

Reflecting,
Discussing,
Exploring

Questions and Follow-Up Activities for Developmentally Appropriate Practice in 2005

Susan Friedman



In this series of thought questions, the focus is on two articles from the July 2005 issue of *Young Children*. In the first, “Whatever Happened to Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Literacy?” (<http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200507/02Neuman.pdf>) Susan B. Neuman and Kathleen Roskos report that many early literacy programs focus on letter and word recognition and memorization rather than on meaning and suggest content-rich approaches to early literacy. The second, “*Yeah, But’s* That Keep Teachers from Engaging in an Active Curriculum,” (<http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200507/03Geist.pdf>) by Eugene Geist and Angela C. Baum, addresses the challenges many teachers face in implementing a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and at the same time meeting statewide and national goals and mandates.

Using these articles as springboards, teachers can respond to the following questions to gain insight into developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in 2005. We are interested in hearing about your methods of keeping the focus of your program developmentally appropriate. If you have any examples you would like to share, please e-mail **Beyond the Journal** at editorial@naeyc.org.

Thought questions on DAP and literacy

1. In your view, what are the most important elements of a developmentally appropriate early literacy program? What literacy essentials would you expect to see in an infant/toddler program? in a program for preschoolers? in a program for children in kindergarten? in a program for children in the primary grades?
2. Neuman and Roskos state that letter games and sound activities have a place in content-rich literacy instruction but should serve a supporting role, while activities focusing on meaning should take center stage. When you reflect on your own classroom, how would you describe the balance between letter games and activities and the content-rich aspects of your literacy curriculum? What might you want to change?
3. The authors provide two examples of content-rich literacy experiences. In the first, a family child care provider discusses and demonstrates the concept of water pressure with a multiage group of children while integrating new vocabulary and concepts in the conversation. In the second example, four-year-old friends excitedly

NAEYC staff member **Susan Friedman**, MEd, serves as editorial associate for *Young Children* and coordinator of **Beyond the Journal**.

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write numbers and letters on paper as they discuss the Rose Bowl. Their teacher actively listens to their conversation and helps them extend their discussion and learning. What content-rich literacy experiences have you planned for and observed in your classroom? How could you provide even more opportunities for these kinds of literacy experiences?

DAP and literacy—Reflecting on your own program

To reflect on the role of content-rich literacy experiences in your program, keep a literacy log over a one-week period.

- Take brief notes that describe how you implement literacy in your program. Describe the activities that focus on literacy as well as the materials in the environment that support early literacy.
- Review the log. What percentage of early literacy experiences in your program focuses on content-rich experiences? What percentage focuses on memorization of letters or words? Are you surprised by what you found?
- Are there changes you want to make in your classroom? Are there content-rich literacy experiences you are undertaking that you want to share with other teachers? (If so you can e-mail them to **Beyond the Journal** at editorial@naeyc.org.)
- Try an experiment. Change something in your approach to literacy. After implementation, observe the children's responses to the changes. What are they doing and learning?

Thought questions on maintaining an active, child-centered curriculum in the face of outside pressures

1. After reading the article by Geist and Baum, what do you think are the major factors that get in the way of implementing a child-centered curriculum? Do the challenges the authors describe reflect your own experiences?
2. The authors suggest planning with the teachers of the grades before and after yours to develop a coordinated approach to a particular curriculum area. What aspect of the curriculum do you think might lend itself to this type of progressive collaboration? How could you go about suggesting such a collaboration to your colleagues?
3. The authors offer a list of resources to help educate families about using a child-centered curriculum to

achieve goals and standards. Do you believe that families want their children to experience DAP or do they want their children to only receive teacher-led instruction? How might families benefit from learning more about DAP? How could you introduce the topic to families?

A child-centered curriculum—Reflecting on your own program

The authors recommend looking at the curriculum and seeing where hands-on projects can be added to enhance children's learning. Think about your own teaching plans. Is there a particular area that would lend itself to such hands-on projects?

Decide on one or two curriculum areas that lend themselves to the project approach. (For ideas, see *The Power of Projects: Meeting Contemporary Challenges in Early Childhood Classrooms—Strategies and Solutions*, by J.H. Helm and S. Beneke, [Teachers College Press and NAEYC, 2003].) Try to integrate hands-on activities in a curriculum area in which seat work is the traditional approach. For example, when learning about money, instead of using worksheets to reinforce mathematics skills, set up an in-class store where the children can add and subtract sums in the context of "selling" and "buying" items. Or instead of doing a desk-only writing assignment with kindergartners, let your class create a city out of blocks and then brainstorm and create signs for stores, streets, and so on.

After completing the project, think about any differences you observed in the children's exploration and mastery of the subject matter. How did the children approach learning? What did you do to build on their interests and extend their learning?

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