Sixth Edition

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Curriculum and Development in Early Education

Carol Gestwicki

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The Goals of This Book and Intended Audience

Over the past couple of decades, early childhood professionals have been enriched and stimulated by a series of position statements on developmentally appropriate practice. These position statements have been issued by various professional early childhood organizations. The most recent revision of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement was published in November 2008 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In no way is this book meant to compete with this important professional publication. Rather, the hope is that instructors will use this text as an accompanying reading, using the position statement as a primary resource and this text as an opportunity to reflect on the implications and practical applications of the ideas in the position statement. All teachers should also have a copy of the position statement to refer to regularly.

Classroom teachers and preservice students struggle to understand how the philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) translates into everyday decisions and actions in early childhood classrooms. This book is designed to help preservice and in-service early childhood teachers as they try to implement the philosophy of DAP every day—in their classrooms and with their students.

The ideas found in this book are practical and comprehensive, applicable to students and teachers within various early childhood courses such as DAP, early childhood curriculum, best practices in early childhood education, and others. The book may also be used for courses that focus on particular age groups—infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged children. This book is also designed for those who do work or will work in a wide variety of private and public settings and with diverse client populations. In sum, this book is intended for you, as a student, a new or an experienced teacher, or any professional working with children in the schools, early childhood centers, family childcare homes, and Head Start, prekindergarten, kindergarten, or primary classrooms.

In addition, others are involved in the wider conversations about helpful practices in the early years. Administrators and decision makers in the community must also gain clear understandings of positive learning environments for young children. Parents who are making choices for the care and education of their children need to learn what good practice looks like, so they can make informed choices about classroom placement and also advocate for best practices in their children's schools.

A critical component of the philosophy of DAP is the idea of *individual appropriateness*; that is, that no absolute standard can be set that precisely meets the needs of every individual. This principle also holds true for the particular teachers and programs that work to find their optimum effectiveness. So, this book is intended as a guide for thoughtful consideration of classroom practices, not as an absolute prescription that would push every classroom mindlessly into the same mold. It is assumed and planned that the dialogue in the profession will continue, expanding our thoughts and our horizons. This book is offered in the hope that young children will be offered the best experiences that knowledgeable and intentional adults can provide.

Organization and Content

The sixth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* is organized into sixteen chapters and four sections.

In **Section One**, the concepts of DAP are explored by introducing general principles that are made specific and concrete in subsequent chapters. Because play is at the heart of DAP, this section includes a chapter (2) that introduces the theory and research regarding play and its contribution to development. Another introductory chapter (3) examines general ideas about curriculum and describes teacher roles in planning appropriate curriculum. Finally, this introductory section includes a chapter (4) that describes key curriculum approaches and considers how these models fit into the principles of DAP. These introductory chapters lay the foundation for the later chapters that concentrate on translating principles into intentional teacher actions.

After the general introduction, students are guided through **Sections Two, Three, and Four** to examine developmentally appropriate physical environments, social-emotional environments, and learning environments. The idea of environments for developing creativity is included in considerations of physical environments, as well as throughout the social-emotional climate, and the kinds of learning experiences described in the chapters on learning environments. *Environment* is used here to include comprehensively the materials, activities, arrangements, relationships, and interaction that adults provide in the classroom. In each of these sections, separate chapters are devoted to describing appropriate practice for infants, for toddlers, for preschoolers, and for primary-aged children.

For those instructors or students who prefer to use an age/stage rather than topic approach, the chapters on infancy can easily be designated for consecutive reading and discussion (e.g., Chapters 5, 9, and 13), then those on toddlers (Chapters 6, 10, and 14). Instructors also may prefer to discuss the various curriculum approaches after a thorough grounding in DAP.

The author assumes that students who use this text have already completed a child-development course, because the body of current child development knowledge is beyond the scope of this book. However, both in the introductory chapters and where appropriate throughout, reference and/or summary of the necessary theoretical base is included. Whether students are at beginning levels or more advanced ones, the references and ideas for further study meet individual needs.

New to the Sixth Edition

The following is a list of key content revisions within the sixth edition. It is important to note that all chapters have been substantially revised to include the most current thinking and references for developmentally appropriate practices and practical issues.

First and foremost, the text has been thoroughly revised and updated to reflect *the most recent position statements and standards*. Students will also find frequent references to other recent and important early childhood position statements, including the most recent, the joint position statement of the NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College, "Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8" (2012). An **NAEYC icon** indicates these throughout.

- *Current topics of professional interest related to DAP* have been updated in each chapter. You will find a listing of all Current Topics in DAP at the end of this section.

- Included in this sixth edition is a strong focus on *the continuing debate about the application of these DAP principles* for all children in all early childhood settings. Such debate enriches the dialogue and will continue to enhance professional development and knowledge for those who follow the discussion.

- The sixth edition offers expanded coverage throughout on *diversity issues related to developmentally appropriate practice*, such as cultural sensitivity to diverse child-rearing practices and attention to needs of children with disabilities and other special needs. A **diversity icon** indicates these comments throughout.

DIVERSITY

- This new edition discusses *Early Learning Standards and Common Core State Standards as developed by individual states*, as well as the implications of the *No Child Left Behind legislation*. These issues are discussed in several chapters.

- Professional standards are also referred to throughout. Correlation charts on the inside front and back covers provide a complete list of the standards cover throughout this book.

