking, build on one another's ideas, and cooperate to solve problems.

Teaching to enhance development and learning... Teachers plan the environment, schedule, and daily activities to promote each child's learning and development... Teachers arrange firsthand, meaningful experiences that are intellectually and creatively stimulating, invite exploration and investigation, and engage children's active, sustained involvement. They do this by providing a rich variety of materials, challenges, and ideas that are worthy of children's attention.

Teachers present children with opportunities to make meaningful choices, especially in child-choice activity periods. They assist and guide children who are not yet able to enjoy and make good use of such periods.

Teachers organize the daily and weekly schedule to provide children with extended blocks of time in which to engage in sustained play, investigation, exploration, and interaction (with adults and peers).

Teachers know how and when to *scaffold* children's learning—that is, providing just enough assistance to enable each child to perform at a skill level just beyond what the child can do on his or her own, then gradually reducing the support as the child begins to master the skill, and setting the stage for the next challenge... Scaffolding can take a variety of forms; for example, giving the child a hint, adding a cue, modeling the skill, or adapting the materials and activities. It can be provided in a variety of contexts, not only in planned learning experiences but also in play, daily routines, and outdoor activities.

Planning curriculum to achieve important outcomes. The curriculum consists of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and understandings children are to acquire and the plans for the learning experiences through which those gains will occur. Implementing a curriculum always yields outcomes of some kind—but *which* outcomes those are and *how* a program achieves them are critical. In developmentally appropriate practice, the curriculum helps young children achieve goals that are developmentally and educationally significant. The curriculum does this through learning experiences (including play, small group, large group, interest centers, and routines) that reflect what is known about young children in general and about these children in particular, as well as about the sequences in which children acquire specific concepts, skills, and abilities, building on prior experiences.

Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation

<http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape>

From: Curriculum—Indicators of Effectiveness

Valued content is learned through investigation, play, and focused, intentional teaching.

Children learn by exploring, thinking about, and inquiring about all sorts of phenomena. These experiences help children investigate “big ideas,” those that are important at any age and are connected to later learning. Pedagogy or teaching strategies are tailored to children’s ages, developmental capacities, language and culture, and abilities or disabilities.

NAEYC’s Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria

<http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/standardsintro>

From Standard 1: Relationships

Teaching staff support children’s development of friendships and provide opportunities for children to play with and learn from each other.

Teaching staff support children as they practice social skills and build friendships by helping them enter into, sustain, and enhance play.

From Standard 2: Curriculum

The schedule provides children learning opportunities, experiences, and projects that extend over the course of several days and incorporates time for: play, self-initiated learning, creative expression, large-group, small-group, and child-initiated activity.

From Standard 3: Teaching

Teachers organize time and space on a daily basis to offer infants opportunities to play individually, in pairs, and in small groups.

From Standard 4: Assessment

Teachers observe and document children’s work, play, behaviors, and interactions to assess progress. They use the information gathered to plan and modify the curriculum and their teaching.

From Standard 5: Health

Children of all ages have daily opportunities for outdoor play (when weather, air quality, or environmental safety conditions do not pose a health risk). When outdoor opportunities for large-motor activities are not possible because of conditions, the program provides similar activities inside. Indoor equipment for large-motor activities meets national safety standards and is supervised at the same level as outdoor equipment.

From Standard 9: Physical Environment

Staff organize and group materials on low, open shelves to encourage children to use them independently. Staff rotate and adapt materials to promote learning and extend children’s play opportunities.

Materials and equipment that facilitate focused individual play or play with peers are available in sufficient quantities to occupy each child in activities that meet his or her interests.

Outdoor play areas, designed with equipment that is age and developmentally appropriate and that is located in clearly defined spaces with semiprivate areas where children can play alone or with a friend...

NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct

http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/ethical_conduct

From: Ethical Responsibilities to Children

Childhood is a unique and valuable stage in the human life cycle. Our paramount responsibility is to provide care and education in settings that are safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for each child. We are committed to supporting children’s development and learning; respecting individual differences; and helping children learn to live, play, and work cooperatively. We are also committed to promoting children’s self-awareness, competence, self-worth, resiliency, and physical well-being.

Learning to Read and Write

http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning_readwrite

From: What research reveals

Children take their first critical steps toward learning to read and write very early in life. Long before they can exhibit reading and writing production skills, they begin to acquire some basic understandings of the concepts about literacy and its functions.

Children learn to use symbols, combining their oral language, pictures, print, and play into a coherent mixed medium and creating and communicating meanings in a variety of ways.

...Thus the picture that emerges from research in these first years of children's reading and writing is one that emphasizes wide exposure to print and to developing concepts about it and its forms and functions. Classrooms filled with print, language and literacy play, storybook reading, and writing allow children to experience the joy and power associated with reading and writing while mastering basic concepts about print that research has shown are strong predictors of achievement.

