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Developmentally appropriate practices: Strengths and weaknesses

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Developmentally appropriate practices: Strengths and weaknesses

Abstract

This paper is a review of the literature relative to developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education. The primary focus of this paper was to look at the strengths and weaknesses of developmentally appropriate practices in today's early childhood classroom. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) was described and discussed in the research as the following: age appropriate, and individually appropriate practices and curricula for early childhood students and educators (National Association for the Education of Young Children). Early childhood research and theory was discussed to determine the need for careful planning when teaching young children. The critical side of the issue dealt with realities in trying to implement the developmental model in the face of many problems. These problems include overcrowded classrooms and tight budgets. The intent of this paper was to present a balanced view of the pros and cons concerning the education of young children in a developmentally appropriate manner. This discussion focused on some of the real problems educators face in trying to do so. The conclusion of this study dealt with recommendations for finding a balance in any early childhood program, informing parents prior to implementation, and having the resources available in order to successfully plan an early childhood program that is developmental in nature.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

BY

Barbara Ford

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Strengths and Weaknesses

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The quality of our nation's educational system has been under intense public scrutiny for many years. While much attention has been directed toward secondary and post-secondary education, the field of early childhood also must examine its practices in light of current knowledge of child development and learning because of criticisms in the literature.

In recent years, a controversial trend has emerged concerning an increased emphasis on formal instruction in academic skills in early childhood programs. This trend toward formal academic instruction for younger children is based on misconceptions about early learning (Elkind, 1986). A growing body of research has emerged recently affirming that children learn most effectively through a concrete, play-oriented approach to early childhood education (Katz, 1991). This research has changed the manner in which early childhood programs are developed.

Early childhood programs have changed in response to social, economic, and political forces; however, these changes have not always taken into account the basic developmental needs of young children, which have remained constant. Some authors take the position that early academics is contrary to what we know about how children

learn (Elkind, 1987). Programs should be tailored to meet

the needs of children, rather than expecting children

to adjust to the demands of a specific program.

> ...the National Association for the Education
> of Young Children (NAEYC) provides the early
> childhood education field with the following
> definition of developmental appropriateness
> which has two dimensions: age appropriateness
> and individual appropriateness. (1) Age
> appropriateness: human development research
> indicates that there are universal, predictable
> sequences of growth and change that occur in
> children during the first nine years of life.
> These predictable changes occur in all domains
> of development; physical, emotional, social,
> and cognitive. Knowledge of typical development
> of children within the age span served by the
> program provides a framework from which teachers
> prepare the learning environment and plan
> appropriate experiences. (2) Individual
> appropriateness: each child is a unique person
> with an individual pattern and timing of growth,
> as well as individual personality, learning
> style, and family background. Both the curriculum
> and adult's interactions with children should be
> responsive to individual differences. Learning
> in young children is the result of interaction
> between the child's thoughts and experiences with
> materials, ideas, and people. These experiences
> should match the child's developing abilities,
> while also challenging the child's interest and
> understanding (Bredekamp, 1987, p.4).

Historical Background

Looking at early childhood education from this

perspective is not new. Even during the 1960s and 1970s

when open education was a major force in education,

early childhood educators embraced a similar attitude

toward the education of young children. The open

education movement was similar in that children moved

at their own pace and to their own developmental level. They were not encouraged to be placed in rigid grade levels such as first grade, second grade, or other grades. The thinking was more of a primary school setting in which children moved along in their educational experience without grade-assigned guidelines (Katz, 1991). During this period of open education, many ideas and research, the type of which are used today were employed. Even then, children's play was thought to be a primary vehicle for, and indicator of, their mental growth. It was thought that play enabled children to progress along the developmental sequence from the sensorimotor intelligence of infancy to preoperational thought in the preschool years, to concrete operational thinking exhibited by primary children (Fein, 1979; Fromberg, 1986; Piaget, 1952; Sponseller, 1982).

In addition to its role in cognitive development, play in the past was also thought to serve important functions in children's physical, emotional, and social development. Also, play provided a means for children to practice newly acquired skills.

