

References to *Play* in NAEYC Position Statements¹

Developmentally Appropriate Practice Guidelines

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, children are able to navigate their homes and other familiar settings long before they can understand the words *left* and *right* or read a map of the house.

A major change happens at around age 2, when 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 spoon for a guitar. Their ability to use various modes and media to convey their meaning increases in range and scope. Over the preschool years, these modes may include oral language, gestures and body movement, visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpting), construction, dramatic play, and writing. Further, 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 intellectual development from the constructivist, interactive perspective. Young children gain knowledge of the world from teachers, family members, peers and older children, and even the media. Children take such input, along with what they learn in the course of their own experiences, 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 transfer and apply their learning in new contexts.

¹ NAEYC Position Statements are available on the NAEYC website: <http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements>

Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as promoting language, cognition, and social competence... Children of all ages love to play, and it gives them opportunities to explore the 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 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, preschool children begin to engage in more mature forms of dramatic play, in which they 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, coordinate 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.

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. Once children make this stretch to a new level in a supportive context, they 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, research demonstrates that children need to be successful at that learning much of the time—perhaps as much as 70 to 80 percent 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 in play and other child-guided contexts.

From: Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

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

Teaching to enhance development and learning... Teachers organize an environment that will 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—i.e., 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, or modeling the skill. It also can be provided in a variety of contexts, including scaffolding in play, daily routines, and outdoor activities, as well in planned learning experiences.

Planning curriculum to achieve important outcomes. The curriculum consists of the knowledge and skills children are to gain 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 outcomes that are developmentally and educationally significant. The curriculum does this through learning experiences (including play) 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 learn specific concepts and skills, building on prior knowledge and skills.

NAEYC's Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria

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 space and select materials in all content and developmental areas to stimulate exploration, experimentation, discovery, and conceptual learning. ...Teachers organize time and space on a daily basis to allow children to work or play individually and in pairs, to come together in small groups, and to engage as a whole group.

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 Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation

From Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs are grounded in a child development knowledge base. They use their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs and of the multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for each child..

...Well-prepared early childhood degree candidates base their practice on sound knowledge and understanding of young children's characteristics and needs. This foundation encompasses multiple, interrelated areas of children's development and learning—including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, and aesthetic domains; play, activity, and learning processes; and motivation to learn—and is supported by coherent theoretical perspectives and by current research.

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

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that child observation, documentation, and other forms of assessment are central to the practice of all early childhood professionals. They know about and understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. They know about and use systematic

observations, documentation, and other effective assessment strategies in a responsible way, in partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence the development of every child.

...Candidates demonstrate skills in conducting systematic observations, interpreting those observations, and reflecting on their significance. 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: Using Developmentally Effective Approaches to Connect with Children and Families

Students prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that teaching and learning with young children is a complex enterprise, and its details vary depending on children's ages, characteristics, and the settings within which teaching and learning occur. They understand and use positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with young children and families. Students know, understand, and use a wide array of developmentally appropriate approaches, instructional strategies, and tools to connect with children and families and positively influence each child's development and learning.

...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...

- Teaching through social interactions
- Creating support for play
- Supporting learning through technology.
- Using integrative approaches to curriculum²

NAEYC's Code of 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.

Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation

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.

² The four cited teaching/learning strategies are excerpted from the 11 suggested teaching/learning approaches included in the position statement.

Learning to Read and Write

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

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

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.

Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8

From: Statement of the Issues

The appeal of technology can lead to inappropriate uses in early childhood settings. Technology and media are tools that are effective only when used appropriately. The appeal of technology and the steady stream of new devices may lead some educators to use technology for technology's sake, rather than as a means to an end. Technology should not be used for activities that are not educationally sound, not developmentally appropriate, or not effective (electronic worksheets for preschoolers, for example).

Passive use of technology and any type of screen media is an inappropriate replacement for active play, engagement with other children, and interactions with adults. Digitally literate educators who are grounded in child development theory and developmentally appropriate practices have the knowledge, skills, and experience to select and use technology tools and interactive media that suit the ages and developmental levels of the children in their care, and they know when and how to integrate technology into the program effectively...

From: Principles to Guide the Appropriate Use of Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8

Above all, the use of technology tools and interactive media should not harm children. The healthy cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and linguistic development of the whole child is as important in the digital age as ever. Access to technology tools and interactive media should not exclude, diminish, or interfere with children's healthy communication, social interactions, play, and other developmentally appropriate activities with peers, family members, and teachers...

Developmentally appropriate practices must guide decisions about whether and when to integrate technology and interactive media into early childhood programs. Appropriate technology and media use balances and enhances the use of essential materials, activities, and interactions in the early childhood setting, becoming part of the daily routine. Technology and media should not replace activities such as creative play, real-life exploration, physical activity, outdoor experiences, conversation, and social interactions that are important for children's development...

Interactions with technology and media should be playful and support creativity, exploration, pretend play, active play, and outdoor activities. Play is central to children's development and learning. Children's interactions with technology and media mirror their interactions with other play materials and include sensorimotor or practice play, make-believe play, and games with rules. Therefore, young children need opportunities to explore technology and interactive media in playful and creative ways. Appropriate experiences with technology and media allow children to control the medium and the outcome of the experience, to explore the functionality of these tools, and to pretend how they might be used in real life. Increasingly, educational media producers are exploring the learning power of interactive games and collaborative play involving children and their family members or teachers. Digital games fall into a similar category as board games and other self-correcting learning activities, with the same opportunities and cautions related to children's developmental stages...

Technology tools can support the ways educators measure and record development, document growth, plan activities, and share information with parents, families, and communities. Teachers can use digital portfolios that include photographs as well as audio and video recordings to document, archive, and share a child's accomplishments and developmental progression with families in face-to-face conferences or through communication and social media tools. Displaying photos in the classroom of children's drawings or block buildings, along with narratives dictated by the children or explanations of why these types of play are important, can help families understand the critical role of play in early childhood development...

Using technology to support practice and enhance learning requires professional judgment about what is developmentally and culturally appropriate. Early childhood educators who are informed, intentional, and reflective use technology and interactive media as additional tools for enriching the learning environment. They choose technology, technology-supported activities, and media that serve their teaching and learning goals and needs. They align their use of technology and media with curriculum goals, a child-centered and play-oriented approach, hands-on exploration, active meaning making, and relationship building...