...Early literacy activities teach children a great deal about writing and reading but often in ways that do not look much like traditional elementary school instruction. Capitalizing on the active and social nature of children's learning, early instruction must provide rich demonstrations, interactions, and models of literacy in the course of activities that make sense to young children. Children must also learn about the relation between oral and written language and the relation between letters, sounds, and words. In classrooms built around a wide variety of print activities, then in talking, reading, writing, playing, and listening to one another, children will want to read and write and feel capable that they can do so.

From: Recommended teaching practices

During the infant and toddler years. Children need relationships with caring adults who engage in many one-on-one, face-to-face interactions with them to support their oral language development and lay the foundation for later literacy learning. Important experiences and teaching behaviors include but are not limited to... frequently playing with, talking to, singing to, and doing fingerplays with very young children...

During the preschool years. ...opportunities to engage in play that incorporates literacy tools, such as writing grocery lists in dramatic play, making signs in block building, and using icons and words in exploring a computer game...

Early Childhood Mathematics: Good Beginnings

<http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/mathematics>

From: Recommendations

In high-quality mathematics education for 3- to 6-year-old children, teachers and other key professionals should...

Enhance children's natural interest in mathematics and their disposition to use it to make sense of their physical and social worlds. Young children show a natural interest in and enjoyment of mathematics. Research evidence indicates that long before entering school children spontaneously explore and use mathematics—at least the intuitive beginnings—and their mathematical knowledge can be quite complex and sophisticated. In play and daily activities, children often explore mathematical ideas and processes; for example, they sort and classify, compare quantities, and notice shapes and patterns

Provide ample time, materials, and teacher support for children to engage in play, a context in which they explore and manipulate mathematical ideas with keen interest. Children become intensely engaged in play. Pursuing their own purposes, they tend to tackle problems that are challenging enough to be engrossing yet not totally beyond their capacities. Sticking with a problem—puzzling over it and approaching it in various ways—can lead to powerful learning. In addition, when several children grapple with the same problem, they often come up with

different approaches, discuss, and learn from one another. These aspects of play tend to prompt and promote thinking and learning in mathematics and in other areas.

Play does not guarantee mathematical development, but it offers rich possibilities. Significant benefits are more likely when teachers follow up by engaging children in reflecting on and representing the mathematical ideas that have emerged in their play. Teachers enhance children's mathematics learning when they ask questions that provoke clarifications, extensions, and development of new understandings.

Block building offers one example of play's value for mathematical learning. As children build with blocks, they constantly accumulate experiences with the ways in which objects can be related, and these experiences become the foundation for a multitude of mathematical concepts—far beyond simply sorting and seriating. Classic unit blocks and other construction materials such as connecting blocks give children entry into a world where objects have predictable similarities and relationships...

A similar progression from intuitive to explicit knowledge takes place in other kinds of play. Accordingly, early childhood programs should furnish materials and sustained periods of time that allow children to learn mathematics through playful activities that encourage counting, measuring, constructing with blocks, playing board and card games, and engaging in dramatic play, music, and art.

Finally, the teacher can observe play to learn more about children's development and interests and use this knowledge to inform curriculum and instruction. With teacher guidance, an individual child's play interest can develop into a classroom-wide, extended investigation or project that includes rich mathematical learning. In classrooms in which teachers are alert to all these possibilities, children's play continually stimulates and enriches mathematical explorations and learning.

Early Learning Standards

http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning_standards

From: Benefits

Besides their potential benefits for young children, early learning standards may carry other advantages. The process of discussing what should be included in a standards document, or what is needed to implement standards, can build consensus about important educational outcomes and opportunities. Strong reciprocal relationships with families and with a wide professional community can be established through these discussions. Families can expand their understanding about their own children's development and about the skill development that takes place in early education settings, including learning through play and exploration. Teachers, too, can expand their understanding of families' and others' perspectives on how children learn.

NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation

<http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/ppp>

From Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Candidates also understand and apply their understanding of the multiple influences on young children's development and learning and how those influences may interact to affect development in both positive and negative ways. Those influences include the cultural and linguistic contexts for development, children's close relationships with adults and peers, economic conditions of children and families, children's health status and disabilities individual developmental variations and learning styles, opportunities to play and learn, technology and the media, and family and community characteristics.

...the learning environments created by early childhood teacher candidates are supportive. Candidates demonstrate their belief in young children's ability to learn, and they show that they can use their understanding of early childhood development to help each child understand and make meaning from her or his experiences through play, spontaneous activity, and guided investigations.

From Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Observation gives insight into how young children develop and how they respond to opportunities and obstacles in their lives....Because spontaneous *play* is such a powerful window on all aspects of children's development, well-prepared candidates create opportunities to observe children in playful situations as well as in more formal learning contexts.

From Standard 4: Standards for EC Professional Preparation Programs

Well-prepared early childhood professionals make purposeful use of various learning formats based on their understanding of children as individuals and as part of a group, and on alignment with important educational and developmental goals. A flexible, research-based *repertoire of teaching/learning approaches to promote young children's development* includes ...creating support for play.