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A handbook for parents discussing developmentally appropriate practices for preschoolers

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**A HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS
DISCUSSING DEVELOPMENTALLY
APPROPRIATE PRACTICES
FOR PRESCHOOLERS**


MASTER'S PROJECT

**Submitted to the Department of Elementary Education,
University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education**

by

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November, 1993**

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/ Official Advisor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I, Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Assumptions.....	2
Chapter II, Review of Related Literature.....	3
Introduction to Developmentally Appropriate Practices.....	3
Principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practices.....	3
Curriculum Strategies for Employing Developmentally Appropriate Practices.....	5
Adult Roles in Developmentally Appropriate Programs.....	7
Reasons to Use Developmentally Appropriate Practices.....	9
Chapter III, Procedure.....	11
Introduction.....	11
Review of Journal Articles.....	11
Review of ERIC Documents.....	12
Review of Texts.....	12
Summary.....	12
Chapter IV, Results.....	14
Table of Contents.....	15
Introduction.....	16
Child Developmental Characteristics.....	19
Impact of the Environment on Child Development.....	23
Determining the Best Environment to Promote a Child's Development.....	26
Key Characteristics That Denote a Developmentally Appropriate Practices Environment.....	27
Everybody has a Role in the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Environment.....	29

	Page
The Results of the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Program.....	30
Summary.....	31
Chapter V, Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	33
Summary.....	33
Conclusions.....	34
Recommendations.....	34
References.....	36

TABLE OF TABLES

	Page
Chapter IV, Results	
Table 4.1.....	22

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The education of the nation's children is continually being highlighted and recognized in public forums. Test scores are now publicly examined and are used to evaluate the education system. As the focus continues to escalate, increasing segments of the population become involved in the debate for what is educationally correct.

For example, the government is actively engaged in setting standards for educational quality. In fact, the President and the National Governors' Association have set Goal 1: Readiness for School, which states "By the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn." (From America 2000: An Education Strategy, 1991 as cited by Hostetler, 1991, p.2) This attention has a direct impact upon the education of the nation's youth including the youngest learners, the preschool children.

Attention to the needs of early learners is a necessary strategy for children's future success. Proper initial life experiences can form the layout for increased learning and life skills. However, determining what experiences are beneficial to young minds is a point of contingency.

As the world changes, people begin to examine the environment in the context of the new images. Yet, despite the social, economical and political changes which have occurred, children's developmental processes have remained consistent. Therefore, the approaches to early childhood education must meet the natural mode of learning of young children. However, what often occurs is the application of a program for school-aged children being applied to the education of young children. (David Elkind, 1986 as cited by Miles, 1991)

Parents, or the primary caregiver, are the earliest and most influential teachers in a child's life. As a result, attention must be given to bridge the transition for young learners entering the external, or non-family, learning environment. Continued parental involvement and

understanding are implicit in the education process, throughout life.

The author believes an appropriate early childhood education program will apply knowledge of child development and will employ family involvement, the result being a successful learning environment. The combination of these elements becomes essential to developing an appropriate early childhood education program; one that will benefit the child today and throughout their lifetime.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to formulate a handbook to aid parents in selecting developmentally appropriate practices for preschool children.

Assumptions

This project was based on published research and studies; therefore, it is assumed this literature has reported accurate and valid data.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction to Developmentally Appropriate Practices

As each living being enters the world they become exposed to innumerable stimuli. It is the selective ability of life that allows the body to attend to those stimuli it is capable of ingesting. Thus, the natural developmental processes begin. One rolls over before crawling and later walking, a cry or coo proceeds a word. Simply stated, a natural sequence of progression is eminent as a child develops. The building process is gradual; yet, the outcome is substantial and long lasting.

Education is comprised with the goals for developing the person to their potential and inspiring life-long learning. Continually, human's knowledge and understanding of the environment develop. As a result, adults wish to pass the information on to future generations for their betterment. Commonly, children are presented with more information, at earlier ages, with the intention of preparing them for more material later. Certainly, if a child is presented with more material at earlier ages than education is changing for the better, right? Wrong!

While society and knowledge of the environment have deepened in depth and understanding, the fundamental development of humans remains consistent. The knowledge adults have acquired must better address the attributes that comprise the human being. Instead of presenting more material to young learners, the material presented should encompass known methods learners use to incorporate meaningful material. Thus, the emphasis behind developmentally appropriate practices in learning and teaching (Bredekamp, 1987).

Principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The processes of development are age sensitive and should be addressed as such in a learning environment. Behaviors and abilities may be attributed to chronological age measurement. The stages of growth and change are universal during the first nine years of

life. Additionally, these patterns are visible in each area of development, including the physical domain, the emotional domain, the social domain and the cognitive domain (Bredekamp, 1987; Chall, 1987; Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991).

Despite the commonality of chronological development, individuals do maintain their own inherent traits. In other words, individual appropriateness must also be addressed. Each child brings to the environment, their own personality, learning style and family background. The learning environment should address the individual's pattern for adapting and their own timing of growth (Bredekamp, 1987; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Read, 1992).

Attention to developmental processes involves age appropriateness as well as individual appropriateness; however, there is one more area of concern and that is to address the "whole" child. An appropriate learning environment incorporates each domain of child development, including cognitive, physical, emotional and social structures (Bredekamp, 1987; Miles, 1991). Humans do not live in a vacuum. As humans experience the environment each domain of a person's being filters in the information. Thus, when exposing new learners to experiences, the learning environment will bear consequences and each domain may react. Proper attention to each domain, regarding learning experiences, prevails as a developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Miles, 1991; Young & Marx, 1992).

Knowledge of the age appropriate and individually appropriate developmental practices establishes a strong framework for the development of an educationally appropriate environment. Striving to accomplish each child's potential abilities becomes more feasible within the developmentally appropriate structure. The implementation of such a program rests with various curriculum strategies.

