

Introduction and Book Overview

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Why a Casebook on Developmentally Appropriate Practice?

As a resource for the early childhood profession, the text *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* (hereafter called *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*) continues to evolve to meet the needs of teachers and teacher educators who must navigate a constantly shifting early childhood education landscape. Previous versions of NAEYC’s position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, upon which *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* is based, sought to provide a framework for “best practice.” Over time the position statement has been expanded to reflect advanced knowledge of child development and learning and of multiple appropriate and effective approaches to teaching children. For example, as reiterated in the fourth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, developmentally appropriate practice does not mean a single “best” practice. Rather, it emphasizes a dynamic and complex set of practices that respect, value, and build on the varied strengths children and their families bring to the educational process. It encompasses the understanding that the social, cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts in which children, their families, and teachers live and work have a tremendous influence on these children’s development and learning. Likewise, the supporting resources and the ways faculty teach developmentally appropriate practice to the early childhood educators of the future have had to change and adapt to facilitate educators’ understanding that the unique and vital work of educating and caring for children must reflect our current knowledge of child development and learning as situated within diverse social, cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts.

With the publication of the fourth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, NAEYC (2022) introduced new resources to support faculty in the teaching of developmentally appropriate practice (see [NAEYC.org/dap/faculty-resources](https://naeyc.org/dap/faculty-resources)). A casebook as a companion to the fourth edition presented additional opportunities for further study and engagement with developmentally appropriate practice in new ways.

Case study methodology serves as an informative and transformative framework for teachers, teacher educators, and teacher candidates to engage in critical analysis and discussion of and reflection on how a teaching practice might or might not be developmentally appropriate practice, a process through which they can grow professionally. Importantly, professional growth is both a process and a product of lifelong learning that may resonate with educators and teacher educators. The case studies in this book present authentic classroom scenarios that reflect real-life challenges and opportunities facing educators. The cases encourage educators and teacher educators to engage in further study, reflection, and discourse to deepen their understanding of developmentally appropriate practice. In doing so, each may become a “reflective practitioner” (Schön 1983, 1987) and, in turn, become more knowledgeable and skillful at developing and implementing contextually adaptive strategies and approaches to working with children to optimize their developmental and learning potentials.

For example, key to developmentally appropriate practice is the intentional teaching and decision making that occur when educators consider specific developmental and learning needs in terms of the three core considerations: (1) commonality—understanding the general processes of children’s development and learning at different ages; (2) individuality—seeing each child as an individual with unique characteristics and experiences; and (3) context—acknowledging and understanding the diverse social, cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts within which children, their families, and teachers construct their experiences. These considerations help educators not only adapt but also *become adept at adapting* their teaching to common and individual characteristics and contextual circumstances, enabling educators to thrive at implementing developmentally appropriate practice. In addition, as stated by NAEYC’s (2020) most recent position statement on developmentally

appropriate practice, “Educators make decisions that result in developmentally appropriate practice within the context of their specific program setting, a larger early childhood sector, and extended systems with institutionalized policies and practices” (29). All of these contextual factors suggest that the complex navigation and negotiation among various terrains require educators’ intentional efforts to engage in developmentally appropriate practice.

The cases in this book promote critical thinking of creative, flexible, and reflective pedagogical solutions that align with the developmentally appropriate practice framework. Informed by developmentally appropriate practice, effective educators use the aforementioned core considerations to intentionally scaffold children’s learning so that each child may achieve their potential. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that the most potent scaffoldings occur within the child’s “zone of proximal development,” defined as the difference between what a child can achieve with assistance (for example, from the educator) and what they can achieve unassisted. The case examples in this volume demonstrate how appropriate teacher scaffoldings of children’s development and learning optimally operate within the three core considerations, their associated nine principles of child development and learning, and the six guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in action. They also demonstrate teacher reflections on the unexpected teachable moments, challenges that arise, and emerging ideas and opportunities for future practice, highlighting the complexity and intentionality of educators’ decision-making process in real-life teaching situations.

Instruction using the case analysis model in teacher education programs offers indirect firsthand experiences and possibilities for preservice teachers to develop strong content and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and positive dispositions to make informed decisions about effective solutions involving developmentally appropriate practice. Thus, case study instruction should occupy an important place in teacher preparation programs (Heitzmann 2008). Yet, this case study pedagogy has not been widely applied in early childhood teacher preparation. This book seeks to fill this gap in them teaching and teacher education literature and hopes to inspire the integration of case studies in teacher education programs.

About this Book

The cases are organized into eight parts, each of which is edited by an early childhood education professional who has extensive expertise in the topic. The case writers likewise have an abundance of diverse experience in working directly or indirectly with children through their various professional capacities and bring their authentic voices to the case studies. While cases vary in their usage of first or third person, all are inspired by actual events that have occurred in early childhood programs or families’ homes, and many are the firsthand experiences of the authors.

The first six parts mirror the six guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in action, as shown in the graphic below.



Parts 7 and 8 provide additional focus on two important groups of learners who have unique developmental and learning needs and are increasingly present in classrooms throughout the country:

- Part 7: Supporting Children with Disabilities and Implementing Inclusive Practices
- Part 8: Supporting Dual Language Learners and Respecting Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Individually and collectively, these parts revolve around the three core considerations, nine principles, and six guidelines. They also reflect current knowledge in (1) pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment, (2) ethical professional practices, (3) the importance of considering the contexts of children and families from diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and (4) effective practices for supporting children with disabilities and/or dual language learners in early childhood programs and classrooms.