During early childhood education training and teaching of years past, the work of Piaget (1950, 1972); Montessori (1946); Erikson (1950); and other child development theorists and researchers demonstrated that

children learn by doing. These prominent early childhood
forces laid the groundwork for new early learning
experiences of young children; however, there began to
be a shift in thinking in later years. During the 1980s,
particularly, a great deal of public attention was
focused on the quality of our nation's educational
system. In many cases, concerned adults who wanted
children to succeed, applied adult education standards
to the curriculum for young children and pressured early
childhood programs and curriculum to demonstrate that
children were really learning (Elkind, 1986). There
began a shift toward readiness and academics in the
early years of educating a young child.

The early childhood years became a boot camp, a
prep school, a preacademic, and even an academic program
in prekindergarten and kindergarten grade levels;
children were trained in the ways of higher grades
(Peck, 1991). There began to be a heavy reliance on
worksheets, workbooks, and total class teacher-directed
lessons, with short free choice play periods, and then
only as a reward after their work was finished.
Children were encouraged to work silently and to compete
for grades. With this focus, play was not a major
vehicle through which children learned (Hills, 1987).

During the 1980s young children were being

subjected to accelerated standards for achievement and to improve their test scores. Consequently, teachers were under pressure from parents and administrators to alter curriculum and instruction.

Recent proposals for educational reform emphasized academic achievement and preparation for technological change. As a result, many parents and administrators began to raise achievement standards for young children. Teachers were pressured, and young children were hurried and hot-housed, or caused to acquire knowledge and skills earlier than is typical (Sigel, 1987).

The pressure for young children to achieve came from several sources. Parents applied pressure on children for various reasons:

-- their own ambitions for achievement.
-- their own need to help with multiple responsibilities, especially if they are single.
-- anxiety about the highly competitive futures children face (Hills, 1987).

There began a broad change in social values. Heightened expectations for young children may have signaled a change in the nation's view of children. For example, Americans were less likely to see childhood as a unique period of development, requiring special nurturance (Winn, 1981); adult interests may have become

paramount (Douvan, 1985).

During the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, many early childhood educators have reversed their thinking and have reverted back to play-based theoretical practices, and they pleaded their case for developmentally appropriate practices. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has played a major role in enforcing and promoting these ideals in teachers and administrators, as well as parents.

Many programs became developmentally appropriate to a fault (Demattias, 1990). It would appear that there is now beginning to be a reexamination of the manner in which some early childhood programs were implemented. Taking into consideration the basic premises of a developmentally appropriate program, many critics do accept the theoretical background (Demattias, 1990). There is, however, some discussion among educators of young children relative to a balance in programming and an excess of extremes in the developmental model. Today, there seems to be a swing of the pendulum for change again.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the literature that describes practices of a developmentally appropriate early childhood program. The major focus of

this study, however, will be to emphasize strengths and weaknesses of the developmental model. To achieve this purpose, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What is the support for developmentally appropriate programming?

2. What are the criticisms against developmentally appropriate programming in recent literature?

Need for the Study

There has been a renewed interest in the past five years concerning developmentally appropriate education. Many teachers, administrators, and some parents are asking questions, and reevaluating the basic premises of early childhood education.

Many criticisms stem from the original concerns when the developmental model was promoted and implemented in many classrooms across the country. Much of what works, according to this model, is only feasible under ideal conditions such as small class size and an abundance of adult assistance and supervision. Unfortunately, the majority of early childhood classrooms, prekindergarten through third grade, are not ideal settings, instead these classrooms contain large numbers of students and a poor student/teacher ratio. Because of these concerns, there needs to be an examination of the highly academic

model and the developmentally appropriate model.

Limitations of the Study

There are many resources available to educators in researching early childhood education, and developmentally appropriate practices. Finding a large volume of critical literature is not as plentiful, simply because critical questions have only recently been raised. Much of the critical issues that are being brought forth in dealing with DAP (Developmentally Appropriate Practice), are the same issues that have been argued for years, such as large class size and limited staff.

It may not be a popular position to take in education today, being critical of the developmental model; as such, the literature has just begun to trickle into our educational domain.

Most of what was found concerning the developmentally appropriate approach dealt with ideal conditions versus the real world of teaching today. It is from this perspective that this topic will be discussed.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study will be defined to mean the following:

Child centered - An environment where the learner is the center of the curriculum planning and the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator.