Curriculum Strategies for Employing Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Curriculum planning in a developmentally appropriate program emphasizes learning as an interactive involvement with the environment. The environment becomes anything outside of the child and more particularly everything the child may learn from exploring. The experiences a young learner is permitted to encounter, allow that student to personally internalize and develop as a result. A variety of experiences address the interests of the individual personalities. Allowing spontaneous encounters permits an even flow of knowledge transmission. The by-product being a learning situation whereby, students encounter new experiences as they are capable of handling them, and therefore are better able to incorporate the new information within their schematic structure (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989; New, 1990).

The environment selected plays an integral role in the curriculum strategy. Additionally, the concept of how children interact with the environment is unequivocally important. A play oriented approach to learning fulfills the transition from visually encountering the surrounding material -- to actually experiencing and delighting in the properties of various stimuli. Play allows young minds the opportunity to try out the facets of those situations encountered. Play is pertinent to child development and is easily one of the truest forms of developmentally appropriate practices (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Nourot & VanHoorn, 1991; Read, 1992). For example, play is a personal activity so it automatically becomes age appropriate as well as individually appropriate. Each developmental domain, may also be addressed through play, therefore involving all the principles of developmentally appropriate practices.

Opportune learning situations are not evident without teacher manipulation and strengthening of the stimuli. The ideal learning environment employs manipulation of the existing environment; yet, filtering it into adaptable forms for the audience being addressed.

In the case of young learners, materials and activities need to exhibit concrete qualities.

Young minds function at the concrete operative level. Incorporating the senses allows the young mind to better understand the concepts and properties of an idea or verbal presentation (Bredekamp, 1987; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989). In other words, stimuli that appear more "real" and tangible are more relevant in the minds of the students and increase the opportunity for learning to occur.

Manipulation of the environment may also entail ensuring that various situations do occur in order to meet multiple interests. Providing multiple events for exposure allows individual interests to be met. Multiple events, when paired with children selecting their own environmental encounter harbor the opportunity for growth potential. Not only is the child selecting what is individually important to herself/himself, the young person is developing the ability to be independent and make choices, or be responsible, for their own path of learning. Individual choice, when paired with an appropriate environment, becomes a tool for curriculum planning (Bredekamp, 1987; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Hostetler, 1992; Miles, 1991; Read, 1992).

Activity is integral to the curriculum process. Not only does activity provide opportunity and interest, it also allows young bodies to physically use their energy resources (Bredekamp, 1987; Miles, 1991). Prudence must be employed however, because activity must be balanced with rest. Young bodies tire easily. Young minds sometimes do not realize the exertion their bodies experience, so it becomes the adults' responsibility to make sure rest needs are addressed. Proper balance among activities and rest increases the productivity within the learning environment, increasing the potential gain. Therefore, rest as well as activity are curriculum considerations.

Curriculum planning relies on a strong environmental emphasis, meaning the learning environment. However, a natural resource for teaching becomes the literal outdoor environment. Outdoor learning experiences provide unique opportunities for students to learn (Bredekamp, 1987; Mile, 1991; Read, 1992). Incorporating the environment becomes a strengthening device

of any curricular program.

Implementation of the curriculum strategies further promotes the efforts for a developmentally appropriate program. Much detail and effort are consumed in executing each strategy. It is the blending of all strategies that yields the highest results. In order for such execution to occur, skilled adults play a primary role. The role adults take in a program reflects the outcome of the individual components (Bredekamp, 1987). Adult participation brings cohesion to the elements that comprise a developmentally appropriate program.

Adult Roles in a Developmentally Appropriate Program

First and foremost, adults impact the learning environment. Adults manipulate situations for the optimum learning to occur (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Kostelnik, 1992; Miles, 1991; Read, 1992). What is so evident once done, was first a non distinguishable event. A knowledgeable adult scrutinizes the situation, realizing the valuable learning that may be extracted. Not only is an event looked at for its educational content; but, also must be recognized for its appropriateness to the proposed audience. So many angles must be addressed when planning a learning environment. A knowledgeable adult assumes a great deal of responsibility in providing learning opportunities to their audience.

Trained adults are necessary components to the success of educational programs. Another valuable resource, which must be utilized, are the parents or care providers. A high level of parent involvement is a substantial adult role in a developmentally appropriate program (Bredekamp, 1987; Bruce, 1983; Hostetler, 1992; New, 1990; Young & Marx, 1992). The first teacher any child has is/are the parent(s)/care provider(s). Once school age has arrived, why must the bond break between the first teacher and the child? Not only is this cause for a bumpy transition between the home and school, it also ignores the fact that the parent(s)/care provider(s) remain an influential force in the child's life

(Lombardi, 1992a-1992b; Love & Yelton, 1989). Continued parental involvement strengthens what the program teacher is trying to accomplish by incorporating a very powerful outside source, the family.

A powerful bond may be created when a teacher teams up with the student's family. Open lines of communication serve as the groundwork for individualizing a student's education. For example, when the teacher has access to the child's background, he/she may better adapt material to fit the child's existing understanding of the environment. In turn, the family's involvement may further strengthen what the teacher is trying to expose the student to, by continuing the lesson in the home life. As a result, the teacher--family bond increases the potential for the child's learning. Such a relationship is pivotal in the child's developmental processes. Thus, parent and teacher communications are central to a developmentally appropriate program (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1991; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; New, 1990).

The interest adults take in a child's development allows for the understanding and implementation of the adult roles described. Educational providers, whether they are family members or teachers, must note the child ultimately dictates learning, therefore knowledge of child development is implicit. All the best intentions will not influence a child, unless that child is addressed in a manner that is meaningful to her/him. Adults must educate themselves regarding child development processes so that the proper means of exposure and experiences are provided to increase learning potential (Bredekamp, 1987; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Greenberg, 1990-1991; Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989; Shimoni, 1990).

Knowledge of children's developmental sequences promotes a child centered focus (Bredekamp, 1987; Kostelnik, 1992). In other words, what is best for the child is most important. Understanding and responding to a child's needs are the foremost roles adults may take in a developmentally appropriate program.