- MindTap for Education is a first-of-its kind digital solution with an integrated eportfolio that prepares teachers by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and competencies they must demonstrate to earn an education degree and state licensure, and to begin a successful career. Through activities based on real-life teaching situations, MindTap elevates students' thinking by giving them experiences in applying concepts, practicing skills, and evaluating decisions, guiding them to become reflective educators.

- Information on the *most up-to-date brain research* is also included in this text. Watch for a **brain icon**, as well as new "Notes from Neuroscience" features.

- *Family Communication boxes* are new to this edition, recognizing the crucial role that families play in the education of their children. Teachers gain support as the families with whom they work understand best practices. Teachers may use the relevant letters as provided, or adapt them to the particular questions and circumstances where they work.

- *DAP Means Making Decisions* vignettes have been highlighted in every chapter, to emphasize the importance of intentional and thoughtful teacher decision making in responding to a variety of questions and situations.

- An *expanded discussion of play* has been added to Chapter 2. This coverage emphasizes the rich research that is being conducted on this subject and the issues that surround the topic of play, including helping families understand its importance.

- The *chapter on planning for curriculum is substantially revised* to reflect current thinking about planning curriculum linked with assessment and learning standards.

- All *in-text references have been thoroughly updated* to demonstrate the most recent research and discussion within the early education field.

Teaching and Learning Tools

Developmentally Appropriate Practice, sixth edition, offers students a rich collection of pedagogical tools for learning, study, and reflection.

Each chapter includes the following new and retained features:

1. **Learning Objectives** are provided at the beginning of each chapter and now correlate with main headings within the chapter and the Summary at the end of the chapter. The objectives highlight what students need to know to process and understand the information in the chapter. After completing the chapter, students should be able to demonstrate how they can use and apply their new knowledge and skills.

2. **Chapter Opening Introductions and Professional Standards** provide students with a brief overview of key chapter topics, linked with specific NAEYC standards of professional preparation and NAEYC standards for excellent early childhood programs. The related standards are printed on the inside covers of this book.

3. **Professional Resource Downloads** are downloadable, practical, and professional resources, often customizable, that allow students to immediately implement and

apply the textbook's content in the field. The student downloads these tools and keeps them forever, enabling preservice teachers to build their library of practical, professional resources. Look for the Professional Resource Download label that identifies these items.

4. **MindTap for Education** is a first-of-its kind digital solution that prepares teachers by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and competencies they must demonstrate to earn an education degree and state licensure, and to begin a successful career. Through activities based on real-life teaching situations, MindTap elevates students' thinking by giving them experiences in applying concepts, practicing skills, and evaluating decisions, guiding them to become reflective educators.

5. **Becoming a Reflective Practitioner boxes** recognize the importance of teachers becoming thoughtful, intentional practitioners, and provide opportunities for personal thinking throughout the text. This feature encourages students to stop to consider their own experiences and ideas.

6. **Diversity Considerations boxes** describe cultural issues or conflicts that may arise in typical classroom situations. Readers will have opportunities to consider ideas and circumstances from the others' viewpoint and discover ways of finding common ground and compromise.

7. **Current Topics in DAP features** focus on issues that concern many teachers today, as they relate to principles of DAP. A complete list of these features is provided after this introduction.

8. **Advice from Master Teachers** segments highlight practical ideas for teachers to guide their classroom practices.

9. **Family Communication boxes (NEW)** highlight letters that may be used to communicate with families about specific classroom topics, or be used to suggest ways that teachers can increase their dialogue with parents. All Family Communication boxes are available as Professional Resource Downloads so students can download and save them, and edit them for their specific purposes to implement them in the field.

10. **DAP Means Making Decisions… boxes.** From questions and challenges from parents to requests from administrators, teachers are often placed in the position of having to interpret appropriate practices and responses to others. These very realistic situations and scenarios raise some of the everyday predicaments for teachers and help students learn how to solve problems and explain their work to others. These may often form the basis for important class discussion and individual reflection.

11. **Real-life Photographs and Vignettes** are included in each chapter, with multiple photographs and vignettes about children and teachers within early childhood settings.

12. **Chapter Summaries** are brief reviews that summarize in list form the key concepts addressed within each chapter.

13. **Questions to Assess Learning of Chapter Objectives** at the end of each chapter help students and instructors assess whether the key points of each chapter have been mastered.

14. **Think about It Activities** are end-of-chapter activities for further study, which may be used for in-class or out-of-class assignments.

15. **Apply Your Knowledge: Case Studies** are vignettes located at the end of each chapter that help students apply and reflect on the principles in the chapter.

16. **Helpful Websites** feature recognizes the important role that technology plays in today's world in expanding resources for learning. Web descriptions and references are included at the end of each chapter that will allow readers to search for the current URL to further explore topics and organizations discussed in the text.

Accompanying Teaching and Learning Resources

This sixth edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* is accompanied by an extensive package of instructor and student resources.

MindTap™: The Personal Learning Experience

MindTap for Gestwicki, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, sixth edition, represents a new approach to teaching and learning. A highly personalized, fully customizable learning platform with an integrated eportfolio, MindTap helps students elevate thinking by guiding them to:

- Know, remember, and understand concepts critical to becoming a great teacher;
- Apply concepts, create curriculum and tools, and demonstrate performance and competency in key areas in the course, including national and state education standards;
- Prepare artifacts for the portfolio and eventual state licensure, to launch a successful teaching career; and
- Develop the habits to become a reflective practitioner.