Concrete Operational Thinking - Children begin to think "logically", as described by Piaget. They learn to organize their knowledge, classify objects, and do thought problems (7 - 11 years).

DAP - Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Developmental Appropriateness - (Age appropriateness), predictable changes in all domains of knowledge - physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. (Individual appropriateness) - each child as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth. These are the two dimensions of developmental appropriateness.

Experiential - The practice of learning through hands-on experiences of real life. Experience learning by doing.

Discovery Learning - Learning by experience through concrete, real objects, as well as the freedom to break new ground by self-directed learning.

Facilitator - The teacher acts as an enabler of learning, guiding the student, and allowing a freedom of self-discovery.

Hot-Housed - Causing children to acquire knowledge and skills earlier than is typical.

Integrated Learning - Learning in a manner that combines a variety of subject areas, such as math, science, and language arts.

Multi-Age Grouping - The practice of placing students of varied age ranges in one classroom.

NAEYC - (National Association for the Education of Young Children). The nation's largest organization of early childhood educators.

Play-Based Theory - The theory that children expand their understanding of themselves, and the world around them through play.

Pre-Operational - Piaget describes this stage as the time children develop basic language, as well as beginning writing and drawing abilities. Children at this stage are still in need of hands-on, tactile objects in order to internalize many concepts (2 - 7 years).

Reading Readiness - The theory that there is the existence of a set of skills that is a necessary prerequisite to formal reading instruction.

Retention - The practice of holding students back in a specific grade level and not letting them proceed as normal. Holding a prekindergarten student out for an additional year.

Sensory-Motor Intelligence - According to Piaget, children obtain a basic knowledge of objects tactically through their senses (0 - 2 years).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Arguments for the Developmental Model

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood as the years from birth through age eight. NAEYC believes that an index of the quality of primary education is the extent to which the curriculum and instructional methods are developmentally appropriate for children five through eight years of age.

There are some specific guidelines to which the developmental model adheres. The curriculum is planned to be appropriate for the age span of the children within the group and is implemented with attention to the different needs, interests, and developmental levels of those individual children. Developmentally appropriate curriculum provides for all areas of a child's development: physical, emotional, social, and cognitive through an integrated approach.

Realistic curriculum goals for children should address all of these areas in age appropriate ways, according to this model. It describes children's learning as something that does not occur in narrowly

defined subject areas, but as developmental and integrated learning.

Another aspect of the model is that appropriate curriculum planning is based on teacher's observations and recordings of each child's special interests and developmental progress. Realistic curriculum goals and plans are based on regular assessment of individual needs, strengths, and interests. Curriculum is based on both age-appropriate and individually appropriate information. This model also stresses that curriculum planning emphasizes learning as an interactive process. Teachers prepare the environment for children to learn through active exploration and interaction with adults, other children, and materials (Biber, 1984; Fromberg, 1986; Ramii, 1985).

Interacting with materials and people results in learning. Finished products or correct solutions that conform to adult standards are not encouraged as accurate criteria for judging whether learning has occurred. Play is a major component in this model. "During play, children feel successful when they engage in a task they have defined for themselves, such as finding their way through an obstacle course or pouring water in and out of various containers" (Bredekamp, 1987, p.4).

The learning activities and materials should be

concrete, real, and relevant to the lives of young children.

> "Children need years of play with real objects and events before they are able to understand the meaning of symbols such as letters and numbers. Learning takes place as young children touch, manipulate, and experiment with things and interact with people" (Erickson, 1963, p.7).

Using the developmentally appropriate model, the use of workbooks, worksheets, coloring books, and adult-made models of art for children to copy are not thought to be appropriate for young children, especially those younger than six. Basic learning materials and activities for appropriate curriculum include sand, water, clay, and accessories to use with them including the following: hollow table and unit blocks, many types of games, manipulative toys, dramatic play props, housekeeping areas, pleasing books and recordings, supplies of paper, water-based paints and markers, and other materials for creative expression; other activities and equipment include large muscle equipment, field trips, and classroom responsibilities such as helping with routines and problem-solving opportunities with other children and adults.