Reasons to Use Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Such understanding and focus on the child, from their inherent developmental characteristics to their individual personalities and backgrounds, have represented the means by which to accomplish a developmentally appropriate program. Attention to childhood education becomes increasingly important as we consider the methods of educating which produce the best results. Improvements in society are valued trademarks by its people, and education is another arena impinged upon by society's desire for change and improvement. What truly must be addressed is the improvement of the individuals through an education that suits each person's needs. Such a goal may be met with the use of a developmentally appropriate program.

The foundation for the potential development of any person, rests with their level of self-esteem. A positive self image permits a person the ability to feel worthy of developing himself/herself to greater levels of achievement (Hostetler, 1992). Building a child's self-esteem is a strong reason to select a developmentally appropriate program. Incorporating developmentally appropriate practices reflects individual worth because of the individualized attention and the continued successes which boost self-worth (Bredekamp, 1987; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Greenburg, 1990; Melbourne University, 1991; Read, 1992). When a child is attended to and able to accomplish meaningful things on their own, the results build self-esteem positively.

As experiences are met with success, the desire to meet new challenges increases. Continued exposure to new experiences provides the learner with new resources to address even more new situations. The learner becomes capable of handling increasingly varied environmental circumstances without anxiety, but with pleasure and with a sensitivity of acquiring new skills (Hostetler, 1991-1992). The impact promotes the quest for life-long learning. Such a tool for adaptation is another valid reason for selecting a developmentally appropriate program.

Concurrently, the ability to confront new situations with a relaxed, pleasurable

approach reduces stress levels in children. This may be attributed to several factors which exist in developmentally appropriate programs. First of all the situations which a child is exposed to are appropriate for that child, because of both individual attention and appropriate age developmental characteristics. Secondly, children in such an environment are instructed to learn at their own pace and each discovery is valued; but predetermined, one hundred percent right versus wrong situations are not employed. Therefore failure is not feared, and children explore and take risks in order to discover and grow (Bredekamp, 1987; Burts, Hart, Charlesworth & Kirk, 1990).

Another firm reason for selecting a developmentally appropriate program is the notable success students experience throughout their educational careers. Students who begin learning through positive experiences, continue to desire to learn as the positive learning experience serves as a reward (Love & Yelton, 1989; Miles, 1991). Exposure to the environment through a variety of stimuli, arms students with a multitude of resources with which to encounter new stimuli. The new challenges provide incentives to the learner, through which the learner hopes to grow and develop. The result is the creation of an avid learner, capable of coping with new situations, which serve to better the learner.

Therefore, the creation of better learners does indeed rest with every person. However, it is the focus upon the children, not adult desires, which must be met with concern. The accomplishments of developmentally appropriate practices are substantial, as have been reviewed in the referenced literature. The employment of such practices yields the results society voices are its concerns (Hostetler, 1992). The ability to enforce these practices in the educational system is reliant upon those adults who have promoted their own self-education of the learning and developmental processes. It is the desire of the author to promote understanding of developmentally appropriate practices and the plausible benefits at the earliest stage in the external learning environment -- preschool.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Introduction

The interest in creating the handbook originated as a result of the author observing various preschool environments and witnessing the numerous interpretations of developmentally appropriate practices. Further exploration of existing research and documentation, regarding developmentally appropriate practices, provided support not only of the positive outcomes; but, also the need to clarify the components of just such a program. The desired product of the study, was the formulation of the handbook, for parent(s)/care provider(s), which provides guidance in selecting developmentally appropriate preschool programs as well as the importance of this type program.

Review of Journal Articles

A review of journal articles was conducted as a method to support the philosophy behind the development of the handbook. These references guided the author in the creation of material that is validated by current thinking in the educational field. The review consisted of educational journals dating 1983 through 1992.

Articles were selected for their attention to the developmentally appropriate practices of early childhood education. They included: Bryant, Clifford & Peisner (1991), Casey & Lippman (1991), Chall (1987), Fowell & Lawton (1992), and Read (1992).

Several articles were chosen based on their ability to present characteristics of developmentally appropriate child care programs. These include: Bruce (1983), Burts, Hart, Charlesworth & Kirk (1990), Greenberg (1990, 1991), Hostetler (1991, 1992), Kostelnik (1992), New (1990), and Nourot & VanHoorn (1991).

Articles were reviewed that supported the need for developmentally appropriate programs. They included: Burts, Hart, Charlesworth & Kirk (1990), Greenberg (1990),

Hostetler (1992), Lombardi (1992), Love & Yelton (1989), and Mitchell & Modigliani (1989).

Review of ERIC Documents

The review of ERIC documents, as with the journal articles, was a valid component for supporting the topic and confirming the importance of the statements made. The ERIC documents substantiated the investigation of the problem statement. In conjunction with the journal articles, ERIC documents validated the importance of the subject matter.

ERIC documents were selected to reveal the need for adult education on developmentally appropriate practices. The documents chosen included: Dodge & Goldhammer (1989), Melbourne University (1991), Miles (1991), and Young & Marx (1992).

Documents were selected that presented actual situations where developmentally appropriate practices have been employed. These include: Lombardi (1992), and Shimoni (1990).

Review of Texts

The review of early childhood education literature was conducted to substantiate the importance of the subject matter. Completion of the project hinged on the clarity and acceptability of the material. Support for the ideas and philosophies of developmentally appropriate practices is best represented by the following works: Bredekamp (1987), and Brewer (1992).

Summary

The compilation of the information reviewed, serves as the framework for the established handbook. Exposure to the knowledge of such developmental processes allows understanding of the handbook's value and importance. The design is so constructed for reader insight after one review. The presentation of pertinent information

is the scope of the handbook. The review of established documents provided the validity of the material presented.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES HANDBOOK

CHAPTER IV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction.....	16
Child Developmental Characteristics.....	19
Impact of the Environment on Child Development.....	23
Determining the Best Environment to Promote A Child's Development.....	26
Key Characteristics That Denote a Developmentally Appropriate Practices Environment.....	27
Everybody has a Role in the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Environment.....	29
The Results of the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Program.....	30
Summary.....	31

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The transformation from infancy to childhood, further into adulthood occurs as a continual process. The elements involved in this continual process include maturation, developmental growth and experiences. All combined, these ingredients constitute an educational program. Afterall, the development of each person's potential is a goal of an educational program.