As students move through each chapter's Learning Path, they engage in a scaffolded learning experience, designed to move them up Bloom's Taxonomy, from lower- to higher-order thinking skills. The Learning Path enables preservice students to develop these skills and gain confidence by:

- Engaging them with chapter topics and activating their prior knowledge by watching and answering questions about authentic videos of teachers teaching and children learning in real classrooms;
- Checking their comprehension and understanding through Did You Get It? assessments, with varied question types that are autograded for instant feedback;
- Applying concepts through mini-case scenarios—students analyze typical teaching and learning situations, and then create a reasoned response to the issue(s) presented in the scenario; and
- Reflecting about and justifying the choices they made within the teaching scenario problem.

MindTap helps instructors facilitate better outcomes by evaluating how future teachers plan and teach lessons in ways that make content clear and help diverse students learn, assessing the effectiveness of their teaching practice, and adjusting teaching as needed. MindTap enables instructors to facilitate better outcomes by:

- Making grades visible in real time through the Student Progress App so students and instructors always have access to current standings in the class.
- Using the Outcome Library to embed national education standards and align them to student learning activities, and also allowing instructors to add their state's standards or any other desired outcome.
- Allowing instructors to generate reports on students' performance with the click of a mouse against any standards or outcomes that are in their MindTap course.
- Giving instructors the ability to assess students on state standards or other local outcomes by editing existing or creating their own MindTap activities, and then by aligning those activities to any state or other outcomes that the instructor has added to the Mind-Tap Outcome Library.

MindTap for Gestwicki, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* 6e helps instructors easily set their course since it integrates into the existing Learning Management System and

**MindTap Moves
Students Up
Bloom's Revised
Taxonomy**

Create

Evaluate

Analyze

Apply

Understand

Remember & Know

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.* New York: Longman.
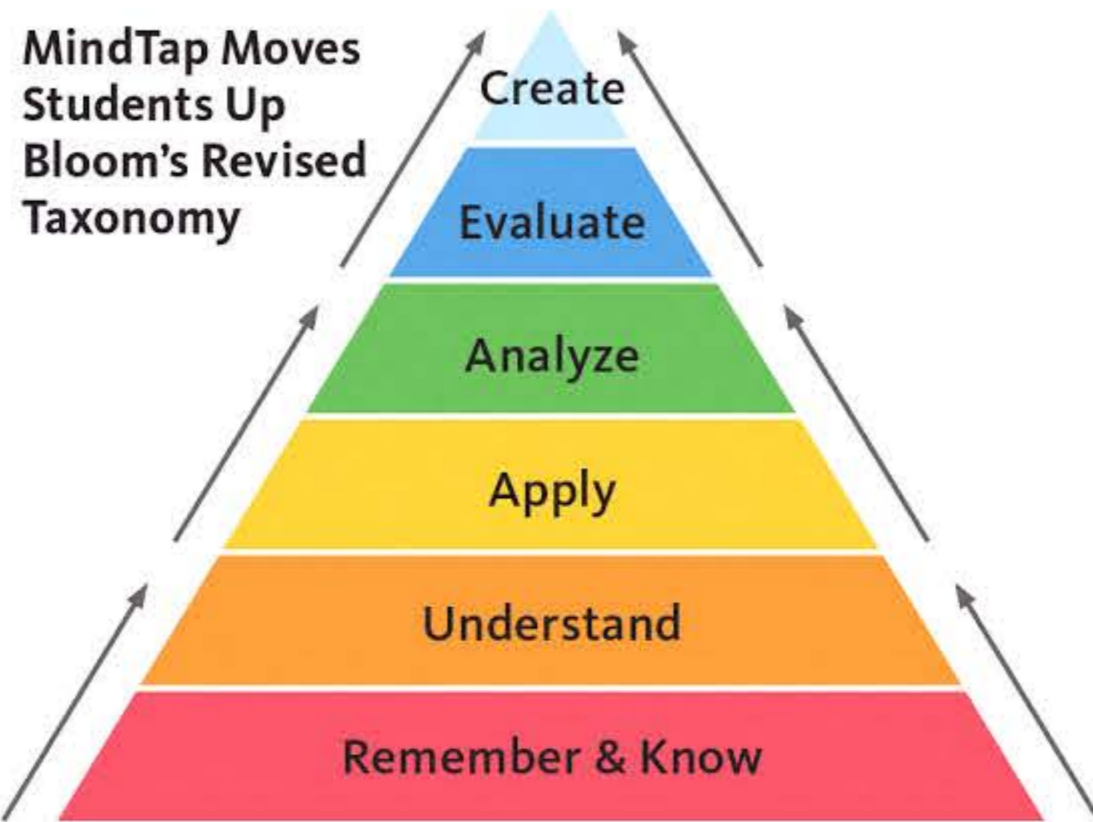
saves instructors time by allowing them to fully customize any aspect of the learning path. Instructors can change the order of the student learning activities, hide activities they don't want for the course, and—most importantly—create custom assessments and add any standards, outcomes, or content they do want (e.g., YouTube videos, Google docs). Learn more at www.cengage.com/mindtap.

Online Instructor's Manual with Test Bank

An online Instructor's Manual accompanies this book. It contains information to assist the instructor in designing the course, including sample syllabi, discussion questions, teaching and learning activities, field experiences, learning objectives, and additional online resources. For assessment support, the updated test bank includes true/false, multiple-choice, matching, short-answer, and essay questions for each chapter.