Early childhood programs that are developmentally appropriate should also allow for a wider range of developmental interests and abilities than the

chronological age range of the group. "The teacher should be prepared to meet the needs of children who exhibit unusual interests and skills outside the normal developmental range" (Kitano, 1982, p.16).

The teacher should also try to increase the difficulty of the activities, to challenge the children as they develop understanding and skills. Teachers need to listen, observe, and interpret children's behavior; also, asking questions, making suggestions, and adding more complexity and new ideas are important to the success of this model. The environment is truly child-centered, and the adult is somewhat of a guide or facilitator (Elkind, 1986, p.37).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's Position Statement on School Readiness points out that contrary to what is commonly assumed, there are no tests by which to determine reliably whether a child is ready to begin school. Therefore, the only legally and ethically defensible criterion for determining school entry is whether the child has reached the legal chronological age of school entry. Some schools and districts are experimenting with mixed-age groupings as a way of reducing grade retention rates, and encouraging children to help each other in all areas of learning.

The developmentally appropriate classroom appears

to reap benefits when the ideal components are in place.

Class size is a critical element for success. This gives

the child and the teacher the environment that good early

childhood education can thrive and grow on for the best

interests of everyone involved.

Developmentally appropriate classrooms are most

successful when the class sizes are small, with

appropriate staffing. According to Katz, (1991):

> ...teachers are more likely to be able to
> accommodate the diversity of experiences,
> backgrounds, languages, and interests of their
> pupils if their classes are small, or if they
> have the services of a qualified full-time aide.
> Having two adults in each class makes it easier
> to staff classes with speakers of more than one
> language. Small child/staff ratios provide
> teachers with the opportunity to spend unhurried
> time with every child, to address each child's
> unique needs, and to develop good relationships
> with parents (p.6).

Multi-age grouping is one of the tenets of this kind of

program. More districts are attempting to place two

grade levels together in order to provide peer teaching

and cooperative learning, and to lessen the need for

retention. It is also found to be beneficial for a

child to have the same teacher for an extended period of

time, not for just a brief nine month period.

Demattias (1990), referred to DAP as a teaching

philosophy, a way of thinking, an approach, which

involves both the what and the how (curriculum and

methodology) that is designed for the age group served, and implemented with attention to the needs and differences of the individual children in the group. This approach accepts that children construct knowledge through active involvement in relevant and interesting activities.

The younger the child, the more experiential and integrated the methodology must be. The teacher must be aware that within any group of children, the level of knowledge and skill varies (Demattias, 1990, p.41). With that in mind, if children are to understand fully, and remember what they have learned, the information must be meaningful to them in the context of their experiences and development. "Filling out reams of worksheets is meaningless busy work that is used as a management technique; the problem is that it creates behavior problems by dull, non-engaging skill and drill practices (Tegano, 1991, p.18). In a developmental classroom hands-on, real, concrete experiences replace paper and pencil activities, which enhances learning. By third grade many children are burned-out on worksheets (Katz, 1991).

"A developmentally appropriate advocate accepts that when expectations exceed children's capabilities, and children are pressured to acquire skills too far beyond

their abilities, their motivation to learn, as well as
their self-esteem, may be impaired" (Fogarty, 1991,
p.12). In many highly structured classrooms, self-esteem
is diminished by early school failure, resulting from
inappropriate practices. "The child's maturity level
and readiness determine the teaching tasks and approaches
used" (Spodek, 1991, p.11). In contrast, the early
childhood classroom that does not operate under the
developmentally appropriate philosophy will incorporate
a prescribed curriculum by the teacher with practices that
may stifle a child's love of learning and general attitude
toward the school environment.

Guidelines for evaluating appropriate classroom
practices are vital. Drake (1993) has advocated the
following:

1. Focus on the total child, taking into
   consideration the cognitive, affective, and
   psychomotor growth of the child.
2. The curriculum must be organized around the
   developmental needs, interests, and learning
   styles of each child, rather than around a
   single text, curriculum guide, or time schedule.
3. The learning environment must encourage active
   participation on the part of each child, so
   that children can learn through observation,
   exploration, and verbalization. Self-expression
   should be encouraged through writing, drawing,
   and movement activities.
4. In an early childhood classroom, how the
   curriculum is taught is as important as what
   is taught. Process is as important as product
   for young children (p.20).

