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## **Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) @ ECCE**

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### **Abstract:**

*Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a cornerstone for shaping the future of a nation, emphasizing the holistic development of children. As outlined in the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage-2022, ECCE focuses on three developmental goals: health and hygiene, effective communication, and engaged learning. Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) are central to achieving these goals, as they involve teaching methods tailored to a child's developmental stage, cultural background, and individual needs. DAP emphasizes experiential and play-based learning, fostering creativity, problem-solving, and meaningful engagement.*

*DAP recognizes that each child is unique and requires personalized approaches to learning. It values hands-on activities and play as essential tools for skill development and knowledge acquisition. Play encourages creative expression, problem-solving, and social interaction, which are pivotal for early childhood development. However, implementing DAP faces challenges such as resource shortages, large class sizes, lack of parental support, and administrative constraints. In India, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is the largest initiative concerning ECCE. Various models of ECCE centers include Anganwadis (standalone or co-located with primary schools), pre-primary sections within primary schools, and standalone preschools. Despite these efforts, studies reveal a gap between preschool teachers' beliefs in DAP and their actual classroom practices due to external limitations.*

*Family involvement is crucial in ECCE. Parents should be engaged in nurturing their children through regular communication with educators and participation in school activities. Communities also play a vital role by providing real-life learning experiences outside the home. Ultimately, DAP ensures holistic development by integrating experiential learning, cultural sensitivity, family collaboration, and community engagement. This approach not only supports children's growth but also lays a strong foundation for their future success.*

**Keywords:** *ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education), Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), Experiential Learning, Parental Involvement*

## Introduction

Every child is important as it defines the future of the country. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is the priority of any country due to its immense effects on future life. The spending of money on quality ECCE is like an investment. More and more research is being done to enhance the quality of ECCE. As per the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage-2022, there are major three developmental goals for the foundational stage i.e. health and hygiene, effective communication and involved learning. As a general fact, we do not show any concerns for whom we do not know or which is not relevant to us. Just like that if something is inappropriate, it would not be able to attach to anybody with it. Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) need to be focused on while imparting education to the young.

## What is DAP?

Learning is the process that trains the head and hands and affects the heart. Developmentally appropriate practice means teaching techniques that consider and accept a child as an individual. The practices that are implemented or selected for teaching the young must have social and cultural contexts in the real world of a child. It emphasizes

the methods that promote engaged learning on the part of each child. It focuses on providing young learners the experiences that are appropriate to their developmental stage that help in their growth and learning. It helps in optimal effective and meaningful learning that has a lasting effect on the development of a child.

## Why DAP?

Each child is different and has individual needs. DAP emphasizes organizing teaching methods to align with each child's specific needs. It prioritizes children's unique experiences and identities by showing acceptance of his/her differences. By applying DAP methods, parents and workers/teachers can provide children with optimal opportunities to learn and grow in a way that enhances their needs and abilities. This approach utilizes strategies and activities that have been proven to be effective for young children and focuses on hands-on learning experiences that allow children to develop practical skills and knowledge. Additionally, DAP recognizes the importance of play in early childhood development, as play provides opportunities for children to engage in creative expression, problem-solving, and exploration of their interests (NAEYC, 2023).

In India, the Integrated Child Development Scheme is the largest scheme concerning ECCE. As per National Curriculum Framework for Foundation Stage- 2022, institutions for ECCE comprised of (a) stand-alone Anganwadis; (b) Anganwadis co-located with primary schools; (c) pre-primary schools/sections covering at least age 5 to 6 years co-located with existing primary schools; and (d) stand-alone pre-schools (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

In a study of Preschool teachers' beliefs and practices of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), Mengstie, Missaye (2022-23) found a discrepancy between preschool teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices of DAP. The participants reported strong beliefs about the importance of DAP for children's development and learning. However, they did not follow the DAP guides when teaching children. The preschool teachers attributed this discrepancy to external factors such as a shortage of inputs, large class size, lack of parental support and administrative problems.