Growth and development are focused upon as soon as a child enters the world. Parents or care providers work daily preparing infants to increase their self sufficiency, as in holding a bottle for themselves. This continues as the child learns to walk, talk, eat and perform various other tasks that allow the child to become independent and self reliant. Thus, the education process has begun immediately, since birth, preparing the child to be the best person possible. In other words, the education goal has been initiated by the foremost teacher, the parent or caregiver.

It is no accident that the parent/teacher parallel exists. Afterall, who would be more concerned over a child's development than a parent/caregiver. Therefore, when the education of the child graduates to the external influences of an outside program, parents or caregivers must take an active role in continuing that which was started internally, or at the home, to promote the preparation of the child's potential.

Obviously, parents/caregivers have a high level of understanding of their child and the development processes which have occurred over those very important initial years. However, it is often difficult to assess the attributes of a learning environment when examining an outside-the-home program, since it occurs so naturally in the family setting. Therefore, it is helpful to understand precisely what has occurred very naturally during the initial learning years. The terminology "developmentally appropriate practices" represents the ideology of the natural evolution of growth and development. Understanding the concept of developmentally appropriate practices may increase the parent'(s)/caregiver's aptitude for selecting the most beneficial learning environment.

A clear definition of developmentally appropriate practices has best been worded by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, whereby "the concept of developmental appropriateness has two dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness." (Bredekamp, 1987, p.2) The first dimension of age appropriateness purports a notion of a universal sequence of predictable growth and change, which transpire during the first nine years of life (Bredekamp, 1987). This theory is supported by psychological research conducted by proponents, such as Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, both of whom formulated stage development theories. Although the stage theories are varied, Piaget examined cognitive development and Erikson focused on developmental stages with relationship to social interaction, each theory substantiates the pattern of growth sequences which occur.

The development of the stage theories is supportive of the early childhood education movement of today. Knowledge of the developmental stages which occur, allows programs to directly address and meet the needs of the developing students. This awareness is cognizant of all learning areas or domains, meaning the material addresses the physical, emotional, social and cognitive learning abilities (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991). As such, by combining information known of the developmental sequences and incorporating that knowledge in the planned learning environment, age appropriateness goals become apparent.

The second dimension cited is that of individual appropriateness, which encompasses the specific needs of each individual learner. Despite the universal developmental stages, each person goes through the stages at their own pace (Bredekamp, 1987). A person has their own unique characteristics which impinge on their learning style. Additionally, each person has developed an approach to the environment through their past experience and family background. As a result, the universality of growth is filtered through each student's individual screen. Approaching the individual needs within the educational program is also key to a developmentally appropriate program (Bredekamp, 1987; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991).

Exposure to the two main points of developmentally appropriate practices is just the start

of understanding what such a program involves. The importance and substantiation for such programs arises out of what these programs deliver.

The credibility of a sound education, is a primary concern of parents/caregivers. Today's societal demands have requirements which place increasing pressures on its people. Basic life skills and adaptability are necessary functions which young minds must acquire to become capable members of society. Parents/caregivers seek to transmit as much knowledge as possible to the young, to enable that young person with every opportunity for future success. What must not be overlooked is the inherent ability of children to acquire knowledge. Therefore, the efforts of providing the young with the means for attaining their future, rests with the young child's ability to acquire that material.

Developmentally appropriate programs establish relevant material within a meaningful presentation so that the young person is able to optimize the learning of the experience (Bredekamp, 1987; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991). This represents the true impact of what an educational program is to accomplish. In other words, education is to promote each individual student to the potential success he/she desires to attain. The use of developmentally appropriate practices have in turn accomplished a number one educational goal and have done so through efficient and effective means. Accomplishments such as these are the main instigation for using the developmentally appropriate practices.

The philosophy behind developmentally appropriate practices is in fact the actual effort of accomplishing educational goals, by means of presenting young learners with meaningful experiences and the tools and freedom to learn from those experiences (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989). The number one influence upon the learning program is each individual child. Therefore the developmentally appropriate program exposes learners to those experiences which are age appropriate, through an environment that is individually appropriate. The program is highly individualized enabling each participant's needs to become fulfilled. The result is the highest degree of information being presented and retained, because the student's find it meaningful and relevant

to their own lives. Consequently, the outcome of employing developmentally appropriate practices also satisfies adult desires to furnish children with as much information as is possible. Therefore, the results become twofold, satisfying adult goals as well as children's needs, and the purest form of education begins to exist.

This initial preview of the use of developmentally appropriate practices is further expounded upon in the remaining text. As has been portrayed in the introduction, knowledge of child developmental characteristics is implicit to the understanding of children's learning capabilities. This is the first area to be covered since it is the component that determines all other outside arenas of educating children.

Child Developmental Characteristics

The process of developing has been linked to chronological age, dimension one of developmentally appropriate practices. A universal pattern of developmental stages attests to the sequences of development which occur at around the same time, in all children from birth to age nine (Bredekamp, 1987; Brewer, 1992). These patterns affect the whole child, or more specifically the growth is evident in each domain, (physical, social, emotional and cognitive). Despite the generalized timing for stage development, each individual evolves at their own pace within the universal structure (Bredekamp, 1987; Brewer, 1992).

Observation and review of the stages is commonly categorized by age groupings. The timetable usually subdivides as follows: 1). birth to three years old, 2). three to four years old, 3). five to six years old, and 4). seven to nine years old (Bredekamp, 1987; Brewer, 1992). The focus of the handbook is the preschool age group, therefore further presentation will revolve around the three to four year old category, although preschool may involve younger and/or older students.