Taking into consideration the tenets of early

childhood education that so many teachers believe and strongly support. Many components need to be in place for developmentally appropriate programs to work for all concerned. Many researchers, teachers, and theorists are supporting one another with their thoughts and research concerning quality early childhood programs. The developmental program makes sense to many professional teachers, for it appears to be a healthy approach toward teaching and learning. It is not, however, without its critics.

Clearly, the developmental model has many accepted components for its theory is based on the research of many well respected early childhood researchers. There is, however, a need to examine some of the limitations of this approach. As a result of many restrictions in early childhood classrooms today, DAP has had some difficulty being implemented to the fullest extent.

CHAPTER III

Criticisms of the Developmental Model

Many criticisms of the developmental model are

appearing in the literature. One concern deals with

class size.

> Professional organizations and leaders have
> emphasized that adequate staffing is an essential
> element of high-quality early childhood programs.
> There is a strong professional consensus that
> every class for young children should have at
> least two adults. Classes for five-year-olds
> should be no larger than 20 with one teacher and
> one assistant, and classes for four-year-olds
> should be no larger than 16 with one teacher and
> preferably two assistants. However, these
> standards have not been met in most school
> systems (Day, 1990).

This would have been an ideal setting; unfortunately

in realistic terms, class sizes are generally much

larger. Additionally, it is rare that one teaching

assistant is available for any length of time, let alone

two assistants in the average classroom.

> ...developmentally appropriate programs work best
> when children are able to move independently
> around the classroom and manage their own
> transitions from one activity to another, use
> materials appropriately and independently without
> close adult supervision. How can they accomplish
> this in classes of 30? It becomes more of a
> management situation (Demattias, 1990, p.18).

In an ideal world class sizes would be small, with

an ample supply of adults available to assist the teacher.

In most cases, large classes make it much more difficult

to implement a developmental program. "Many teachers
working alone in a self-contained classroom may feel
overwhelmed at the prospect of managing a developmentally
experiential learning environment" (Uphoff, 1990, p.19).

Another aspect of the developmental curriculum
model is how effectively it can be implemented in a
half-day kindergarten program versus an all-day setting.

> ...teachers in both full and half-day programs
> often feel pressured to cover an extensive
> curriculum and produce high academic results.
> Teachers in half-day programs may feel especially
> pressured, so they do not often believe there is
> enough time to address the required content and
> provide a developmental program, and it is quite
> frustrating (Mize, 1990).

Early childhood educators want to do what is right,
according to the research; however, reality often dictates
a more structured, teacher-directed mode of learning for
many youngsters. As a result, busywork may be assigned,
especially in large group settings.

Developmental programs can take many forms, and one
of the components essential to this model is multi-age
grouping. In this form, children of varied chronological
ages and developmental levels are placed in one classroom,
or two classrooms open to each other with two grade levels
interchangeably mixed. The thinking is that it promotes
communication, collaboration, and mutual support among
teachers.

"Most early childhood classrooms are not structured

for multi-age grouping, and many teachers prefer not to team teach" (Hymel, 1990, p.6). There has been much discussion of the pros and cons of this issue. "Children and parents like to know where they are in terms of grade level, there is some comfort in knowing that they have accomplished a level of learning" (Hymel, 1990, p.7).

Parents are voicing a strong concern relative to some developmental practices. "Many parents are more familiar and comfortable with traditional modes of instruction and worry that academic achievement will not be as high in the developmental/experiential classroom" (Burton, 1990, p.10).

In some classrooms, there is a concern about letting children go, without direction, and that discovery without teacher intervention can lead to a lack of real learning. This is one of the major arguments against the developmental model. If it is implemented to an extreme, the children will not acquire the skills needed to cope with subsequent grade levels. "There may be academic gaps in the child's learning, if left to learn whatever they are interested in that day" (Tierrey, 1991, p.22).