PowerPoint Lecture Slides

These vibrant Microsoft PowerPoint lecture slides for each chapter assist you with your lecture by providing concept coverage using images, figures, and tables directly from the textbook.

Cognero

Cengage Learning Testing Powered by Cognero is a flexible online system that allows you to author, edit, and manage test-bank content from multiple Cengage Learning solutions; create multiple test versions in an instant; and deliver tests from your LMS, your classroom, or wherever you want.

Features Guide

Diversity Considerations

Advice from Master Teachers

Current Topics in DAP

Becoming a Reflective Practitioner

Family Communication

Acknowledgments

Many conversations and experiences contribute to a work such as this. More than thirty years of college classroom discussions with new and experienced teachers have shaped my questions and assumptions, and I am grateful to students who have pushed me to find better ways to explain. I have been fortunate to have had colleagues all along the way to support and stimulate my growth as an educator. In particular, I want to acknowledge the late Betty High Rounds, a valued friend and colleague, who first gave me the idea, then gave helpful feedback on chapters in an early draft, and who provided both the excitement and many materials on Reggio Emilia. I also appreciate the thoughtful comments of reviewers.

And of course, much love and gratitude to my family—who have always been developmentally appropriate and willing to ignore the many shortcomings a work such as this produces. This edition also notes that my granddaughters, Lila and Rose, have left early childhood behind them as they move on in high school—amazing!

I dedicate my work to the memory of my beloved husband Ron, whose intellectual curiosity and passion for learning continues to inspire us. In addition, I would like to thank those who reviewed the text in its various stages. The reviewers include Laurel Anderson, Palomar College; Jennifer Briffa, Merritt College; Jana Camm, Gateway Community and Technical College; Evia L. Davis, Langston University; Elizabeth Elliot, Florida Gulf Coast University; April Grace, Madisonville Community College; Kim Hawley, St. Lawrence College; Carlene Miki Henderson, Sam Houston State University; Sherron Murphy, Gwinnett Technical College; Bridget Murray, Henderson Community College; Wendy Ruiz, College of the Canyons; and Corlis Snow, Delta State University.

Note to the Reader: I am well aware that a work of this kind could always be larger and more comprehensive; it is my assumption that a text such as this might be used in several courses, covering the age spans. It may well supplement development texts and courses. I have endeavored to convey the ongoingness of the discussion on developmental appropriateness. The reader is invited to contact the author through the publisher with questions, comments, and suggestions related to these materials.

About the Author

CAROL GESTWICKI was an instructor in the early childhood education program at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina, for more than thirty years. Her teaching responsibilities included supervising students in classroom situations as they attempted to put these principles into practice. Earlier in her career, she worked with children and families in a variety of community agencies and schools in Toronto, New York, New Jersey, and Namibia (South West Africa). She received her M.A. from Drew University. She has been an active member of NAEYC for many years, including making numerous presentations at state and national conferences. She has been a Fellow in the Early Childhood Leadership Development Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and she has been associated with the T.E.A.C.H. Model/Mentor program. Other publications include more than two dozen articles on child development and family issues, and scripts and design of fourteen audiovisual instructional programs. The author has three other books on topics in early education published by Cengage Learning: *Home, School, and Community Relations*, 9e (2016); *The Essentials of Early Education* (1997); and *Authentic Childhood: Exploring Reggio Emilia in the Classroom*, with Susan Fraser (2002). Since her retirement from full-time teaching, she writes a regular column titled "Grandma Says" for *Growing Child*.

Carol Gestwicki

1 Defining Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

1-1   Define developmentally appropriate practice.

1-2   Describe the essential components of developmentally appropriate practice.

1-3   Identify twelve **developmental principles** relevant to understanding developmentally appropriate practice.

1-4   Describe concerns regarding inappropriate educational experiences for young children.

1-5   Discuss responses to ten misunderstandings related to developmentally appropriate practice.

naeyc

Related NAEYC Standards

Accreditation Standards (see inside text back cover for full listing of the Accreditation Standards for exemplary early childhood programs): **1.A, 2, 3, 6**

Licensure Standards (see inside text front cover for full listing of the Licensure Standards for this chapter): **6b, 6d, 6e**

S eth Adams and Maria Jimenez are two of the nation's millions of **preschoolers** who will begin attending early childhood programs this year. Seth is entering the two-year-old class at Busy Learners Day Care Center, and Maria is enrolled in the half-day program at Happy Days Nursery School. Both sets of parents looked at several programs in their communities before making a choice.

Seth's parents chose Busy Learners Day Care Center because of its philosophy and the activities they saw during a visit. The center handbook states:

We believe young children are capable of serious learning, so our day is arranged to provide opportunities for your child to gain the important academic skills that will gain him/her

Developmental principles
Basic, accepted ideas of development derived from research and theory.

Preschoolers
Children ages three through five years.

entrance to the school of your choice. Our curriculum includes beginning reading skills, with emphasis on phonics, and introductory math activities. Before your child leaves our two-year-old class, he/she will be able to recite the alphabet and recognize many letter sounds, name the shapes and colors, and count to 20. Our Spanish teacher spends an hour a week with the two-year-old class. The children's day is spent in large- and small-group instruction by our competent staff. We believe that the learning potential of the preschool years is too great to waste on play.