Each case follows the same basic structure:

Connections to *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*: This section outlines the specific chapters and content in the fourth edition of the book and the position statement that the case illustrates. The case may describe a scenario in which developmentally appropriate practice is evident, or it may show a situation in which the teacher is not applying the guidelines and principles effectively. In either scenario, it is the accompanying critical, “reflection-in-action” (making decisions on teaching while it is occurring [Schön, 1983, 1987]) “reflection-on-action” (thinking back on an action, that has already occurred [Dewey, 1910, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987]), and/or “reflection-for-action” (thinking about planning for future actions [Killion & Todnem 1991]) that make a difference in educators’ professional growth. This is because educators’ reflections (whether about a past, present, or future action) are conducted with the intention of improving their teaching practices to ultimately benefit children’s learning and development.

Case Overview: This section includes a brief description of the purpose of the case and provides background information for context.

Learning Objectives: This section offers concrete, defined learning objectives to be achieved upon reading and evaluating the case.

Case Narrative: The details of the case are set forth in this section.

Takeaways and Next Steps: The section includes reflections from the educators in the case scenario and invites readers to think about next steps, forecasting based on the study of the case—what dilemmas may be ongoing, what challenges and opportunities need monitoring, and what next-level solutions might be, all of which reflect the educators’ role as important decision makers in their vital work with children.

Case Discussion Questions: This section includes targeted questions on case specifics related to developmentally appropriate practice.

Some cases also provide general discussion questions, which pertain to the topic of the case but are not specific to it, and/or suggested resources for additional study.

Online Resources

Additional cases for further exploration and study can be found online at

<need URL>.

Note on Terminology

You will see both *dual language learner* and *emergent bilingual* used in this book to refer to young children who are learning English while simultaneously mastering proficiency in their home language.

Integrating this Casebook in Teacher Education Programs

This casebook can be easily integrated into teacher education. For instance, teacher preparation programs can incorporate it in both their teaching methods and fieldwork courses to engage preservice teachers in critical thinking and perspective taking about the pedagogical challenges and opportunities embedded in the cases (for example, solving ethical dilemmas; facing limited resource affordance; teaching children of different age groups, developmental characteristics, and social and cultural backgrounds). Thus, these cases can be instrumental in introducing preservice teachers to real-life classroom scenarios they may similarly encounter in their fieldwork.

Furthermore, teacher education course instructors can use the critical thinking questions that are case specific and general topic questions for in-class discussions, online discussion boards, and assignments. These questions can serve as starters for preservice teachers to (1) reflect on their own experience observing classroom teaching; (2) foster respect for diverse viewpoints and multiple approaches to solving pedagogical challenges; (3) develop analytic, problem-solving, critical thinking, and perspective-taking skills; and (4) identify opportunities for improving practice.

Course instructors may use specific cases to spark conversations about developmentally appropriate practice with preservice teachers. For example, discussion and analysis of cases may start individually, then continue in small groups, and finally occur with the whole group. Instructors may also provide opportunities to foster a discourse on developmentally appropriate practice inside the classroom and extend it outside the classroom with intentional assignments, such as individual or collaborative inquiry-based analytic projects and reflective writing. These assignments may encourage preservice teachers to individually and collaboratively identify key issues and brainstorm practical solutions. The process can promote both individual construction (Piaget 1963) and collaborative co-construction of knowledge (Vygotsky 1978). A variety of opportunities for learning about developmentally appropriate practice can foster a community of educators who appreciate the pedagogical challenges and innovative possibilities of working with children who have diverse social and cultural identities and developmental characteristics.

In addition, an early childhood teacher curriculum may be designed in a way that allows preservice teachers to revisit case studies at different points in their coursework and fieldwork. Over time, as their practical experience and knowledge increase, these preservice teachers may offer varying analyses and perspectives that reflect their own professional growth. For instance, as preservice teachers learn more about family engagement, they may apply such knowledge to analyzing a case from a family engagement perspective.

Integrating this Casebook in Professional Development

While *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* and this companion casebook can effectively introduce preservice teachers to the field of early childhood education and the vital yet complex work with children, they also serve as equally effective mechanisms to reinforce and remind in-service teachers who are knowledgeable about developmentally appropriate practice of the dynamic and intricate complexities of putting various aspects of developmentally appropriate practice into action. Furthermore, the casebook may motivate in-service teachers to reflect on their own engagement with developmentally appropriate practice and ways in which they can strengthen their own practices. Professional development presents itself as such an opportunity for fostering lifelong learning in educators. While educators may seek resources on their own, such as using this casebook, to continue developing their teaching craft, they should also be well supported with opportunities (for example, workshops and seminars from their school districts or early learning programs) to engage in continuous professional development to further establish themselves as professionals and advance their teaching expertise. For instance, school districts may leverage and incorporate both *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* and this casebook in professional development activities for in-service teachers, especially those who have had little or no exposure to

the developmentally appropriate practice framework. In this way, professional development is a critical means through which educators grow and become better at the critical yet complex art of implementing developmentally appropriate practice with intentionality.

Ongoing Learning

The work of putting developmentally appropriate practice into action starts with understanding the richness and complexity of the processes of child development and learning and the educational practices that best support this development and learning in all areas. Each interaction with children, families, and other early childhood professionals is an opportunity for educators to learn and grow. Thus, it is imperative that educators understand that learning about developmentally appropriate practice is an ongoing process as demonstrated by the case studies.

There are many options for using and engaging with the cases in this book. Each offers a jumping-off point for more discussion and learning. For example, to become actively immersed in the stories of the educators, the children, and the families; to consider the questions and takeaways carefully; and then to engage in meaningful analysis and discussion with fellow students and colleagues is to begin to understand what these narrative accounts reveal to us about why developmentally appropriate practice is so important in nurturing child development and learning. The cases offer glimpses and insights into the everyday and the unique, the challenging and the surprising, the revelatory, the stressful, and the joyful—everything that is involved in becoming and being an effective early childhood educator.

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