The question of accountability is one that teachers and administrators cannot ignore. Program success is often evaluated by standardized test scores, although the use (and misuse) of standardized tests has been

widely criticized. "Many school systems have recognized the limitations and inaccuracies of test results for young children, but most school systems administer some kind of state or national achievement tests by the end of third grade" (Warger, 1988, p.17). Like it or not, testing does continue in the primary grades and many educators believe that it is necessary for accountability, as well as for funding programs.

"Teachers must carefully assess children's needs and work to provide all the resources needed to ensure children's maximum development and achievement" (Drake, 1990, p.11). The fact that testing is often thought to be inappropriately used, testing continues, and more than likely will be a force in the future.

Unfortunately, curriculum is often driven by test scores. Many administrators expect testing to be done in the early grades. They may not view testing as inappropriate at certain ages. "In the public eye, teacher and school effectiveness are often measured by standardized test scores. The powers that be ask, what about accountability?" (Warger, 1988, p.158).

Because children have differing backgrounds, experiences, and individual needs, some children may need additional educational support to reach their full potential. Educational delays, family disruptions, and

poverty may all contribute to the need for supplementary programs. Teachers must carefully assess children's needs and work with families and school personnel to locate and provide all the resources needed to ensure children's maximum development and achievement.

Testing for special class placement continues, contrary to the developmental view that all children are at different stages of development within a classroom, and teachers need to accept them where they are, with full inclusion. Special education continues to do battle with regular education in the testing and placement process. The whole testing issue is one of the major concerns in the pro/con developmental dispute. The developmentally appropriate advocates would say that testing is inappropriate in the early grades; therefore there may be a difference of opinion between regular education and special education.

Developmental programs are hard to implement with limited funds, equipment, and materials. Many teachers use their own salaries to provide materials needed to teach effectively. Some educators would argue that the greater the degree of hands-on discovery learning, the more money is needed. Teachers on a low pay scale find it difficult to spend their hard earned dollars on classroom materials. Needless to say, most school systems

operate under tight budget constraints. To stretch
resources, teachers have to use multiple resources and
share with other teachers in order to provide a
center-based environment. Using hands-on, manipulative
materials are needed as they are the foundation in a
developmental classroom. School budgets rarely supply
those materials.

"School-wide implementation is a necessary goal
in a developmental curriculum" (Lombardi, 1991, p.1).
The key to success would be total staff involvement in
grades kindergarten through third; however, differences
from teacher to teacher and grade level to grade level
make it difficult to implement successfully.

There are certainly a variety of steps needed to
successfully implement a developmentally appropriate
program. The key to success would be total staff
involvement, and not just pre-kindergarten through
third grade. Drake (1988) has stated that the program
needs to: (1) articulate program goals and objectives,
(2) devise realistic action plans, (3) monitor program
implementation, (4) evaluate results, and (5) plan
improvements based on those results. "Unfortunately,
total staff involvement does not come easy; many
veteran teachers are typically the 'hold-outs', which
interrupts continuity and causes in some cases,

failure (Demattias, 1990, p.15).

Many teachers, administrators, and parents are calling for a <u>balance</u> between extremes of developmental programming and a traditional approach. These questions and concerns are beginning to be raised and will need to be addressed by the early childhood education community. A compromise of strategies and philosophies are beginning to form, out of necessity, and due to valid criticisms, by persons in the field, as well as those researching the topical issues.

The fact of the matter is that in many early childhood programs, it is the teaching of reading that drives the program. Teaching specific skills, phonics, letter recognition, spelling tests are just a part of the early learning experience that cannot be ignored.

"Parents have a real fear of the unknown when it comes to a developmental setting. Veteran teachers also wonder if what they have done for years was the wrong approach, especially in teaching reading in a traditional manner" (Maehr, 1990, p.3).

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS FOR CHANGE

Drake (1990) stated that school-wide implementation
of developmental programs is a long-term process. In
the beginning the entire school should be involved in
developing a new philosophy, with the assumption that
all teachers can eventually implement a form of
developmental/experiential program. Then, administrators
should identify the most interested, competent, and
innovative teachers to initially implement the program.
This cadre of teachers can then serve as leaders and
resources to help the rest of the faculty implement
their own program over time.