The Adams' visit to the classroom found young children sitting quietly at tables coloring a picture of a dog and a letter D. The work from the day before was hanging on the walls; the children had pasted the precut outline of a dog. The teachers seemed competent and completely in control as they gave instructions to the toddlers. This school matched Seth's parents' concept of what a school should be.

Maria's parents also chose Happy Days Nursery School based on its philosophy and their visit. The handbook states:

We believe that children should be actively involved in play to develop the whole child. Teachers prepare a variety of interesting choices for children each day, carefully designing an environment for active learning. Children make their own discoveries about the world, as they are able to explore materials and learn to play with other children, with the guidance and support of interested teachers.

A visit to their classroom showed groups of children busy all around the room. One child painted at an easel. Three were building with blocks in an area where another was pushing a truck. Three children were talking as they dressed in grown-up finery. Another group was helping the teacher mix play dough at a table. There was a lot of conversation.

Both sets of parents were confident that they had made the best decision for their child's entry into the world of school. Yet it seems obvious to any observer that the children in these two programs will encounter very different experiences. The philosophies stated by the programs seem to claim very different methods of educating young children. How do we reconcile such differing views on how to appropriately educate and nurture the development of young children?

Programs as different as those of Seth and Maria exist everywhere. The differences extend downward into the nursery and upward into the elementary school classroom. In many centers and schools, the statements on developmentally appropriate practice appear to have had no impact or recognition at all. This may be due, in part, to the human tendency to avoid recognizing ideas or information that conflict with past experience or present comfort levels. This book is intended to help students, professionals, parents, and concerned community members consider the definitions and implications of the developmental appropriateness of programs for children from birth through age eight. Together we will consider ideas that can help translate theoretical statements into actions that are applicable in particular situations.

The debate is not new, nor is it finished, but it has entered a new stage since the publication a couple of decades ago of various position statements about developmentally appropriate practice by several major educational organizations in this country, up to the most recent revised position statement of 2009. With the twenty-first-century national conversations about how best to ensure that "no child is left behind," early childhood educators and parents continue to try to find the best learning environments and practices for children from birth through age eight. In this book, many aspects of these conversations will continue.

First, let us consider what is meant by developmentally appropriate practice.

Background and History of the Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

The first definitive position on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) was adopted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1987. With the development of NAEYC's **accreditation** system (the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs), it had become obvious that a more specific definition of excellence was needed. Otherwise, statements like "using developmentally appropriate activities or materials" were too open to different interpretations.

That first publication was soon followed by a statement expanded to include specifics for programs serving children from birth through age eight and outlines of both appropriate and inappropriate practices (Bredekamp, 1987). The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) published an article corroborating the importance of play in 1988 (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 1988), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) elaborated its own standards for quality programs for young children in 1990, revised in 2005 (NAESP, 2005). The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) followed with statements as part of the report of the National Task Force on School Readiness (NASBE, 1991). NAEYC has since published jointly with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) a position statement, "Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8," Volume 1 (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992) and Volume 2 (1995). A more recent statement on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation was issued jointly by NAEYC and the NAECS/SDE in 2003.

Other position statements include "Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children," by the International Reading Association (IRA) and NAEYC (1998, updated), and "Early Childhood Mathematics: Promoting Good Beginnings," by NAEYC and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NAEYC & NCTM, 2002, updated 2010). Other specific position statements have also been published, including early learning standards; school readiness;

responding to linguistic and cultural diversity; unacceptable trends in kindergarten entry and placement; and technology and young children. These will be discussed in the relevant chapters later in this book and can all be read at the NAEYC website listed at the end of the chapter. All position statements and "Where We Stand" summaries are on the website.

In the field of early intervention and early childhood special education, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children recommended practices in a DEC document published in 1993 and more recently updated in a position statement, *DEC Recommended Practices: A Comprehensive Guide* (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). A joint position statement from DEC and NAEYC *Early Childhood Inclusion* (2009) provided a shared national definition of inclusion and quality.

The conversations continued. In 1997, the first major revision of NAEYC's position statement and guidelines for DAP appeared— "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, Revised Edition" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The preface of that publication acknowledged that the changing knowledge base that derived from both research and the continuing conversations among professionals would demand a review process and revised document every ten years or so. The most recent position statement was published in November 2008 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Many early childhood professionals, parents, and communities have been grateful for the guidelines as they endeavor to chart the path in ever-changing territory. New trends and concerns encountered in the early childhood field include the following:

- Ever-increasing numbers of infants and toddlers being cared for in groups
- Inclusion of children with special needs
- Increasing numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse children and families to be served
- Increasing emphasis on **academic** assessment and readiness requirements for kindergartens and even **prekindergartens**

Accreditation
Process of recognition in early childhood programs that provide excellent learning environments for young children, based on principles of developmentally appropriate practice.

Academic
Related to learning skills for literacy and mathematics. In early childhood education, this term often refers to methods of learning that use rote memorization.

Prekindergartens
Generally considered to be four-year-olds in a preschool program.

Figure 1-1 One new trend in early childhood education is the establishment of prekindergarten classrooms within many school systems.

Early learning standards
Standards developed by most states to outline required learning for children before kindergarten.

- Establishment of prekindergarten classrooms within many school systems (See Figure 1-1.)