As was previously stated, each domain is involved in the developmental stages and characteristics of the stages are evident. Beginning with the physical domain, any observer notices the orderly processes of growth. For example, crawling proceeds walking, which comes

before running and skipping. These patterns reveal a natural progression of change. The question is what is standard for the age category of the three to four year olds. Keep in mind the rate of each child's development (physical included) varies according to the individual. Influences, such as individual abilities and experiences have an impact on physical development.

Overall, threes and fours have a broad range of movements. They are able to walk backwards, run, tiptoe, hop and jump. The difference between threes and fours is that fours have somewhat more refined skills, with more capabilities for movement, which demonstrates the characteristics of development within the physical domain. The continual progression is never stagnant; yet growth follows a pattern within the physical domain. Normally, development of physical movement proceeds from head to tail, or cephal to caudal, from the center of the body to the extremities, or proximal to distal, and from gross motor movements to fine motor movements (Brewer, 1992).

Awareness of the patterns of physical development along with the characteristics for three and four year olds may be applied to the learning environment, to optimize physical learning. All children require vigorous physical activity each day, which should be incorporated into the schedule (Bredekamp, 1987; Brewer, 1992; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Read, 1992). Additionally, equipment and exercises should appropriately address the physical developmental traits of the age group (see table 4.1).

Continuing discussion of each domain and its respective age characteristics, the next area is the social domain. The social domain, as with the physical, gradually becomes more differentiated. Examples of increasing differentiation might be the cries of an infant, which initially sound the same, whether the crying is due to hunger or the child is in pain; but eventually the cries become different, either through pitch or intensity, to represent differing needs. Children, by the age of three, are secure in their family relationship and even identify with people outside of the family. They are becoming socially aware of sexual differences and racial/ethnic variances. However, they are still very egocentric in their thinking as they are more cognizant of themselves.

As briefly stated earlier, Erikson created a stage development theory based on social interactions and the preschool stage is known as the "initiative versus guilt" period (Brewer, 1992).

Basically, this time is one where the child is becoming more self-sufficient and aware of their own abilities. Now the child's desire is to do more and more for himself/herself. However, difficulties arise when their actions are not met with success, because failure is frustrating. Conflict between trying to do too much for oneself and failure requires adults to help children pace themselves and not become inhibited when the outcome is not as planned.

Children should be supported and encouraged to utilize their interest in doing for themselves and making their own decisions (Bredekamp, 1987; Brewer, 1992; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Hostetler, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; New, 1990; Read, 1992). Adults are necessary role models and care providers who provide assistance to children while learning appropriate social behaviors. Common social behaviors, typical of three and four year olds are provided in table 4.1.

Emotional developmental characteristics similarly follow common patterns of development. Children in the three and four year old age category are not exempt from experiencing a set pattern of emotional progressions. In fact, this is the time period when children begin to exhibit a sense of humor. Laughing at funny sounds or movements is standard behavior. Additionally, surprises amidst the routine schedule provide a source of enrichment to this age audience. Emotional characteristics of threes and fours are exhibited in table 4.1.

Cognitive or intellectual development is consistent with the other domains. As was presented earlier, Piaget formulated stages of development, with regard to the intellect and age. Preschool children are classified in Piaget's "preoperational period" (Brewer, 1992). Learning for preoperational thinkers has implicit characteristics which should be addressed. Aspects which pertain to three and four year olds include knowledge of numbers but lack of understanding, ability to classify and sort, and a rapid expansion in vocabulary. Thinking remains egocentric as with the other domains, so children believe everyone else sees the situation as they do and they tend to not re-evaluate their initial understanding. As such, logical reasoning is difficult as is following a line of reasoning back to a beginning point. Typical cognitive characteristics are also presented in table 4.1.

The combination of each domain is responsible for the development of the child as a

"whole". The underlying issue for a preschool program relies not only on a firm understanding of the process involved; but also the incorporation of each domain, as it applies to the environment and experiences provided. Each domain and the traits of the age category must be addressed and properly attended to for optimum learning and increased developmental exposure (Bredekamp, 1987; Brewer, 1992). Table 4.1 has been included as an overview of three and four year olds' typical behaviors for each domain. These developmental characteristics may be inherent; however, environmental factors can influence the transition of the developmental processes, which is examined next.

TABLE 4.1
DEVELOPMENTAL TRAITS FOR THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLDS
AS OBSERVED IN EACH DOMAIN

Physical Domain	Social Domain	Emotional Domain	Cognitive Domain
Physical skills increase	More aware of self	Tolerates some frustration	Follows instructions of two commands
Rides a tricycle	Develops more altruistic feelings	Develops some self control	Makes impulsive judgments and frequent mistakes
Walks up and down stairs, alternating feet	Becomes aware of racial and sexual differences	Appreciates surprises and novel events	Develops vocabulary rapidly
Jumps with both feet, walks balance beam, and runs	Is able to take direction, follow some rules	Begins to show sense of humor	Uses numbers without understanding
Climbs on playground equipment	Has strong feelings toward home and family	Needs overt expressions of affection	Has difficulty differentiating fantasy and reality
Undresses and dresses	Shows a growing sense of self reliance	Fears the dark, being abandoned, strange situations	Begins to classify
Catches ball with arms extended	Parallel play is common, cooperative play begins		Begins to use some functional abstract words
Walks backward and on tiptoe	Imaginary playmates are common		"Why" questions are constant
Holds crayon with fingers			Thinking is very egocentric

Source: Brewer, 1992, pp. 40-41.

Impact of the Environment on Child Development

Understanding of the developmental processes children experience appears uniform and succinct. For all practical purposes, it is assumed each child will undergo this series of gradual transformations. Although, just as the domains for development do not exist in isolation, neither does the child. In other words, external factors impinge upon the child and the child's developmental processes. Examination and attention to environmental details may enhance or damage the growth patterns children experience.

In order to promote developing skills, the learning environment must permeate the scope of what is known regarding child development, across all domains. Positive enhancement of developing skills becomes the framework for later success in the area of learning. More importantly, it is the awareness of the environment's impact on children's development that lends itself to the positive support for preschool education. If it is understood that the outer environment may impact the growth of a child's skills, the more support for the actual manipulation of the environment so that a child can learn improved skills. Environmental manipulation becomes a tool of the educational program (Bredekamp, 1987; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Kostelnik, 1992; Miles, 1991; New, 1990).