All children and their parents expect the best
education possible, and schools and teachers must be
accountable for providing high quality instruction and
recognizing and adapting instruction when children
fail to learn. Developmentally appropriate practices
really refer to individualized instruction for all
students. In its purest form, that would be the result.
This is quite difficult to accomplish due to large
classes, understaffing, limited budgets, differing
philosophies among staff, and accountability toward
the students, parents, and administration.

There needs to be a <u>balance</u> between developmental theory and practices, and the issues of the real world classroom. Autonomy for teachers is an important factor if educators are to be effective. However, there needs to be communication and dialogue between grade levels, parents, and administrators to form a program that is suitable for everyone involved.

In order to implement a program that insures developmental individual differences in pace, style, and range of learning, there must be compromise on the part of the teachers to blend traditional teaching practices along with experiential/discovery learning. Balance is the key in this issue, and no one extreme is perfect or correct. Balance, in early childhood programming could be realized by providing an environment conducive for learning, without the pressure to achieve academically too early. Programming should have adequate structure and limits, with guidance by the teacher, to try to insure that <u>gaps</u> in learning do not occur. If a balance of approaches is incorporated in the early childhood program, the teacher and the students will benefit. There must be room for the teachers own best judgment, in most cases. And, in general, that is what the end result will be in the classroom...the teacher's own best judgment.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to analyze the
literature that describes the practices of a
developmentally appropriate early childhood program.
The focus was to determine the strengths and the
weaknesses of the developmental model. The following
questions were addressed:

1. What is the support for developmentally
    appropriate programming?

2. What the the criticisms against developmentally
    appropriate programming in recent literature?

Support for developmentally appropriate
programming is supported by the research of prominent
early childhood advocates such as Lilian Katz, David
Elkind, and most notably, the National Association for
the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Criticisms,
however, were found to be the following: large class
sizes which may hamper implementation of a developmental
model, parental concerns relative to gaps in the
learning process, and limited resources for many
developmentally appropriate early childhood programs.

One key is not to throw the baby out with the

bathwater. Teachers may need the basal reader for some students. Using an eclectic approach and a variety of methods would appear to be the best solution to this problem.

In early childhood education, educators need to look at the research, understand child development thoroughly, and take the best of the best approaches. Extreme implementation of a strict academic program may be just as inappropriate as an extreme developmental program.

The arguments for and against implementation of this model are clear; however, compromise, and giving the teacher autonomy to decide what is best for the children is essential. Only the individual teacher knows the children in his/her classroom. To best serve them, a multiple strategy must be initiated. Viewing children as competent and capable of constructing their own knowledge is viable to a point. There comes a time when teacher direction and intervention is necessary.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the lack of understanding about developmentally appropriate practices on the part of many parents, teachers, and administrators is largely the result of early childhood professionals' failure to clearly

articulate what they do, and how they do it.

There are choices in education, and there needs
to be a balance in the two extremes of educating
young children. Setting up an environment conducive
for learning at all developmental levels is not an easy
task. One must be realistic, relative to the problems
and hurdles that educators need to try to overcome and
deal with individually.

Operating in a professional manner, from a
knowledge base of early childhood research and theory
will enable success to prevail for the learner, only
if the teacher is allowed to become autonomous in the
teaching, decision-making process concerning a given
classroom of students.

The teacher, the parent, and the administration
are vital as a cooperative unit in educating a child;
however, each teaching situation is different, and
there needs to be compromise when facing the unique
challenges of early childhood education. There does
not appear to be one single exact prescription for
the best approach. Some middle ground must be found,
with the teacher using his/her natural instincts about
what is best for the child.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

Having completed the study, the following
recommendations are suggested as a means for improving

the implementation and acceptance of developmentally
appropriate programs for young children. They are as
follows:

1. There needs to be a balance between
    developmental practices and problems and
    needs arising from the policies and
    interpretations of the concept.

2. Parents need to be informed prior to the
    implementation of any early childhood
    program, relative to the program content
    and curriculum philosophy.

3. Adequate resources need to be available
    for the early childhood program to be
    successfully implemented.

4. There needs to be a clear understanding of
    developmentally appropriate practices for
    parents, staff members, and administrators.

These recommendations are supported by the
literature and are necessary for an early childhood
program to be successful.

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