- Establishment of **early learning standards** in most states, impelled by the Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative

- Pressure to achieve in standardized tests in the primary years and the demands of *No Child Left Behind* legislation

- Growing achievement gap between minority and economically disadvantaged students and others

The third edition of the NAEYC position statement outlines the current context in which early childhood programs operate and in which the statement is made. The critical issues of the current context are defined as the urgency to reduce learning gaps to enable all children to succeed; the necessity of bringing prekindergarten and elementary education together; and the importance of recognizing teachers' decision making for educational effectiveness (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Since the publication of the first position statement, early childhood professionals have continued to question and debate developmentally appropriate practice. Jipson suggested that developmentally appropriate practices ignore issues of cultural variation when determining what constitutes "appropriate" (Jipson, 1991). Delpit shared the concern that the statement does not address the specific needs of African-American children, citing Eurocentric bias (Delpit, 1988, 2006). Mallory and New further discussed the idea of cultural validity and questioned the principles when related to children with disabilities (Mallory & New, 1994). Kessler warned that professionals should be wary of prescriptions for practice based on the perspectives of a particular group of individuals and suggested the multiplicity of views of the purposes of education (Kessler, 1991). Walsh suggested the consensus about child development is more apparent than real, and ignores important alternative perspectives on learning and development (Walsh, 1991). Wien suggested that recent critiques fall into two categories: those that see the dominant culture as projecting norms onto all children and are blind to other cultural values and norms, and those that see a lack of inclusion of a range of practices, such as direct instruction, that are considered necessary for all children (Wien, 1995). A series of published dialogues between two early childhood professionals exemplifies the nature of the debate over whether or not DAP is for everyone (see Charlesworth, 1998a, 1998b; Lubeck, 1998a, 1998b). The 1997 position statement recognized the need to clarify and address some of the concerns, as well as to "express NAEYC's
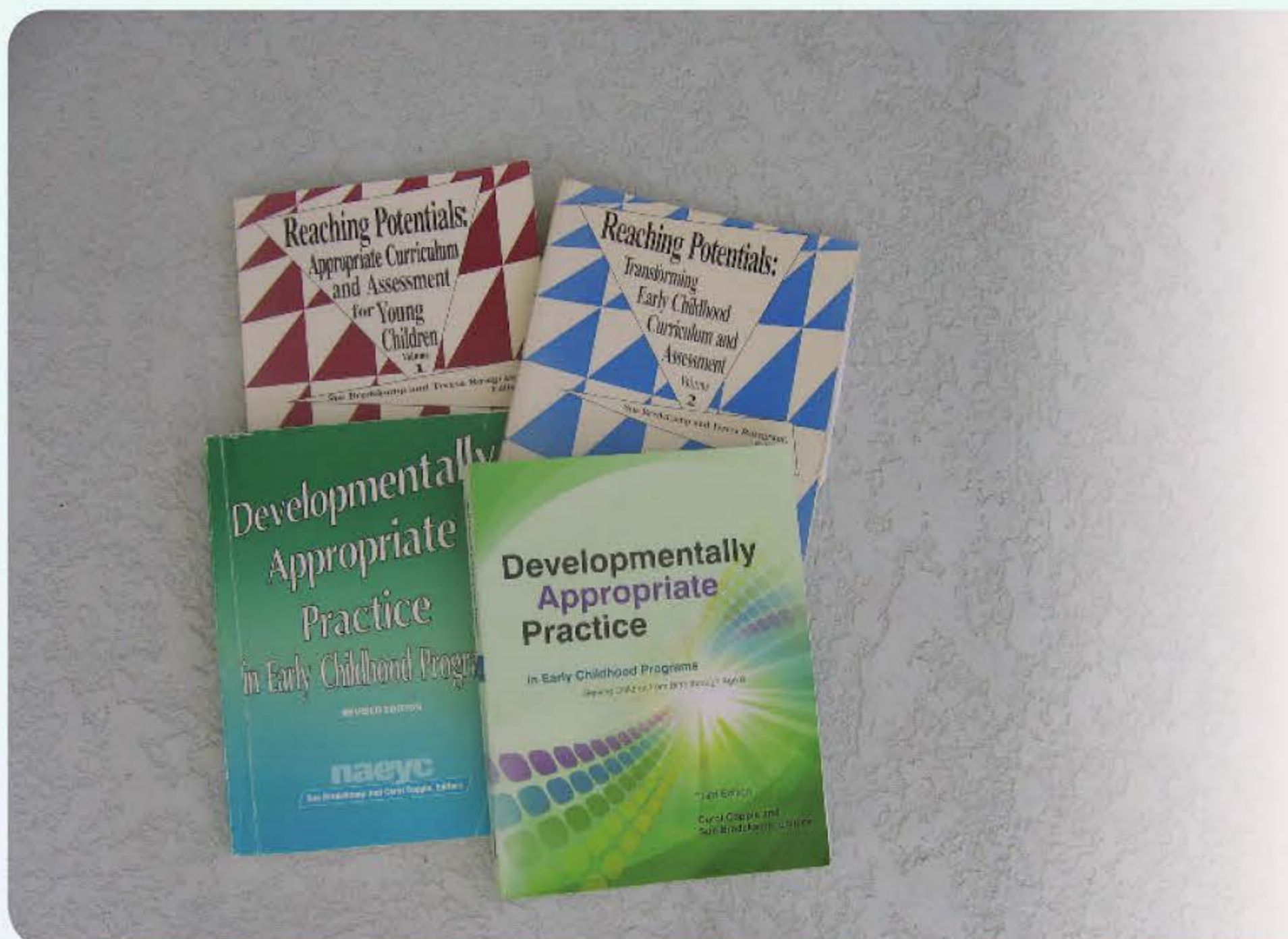
position more clearly so that energy is not wasted in unproductive debate about apparent rather than real differences of opinion" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 4). Yet the most recent position statement recognizes still more issues confronting the profession, and continues to encourage discussion and debate, noting the importance of such dialogue for the continuing growth of professional knowledge in the field. NAEYC's 2013 Institute for Professional Development focused on *DAP: The Next Era*, as the profession continues to develop and expand the definition.