Just what is environmental manipulation and what are its impacts? Overall, the term environmental manipulation is referring to a skilled adult's ability to utilize and provide learning experiences, for children to encounter, among the events in the world surrounding them. Various strategies may be used to approach the creation of the optimum learning environment; yet, consideration for age appropriateness, with regard to the natural developmental sequences, must be held as a priority. Individual appropriateness is also a consideration to be implemented simultaneously. The interaction of age and individual appropriateness become intertwined as the environment is developed, which will be examined shortly hereafter.

Based on review of the characteristics of each domain, there are several main targets which may be accomplished in the learning setting. One such key point is that learning is an

interactive process for children, even adults. Learning is accomplished through interaction with external stimuli, which in turn becomes internalized. Therefore, it is vitally important to allow children to experience situations through their own abilities to assess the material (Bredekamp, 1987; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Kostelnik, 1992; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; New, 1990). Children of the ages three and four are interested in exploring for themselves as part of their developing sense of self. Even more importantly, they need to be given ample time to explore. Exploration for a young child involves more time, perhaps for a number of plausible reasons. This may be their first exposure to such an experience, therefore they are starting from scratch, with no previous image on which to build. Secondly, children employ a variety of senses when addressing stimuli. Multiple exposure through various tactics makes the experience more real and identifiable, which leads to another quality for environmental detail.

Materials and activities in the learning environment need to be concrete, because three year olds and four year olds are not thinking abstractly. Objects and lessons must also be real and relevant to the audience (Bredekamp, 1987; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Kostelnik, 1992; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989). The three and four year old mind views experiences for what they are literally. Additionally, the pertinence of new learning experiences is relevant to what the learner is willing and capable of internalizing. Presenting new situations must be done in a context that is reasonable to the learner. Although, adult interaction and adjustment also impact the learner, what the learner wants to undertake, and what is available for learning.

Students will grow through their interaction with adults, just as they do with learning situations and other children. Adults serve a variety of roles in the learning environment, from role model, to caretaker, on to instigator of promoting learning (Bredekamp, 1987; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Hostetler, 1991; Kostelnik, 1992; Miles, 1991; Read, 1992). Serving as a role model provides examples for children by which to perform, possible socially as in manners or physically as in jumping. Providing care enables children's needs to be met, not only physically, as in a drink of water for thirst; but also emotionally, as in fostering positive self-images through respect during conversation. The adult also has the capability of prodding the child to

explore new territories. As the adult observes a task being met with more and more ease, the task may be altered to provide more of a challenge to the learner; but within an acceptable range so that success may still be met with limited fear of failure (Kostelnik, 1992). Positions as described, allow the adult to positively impact the environment to optimize learning. However, this is ongoing, from the initial plan, to the day-to-day classroom experiences.

The skilled adult begins by setting up the environment. This involves physical room layout which provides space for physical movement and ease of transition from one activity to the next. Materials and equipment must be representative of the children's needs. The materials and equipment should be selected based on their age appropriateness -- concrete and real, as well as individually appropriate -- varying levels of complexity, and more than one item of each toy. Threes and fours enjoy parallel play where they play side by side, the exact same game; however, they do not interact. Also, children enjoy activities by themselves and if there is only one item, then there is little likelihood of the child watching contentedly as another child enjoys experiencing the activity. This, of course, all relays the initial statement that learning is interactive involvement, so materials must be plentiful for everyone to be involved. Most of all, adults must allow children the freedom to choose for themselves and interact as they so desire. The adult serves as an observer to provide continuity to the learners situation, either through prompting when the child encounters difficulty or increasing levels of interest and challenge. The adult role nurtures learning in every aspect.

The ability to learn in an exciting, open environment allows children to meet new situations with a degree of success. This, in turn, fosters an atmosphere of security whereby children do not fear failure and make attempts to further their own skills. Positive atmospheres and increasing experiences with success build student's confidences and self-esteem. As such, the environment has nurtured learning and promoted further developmental skills. The children benefit by increasing their own aptitude for learning and availability of success. As a result, the environment has positively affected the natural progression of developmental skills. Factors such as the ones described, are useful in determining the environment most conducive to a child's development.

Determining the Best Environment to Promote a Child's Development

Review of the environmental concepts previously presented, portrays an atmosphere of a child-centered approach. The flow of the room, the materials available, even the behaviors and actions of the adult(s) are geared to focus on the needs and demands of the children. Attention and detail so focused on the child, are qualities of a developmentally appropriate program.

Selecting a program that caters to children is important if the service is done within the proper guidelines. Concern over the actual environment is not merely confined to the education taking place. Safety is a primary need which must be met in order for learning to occur (Bredenkamp, 1987). Safety has become a primary concern in the society of today. There are many components to consider when attempting to assess the safety of a program. Obvious details, which would be visible on a tour of a facility, would be cleanliness and equipment that is properly maintained and in good repair. Another guideline which may be slightly harder to detect and should be a routine question is the availability of adult supervision, as well as the adult to child ratio. The state has set a guideline; however, some programs do not necessarily adhere to the rules. The guidelines were set for a purpose as in the case of safety and additionally for availability during learning sessions, so each child receives ample attention.

As in specific policies set for the program, perhaps rules are posted somewhere and may be observed. A booklet or letter may address items the parent or caretaker needs to help implement. An example may involve keeping sick children home so they do not contaminate the other students. Often policies are established naming the adults who are legally able to drop off or pick up the child, from the school grounds.

Whatever the case, the safety policies which are either observed and/or provided verbally or in writing, must meet with the parent'(s)/caretaker's approval. It is important to remember if the adult or child feel unfamiliar or unsafe, learning is not likely to occur. Safety is a primary need which must be met in order for other needs to be satisfied, such as learning.