### **Points to be Considered While Implementing DAP**

With all the limitations of large class sizes, if a worker/teacher wants to implement DAP, the following points may help.

- Listening capacity must be developed by a worker/teacher. As the learners are using inner speech (as per the concept given by Vygotsky) workers/teachers must listen to them when they are indulged in play as well as when they are sharing their feelings at various points. He/she must acknowledge children's feelings, including frustrations, using verbal as well as nonverbal communication techniques.
- A learner must feel acceptance from the worker/teacher emotionally and in terms of language use. He/she should accept the family composition of each child and show ongoing interest in each child's unique knowledge, skills, and cultural and linguistic experiences and recognize these as assets for learning.
- ECCE centers must be a safe place physically and emotionally. Any child should not feel humiliated in terms of language, behaviour or family status. Workers/teachers do

not blame children or families for their behaviour but consider it as an additional resource for support as needed. Never use words like: “Are your parents teaching you this ?” As per the theory of Sigmund Freud, they need to understand a child’s reasons for behaving in particular ways.

- ECCE centers must maintain a caring and supportive environment for the learners. Each learner must feel that he/she is important. For this, educators should pronounce and spell the child’s name correctly. As an educator, family preferences may be considered for the pronunciation of the names.
- Experiential learning should be provided through the balance of teacher-centered, and learner-centered activities as well as based on providing experiences that meet individual, cultural and local needs. Try to give examples of the real world from which your learners are coming.
- Planning a curriculum should be done that caters the developmental needs as well as environmental

needs. For instance, if we are teaching children in coastal areas and if we include examples of these places, it will be more useful to connect their learning to real-life situations. It would be more effective to talk about boat jetty than bus stop while teaching in Kerala state.

- A mix of self-directed play, guided play, and direct instruction needs to be utilised.
- Development does not occur in a vacuum. So, we cannot exclude the family while providing learning experiences. Just like each child, each member of the community is also a valued partner for the education of the young. Partnership and reciprocal relationships with families are needed. Communities play the playing very crucial role in early childhood education settings as they are responsible for providing children, the real-life experiences outside the home. Children learn the lessons of how to talk, behave and treat others from this community. Characters of the communities have a significant influence on children's development. Before coming to

school, a child gets many experiences from the family and cultural environment. In India, in the majority of cases children are taught to wish ‘ram-ram’, ‘jay jay’, ‘radhe – radhe’, ‘salam – malekum’ or ‘Khuda hafiz’ or any other words which are culturally appropriate. Is it not good to force a student to use ‘good morning’ or ‘have a nice day’ even when the medium of instruction of the ECCE centre is English?

- Parents need to be trained for proper nurturing of their child. Institutes may arrange special sessions or programmes regularly as many parents are just doing homework inquiries instead of asking a child how he spent a day at school. Let the parents understand that they are NOT just asking to inquire about homework.
- Parent involvement or parent education should be promoted in terms of nurturing their child. Mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility need to be ensured. Informal conversations need to be allowed when parents pick up and drop off children. If families/parents

cannot communicate with workers/teachers during drop-offs and pick-ups, alternative means need to be thought of like emails, text messages and phone calls during fixed hours.

- Play is very essential for a child. Each child should get the opportunity to play together. Play and projects are essential for initiating talk with peers. Scaffolding may be provided by the adults.
- For punishment, recess/activity time/lunchtime should never be withheld. As, food is also having its own cultural identity, during recess or lunchtime conversation among children as well as with children and teachers may be encouraged.
- Keen observation is needed for assessing the learners. When students are involved in play, a teacher must observe the students silently with various aspects such as social skills, communication skills, etc.
- While assessing the young learners, developmentally, culturally and linguistically sensitivity is needed. Worker/teacher must reflect on

regular reviews of collected data or pieces of evidence.

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