One of the original purposes of the position statement was to have a clear understanding of appropriate practices that could be used by programs seeking accreditation by NAEYC. Certainly, the diversity of programs that have been accredited points to the broad principles of DAP that can be applied in unique programs and situations.

All of this is focused on how best to serve the needs of developing children. The position statements help us make judgments and inform our decisions. It is important for all students and professionals to be familiar with these position statements, especially the most recent NAEYC publication (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), and they should be part of your reading and professional library. The NAEYC publications form the basis of the principles that lie behind this book (see Figure 1-2).

1-1   What Is the Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice?

The NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) offers a rationale for the statement and a discussion of the critical issues and current context in early education.

NAEYC recognizes that early childhood practitioners make many decisions every day, keeping in mind the identified goals for children's learning and development, and planning *intentional* strategies to help children achieve those outcomes (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). "The core of DAP lies in this intentionality, in the knowledge practitioners consider when they are making decisions, and in their always aiming for goals that are both challenging and achievable for children" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 9).

The hallmark of DAP is "informed by what we know from theory and literature about how children develop and learn" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 10). In a later section of this chapter, we will consider the set of principles of child development and learning that inform decisions about developmentally appropriate practice.

The position statement goes on to present guidelines in five interrelated dimensions of early childhood program practice:

1. Creating a caring community of learners, within the context of relationships in the classroom

2. Teaching to enhance development and learning, with a consideration of teacher roles and strategies to support children's learning processes

3. Constructing appropriate curriculum, with attention to both content and strategies

4. Assessing children's learning and development

5. Establishing reciprocal relationships with families (see Figure 1-3)

Although not part of the position statement, examples of appropriate and contrasting practices and strategies for implementation in relation to each of these dimensions are given for infants and toddlers, for children ages three through five, for kindergarten children, and for children ages six through eight.

Additional comments in the position statement are related to the perception that the position statement was suggesting "either/or" **polarities** in thinking.

Polarities
Showing two contrary qualities.

Out of this criticism came the suggestion that our thinking should include the complex responses such as "both/and," because often two approaches are developmentally sound and work best in combination; thus, teachers and parents need not choose one method over the other. Answers are more nuanced than simply yes or no.

The last section delineates supportive policies and resources for implementing developmentally appropriate early childhood programs.

This most recent position statement reflects even further progress in the complex thinking and decision making that will shape practices for excellence in early education programs.

Intentional Teaching

When teachers are intentional, they do the following:

- Create learning environments that offer richness in materials and experiences.
- Encourage children's exploration and ideas.
- Engage in respectful and reciprocal conversations with children.
- Know the content of each area of learning.
- Know the standards and benchmarks of required learning.
- Know and use specific teaching strategies that can be adapted in various situations.
- Are planful, purposeful, and thoughtful.
- Take advantage of teachable moments.
- Observe children carefully to learn interests and abilities for next steps.
- Adapt teaching strategies for individuals and groups.
- Reflect on and respond to children's learning.

Adapted from Epstein (2014).

1-1a Developmentally Appropriate Practice—Further Definition

DAP refers to applying child development knowledge in making thoughtful and appropriate decisions about early childhood program practices—the understanding that "best practice is based on knowledge—not on assumptions—of how children learn and develop" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. xii). Everything that has been learned through research and formulated into theory about how children develop and learn at various ages and stages and in particular contexts is used to create learning environments that match their abilities and developmental tasks. This means that DAP is based only on what is currently known and understood about children. It is not based on what adults wish children were like, hope they will be like, or even surmise they might be like. Nor is it based totally on goals for the future.