The actual learning environment should be conducive to the youngsters' receptiveness.

The child may initially be intimidated, after all this is often their first external experience to this magnitude. However, the child will shortly see something or someone that attracts their attention and involves them within the setting, when the environment is appropriate. The key characteristics which denote the environment best suited for a child, once safety and interests are achieved, are those components typical of developmentally appropriate practices. The next section presents the key characteristics utilized in developmentally appropriate practices.

Key Characteristics That Denote a Developmentally Appropriate Practices Environment

Review of a preschool program entails careful observation of the program while in progress. Knowing those procedures which exemplify a developmentally appropriate program enables an observer to quickly assess the program's format. The following details may serve as key characteristics which denote the employment of developmentally appropriate practices.

- Age appropriateness (Bredekamp, 1987; Brewer, 1992; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991).

Dimension one of developmentally appropriate practices is central to the review of all other program details. The program, the adults, the environment, the materials and equipment, the curriculum and the expectations must all actively consider the audience's age.

- Individual appropriateness (Bredekamp, 1987; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991).

Dimension two of developmentally appropriate practices which is congruent with age appropriateness. Each child is a unique individual and must be respected as well as addressed in an individualized manner.

- Emphasis on all domains (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Young & Marx, 1992).

Each of the four learning domains; physical, emotional, social and cognitive, must be properly attended to for growth to occur. This must be within the age and individually appropriate guidelines.

Incorporating each domain fulfills the education of the whole child.

- A play oriented approach (Bredekamp, 1987; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Read, 1992).

Play is a natural vehicle enabling children to experience the learning environment through a meaningful context. Play provides opportunities to address each domain in a relevant, meaningful manner. Observation and interaction by adults, can effectively detail assessment as well as directing students to areas of interest.

- An interactive learning environment (Bredekamp, 1987; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Hostetler, 1991; Kostelnik, 1992; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; New, 1990).

Allowing children to actively engage in the learning environment, positively correlates to the knowledge they gain. Freedom of choice promotes the development of self interests and responsibility. The ability to explore the environment freely allows children the opportunity to learn through those senses that serve the child best. The result is that more actual learning is accomplished because individuals' needs are being addressed within the comprehensive environment.

- Appropriate materials and equipment (Bredekamp, 1987; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989).

The materials and equipment should be compatible with the age and capabilities of the users. Overall, materials and equipment should be concrete, real and relevant to the three and four year old mind. Safety is also a concern for these items. The materials and equipment should be available in quantities for more than one child to play with the items at any given time. Items should be multicultural and nonsexist in nature to promote an unbiased and respectful learning environment.

- Appropriate curriculum and activities (Bredekamp, 1987; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991).

The curriculum and activities must be appropriate for the age as well as each individual. The curriculum should cater to the interests and abilities of the students. Curriculum and activities must also address the "whole" child, or each domain of learning. Continued review, assessment and alteration must be performed to meet the ever changing requirements of the students.

- Knowledgeable and interactive staff (Bredekamp, 1987; Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; Casey & Lippman, 1991; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Kostelnik, 1992; Melbourne University, 1991; Miles, 1991; Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989; Read, 1992; Young & Marx, 1992).

The teachers involved within developmentally appropriate programs must above all be familiar with the developmental processes of children. Their next concern is the ability to accept and control

the learning environment based on their knowledge of child development. Staff members should be willing to interact with students in a respectful manner. Teachers must arrange the learning environment, all its components and curriculum based on the children's needs. Continual re-evaluation and flexibility within the learning environment must accommodate the ever changing needs of the students. Overall, staff members must coordinate the freedom children need in order to experience stimuli, within a safe and orderly environmental setting.

The combination of these key characteristics accomplishes the platform for developmentally appropriate practices within the preschool setting. However, further success is noted when the knowledge and use of these practices is adapted to the home life. Parent or caregiver involvement enhances the use of developmentally appropriate practices.

Everybody Has a Role in the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Environment

The role of parents in a developmentally appropriate program can not be over stated.

It is the accomplishments of parents or care providers that have coached a child to this readiness level for preschool. Incorporating the parent'(s) or caregiver's efforts only serves to strengthen the channels for success, now and later (Bredekamp, 1987; Bruce, 1983; Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; Dodge & Goldhammer, 1988; Lombardi, 1992a; Love & Yelton, 1989; New, 1990; Shmoni, 1990; Young & Marx, 1992).

Parents or care providers have a considerable right to be involved, afterall the child is their family member. Additionally, parents or caregivers have a responsibility to be involved in their child's education. Accomplishing parental or a care providers interaction often rests with the parent or care provider asking questions, or the staff member voluntarily communicating information which pertains to the child's characteristics. The result may be beneficial to both parties involved. Teachers have an open reservoir of untapped knowledge, regarding the child and their background, when they communicate with parents or caregivers. Parents and/or care providers are consistently apprised of their child's progress and/or areas for concern. The tradeoff becomes a continual, round-the-clock

environment, which serves as enhancement for the child's betterment.

Involving outside sources serves as support for numerous reasons. The teacher's involvement of the family serves to promote what is being taught in the school. A family's employment of the school and staff further benefits the education and experiences of the child. Continual reinforcement is accomplished through the bond of the family and the school.

Family interaction is a vital resource for the education process. Students' successes are evident when the family members take an interest in the child's developmental progress. Such support is a key motivator in continued interest in learning throughout a child's education, a solid reason for selecting developmentally appropriate programs.

The Results of the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Program

Knowledge of child development coupled with developmentally appropriate practices instigates an understanding for the support of its employment. The procedures employed through developmentally appropriate practices positively compliment what is known of how children best learn. As a result, optimum learning is encouraged and accomplished.

Early success with learning at the preschool level promotes positive education experiences. Positive learning situations instill the desire throughout the remaining school years and beyond. The result is an aptitude for life long learning. A by-product of success in school is the development of a positive self image, which also enhances the life of any person. High self-esteem levels provide children with the desire and empowerment to succeed. Benefits, as described, fulfill established goals of the education system and better yet adhere to Goal One: Readiness for school, set by the President and the National Governors' Association, which states "By the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn." (From America 2000: An Education Strategy, 1991 as cited by Hostetler, 1991, p.2) Children who are products of developmentally appropriate practices, exemplify the skills necessary to learn.

Exposure to a variety of stimuli within the learning environment equips children with the skills necessary to attempt new challenges, while minimizing fear of failing. Exposure and attention

to each domain accounts for the overall development of the child so that moving into the school environment becomes a smooth transition. New experiences are non-threatening and the child is prepared to accommodate unfamiliar stimuli. Furthermore, the child's adaptability promotes friendships as well as academic successes.

Perhaps the most influential reason for utilizing developmentally appropriate practices may be attributed to the child and his/her learning behavior. Consensus reveals it is the desire of adults to have children succeed. In order to accomplish this feat, the child dictates what is effective versus that which is not. Adults must implement strategies which consciously adhere to child developmental sequences as well as individual needs. Compatibility among students and the learning material is necessary for retention and understanding of the information. Clearly stated, the child dictates what strategies adults need to employ, and the result becomes the potential development and growth of that young person.

Summary

Education of the young is continually reassessed, with the attempt of finding a more successful way to complete the job. What truly needs to be examined are the factors that satisfy the job of educating youth. If it is understood what education is to accomplish, then it should be simple enough to determine the means of achieving the goal. The area to address may be the goal.

A fundamental goal to many educational philosophy statements is the attempt to produce each child to their potential for success, so that he/she may be a contributing member of society. A noble goal, if met. Having each person reach their potential is a significant accomplishment; however, the major contributors to this goal are the students themselves.

Children have not changed their developmental processes over the years, so why are programs continually exerting new strategies to accomplish the same goal? The means by which children learn are fixed in the scope that the same progression occurs in each child, and has repeated itself throughout time. Knowledge of these processes presents the opportunity to fully utilize the child in the learning process. Centering programs around child developmental processes is key to employing

developmentally appropriate practices. The reasons for using developmentally appropriate practices are plentiful.

Throughout the handbook, developmentally appropriate practices and their uses have been presented. The goal has been to establish the importance of the uses and the benefits from employing such practices. The results justify the means and can not be overlooked.

As society creates a tougher world in which to live, children must be armed with capable responses. Adults are obligated to provide children with the resources necessary to move society onward; however, the realization must rely on the fact that children are children. The education of the young becomes only as reliable as the method used to accomplish the goal. Adult knowledge exists to observe and denote the developmental sequences of children. The use of developmentally appropriate practices compliments the sequences of development and the results substantiate their employment. The child carries the benefits of the developmentally appropriate program throughout their lifetime and true education has been accomplished.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Problem Statement. The purpose of the study was to formulate a handbook to aid parents in selecting developmentally appropriate practices for preschool children. The author's interest grew from the national attention directed at published test scores. People begin to question and theorize methods of improving children's performance on standardized tests. A common result is that educational emphasis is placed on performance abilities, and this ideology is adapted to the earliest learning programs, including preschools.

The author intended the creation of the handbook to promote understanding for what education actually entails, as process versus performance. Test results can not completely reveal the progression and development that occurs. In order to support and request the educational structure to meet the needs of each child, parents/care providers must first understand the children's needs. The purpose of explaining the natural learning processes, is with the intention of promoting appropriate learning environments for the betterment of children.

Selection of the preschool age category was based on the need for initial awareness that will continue to influence the remaining educational years. The earliest years of education are being attacked for the increase in declining test scores; however, if early education is not handled properly, more damage may result. Early learning experiences are very influential and affect later learning. It is vital for parents/care providers to understand those elements that constitute a developmentally appropriate practices program and the benefits such a program provides.

Procedure. The handbook was devised as a parental aid in helping parents select developmentally appropriate practices for their preschool child. The author's intention was to inform parents with the necessary material so the best choices may be made for the child's benefit. The handbook is the result of compiling existing research into a digestible format.

The method employed was the review and study of research dating 1983 through 1992.

Articles and writings included journal articles, ERIC documents and texts. The material primarily addressed the principles and support for the employment of developmentally appropriate practices.

Results. The actual handbook was the product of the research that was conducted. The structure of the handbook is set so the explanation and uses of developmentally appropriate practices are clearly outlined. Emphasis is placed on supporting the reasons to employ developmentally appropriate practices and the results of so doing.

The handbook is written with the intention of educating parents so they can become knowledgeable consumers of the educational system. Perhaps as more adults understand the phenomena of education, attention may be directed at conducting the process of learning rather than supplying children with standardized test facts. The author feels the handbook may serve as an adult educational tool with direct aim at the educational programs and what they should be providing. The gains are intended for the children attending preschool programs.

Conclusions

As a result of conducting the research and formulating the handbook, the author concludes readers may gain insight to the developmental characteristics of children and the proper methods of addressing children's developmental needs. The material explains, exemplifies, and supports the uses of developmentally appropriate practices for use with preschool children.

The belief exists that adults want what is best for children and intend to provide the children with the tools for success. This innate quality leads adults to be concerned and take interest in finding those methods which satisfy children's needs. The handbook naturally fulfills an adult's quest for knowledge of child development and methods for properly educating children. The intended benefit is for the children.

Recommendations

The author believes parents are a formable network, with the ability to begin the necessary reformation of the educational system. Arming adults with knowledge only empowers them to improve

the world for children, including the educational structure.

It is the recommendation of the author, that adults continue to value children and their abilities. In order to accomplish this feat, adults must educate themselves about children and the characteristics that are attributable to children. Once adults begin to take interest and expose themselves to the world as children see it, steps may be taken to better meet children's needs. Starting at the preschool level is merely an initial step. All ages and levels within the educational system must be addressed.

Further research and support for developmentally appropriate practices must be requested, starting at the ground level. Parents (taxpayers) are the voice for the children and have the resources to require administrations to listen. Knowledge equips adults with the potential for granting children the opportunities of their lifetimes.

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