DAP is based on the accumulation of data and facts of what children are like. DAP "is not a curriculum; it is
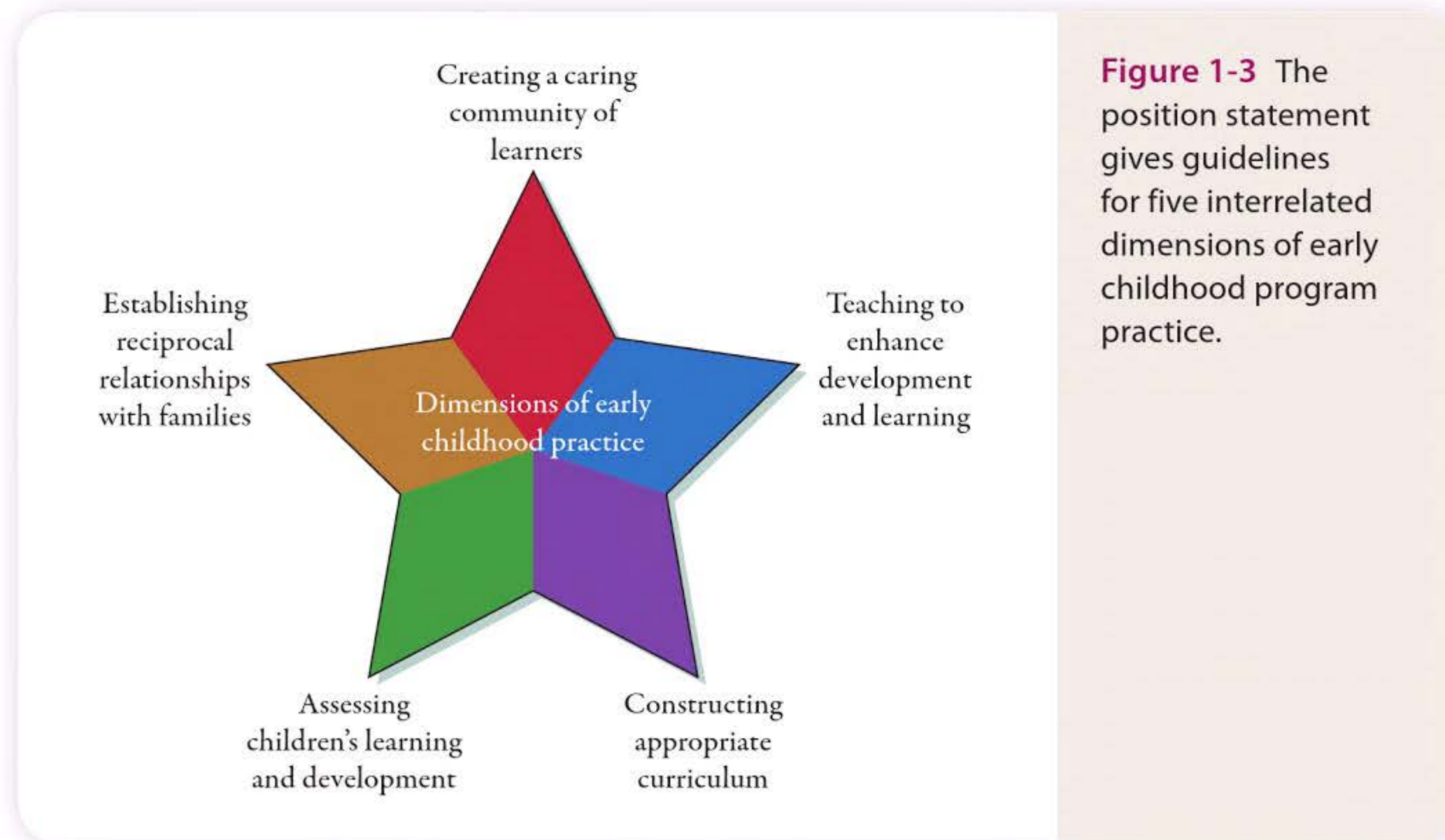
Figure 1-3 The position statement gives guidelines for five interrelated dimensions of early childhood program practice.

not a rigid set of standards that dictate practice. Rather, it is a framework, a philosophy, or an approach to working with young children" (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992, p. 4). This is important to understand at the outset. Those concerned about narrowing the standards of good practice until all programs look the same and do the same things need to realize that no such intention exists. Rather, the intention is to focus philosophically on what we know about children and what we can learn about individual children and their families as a basis for decision making in a specific context.

To translate knowledge of child development into the practical implications for nurturing and educating children, adults have to make many decisions. The deciding question when designing program curricula and formulating plans is, "How does this fit with what we know about children?" If our practice complements and accommodates our knowledge of children, then the decision is based on developmentally appropriate practice. If it is not compatible, then the practice should be questioned, examined, and perhaps changed.

The clear implication is for early childhood practitioners to be steeped in child development knowledge. Without that background, it is too easy for students, teachers, and caregivers to fall back on making decisions based only on vague notions that are part personal values, part memories, part expediency, and part images of desirable future behavior. Inappropriate expectations lead to inappropriate teaching. If you have not completed basic child development courses and/or reading, that is an important place to start before attempting to plan and evaluate quality programs for young children. This book briefly reviews pertinent developmental knowledge to remind readers of the theoretical basis for the suggested actions in the classroom.

Obviously, child development knowledge alone will not give practitioners all the answers they need to plan programs and curricula for young children. Educational programs are products of decisions about curriculum content (what children will learn), learning processes (how children will learn), instructional strategies (how teachers will teach), and **assessment** methods (how to know what children have learned and how to plan for the future).

Decisions are made on the basis of child development knowledge and also on the basis of family, community, societal, and cultural values and priorities. Finding the correct balance between professionals' knowledge and parental and community expectations is an important component of the philosophy of developmental appropriateness.

Assessment
Method of evaluation, usually used in evaluating level of development and learning.

1-2 Essential Components of DAP

As the NAEYC position statement reminds, three important kinds of information and knowledge form the basis of professional decision making:

1. *What is known about child development and learning.* This includes knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions about what experiences are likely to best promote children's learning and development. Understanding child development and learning allows teachers to know what children of a particular age group will typically be like, what they typically will and won't be capable of, and how they will best learn and develop. Such knowledge will allow teachers to make initial decisions about environment, materials, activities, and teaching strategies and interactions. Child development knowledge is most useful for helping teachers understand how children learn so that the learning environment can present experiences that are both achievable and challenging.

2. *What is known about each child as an individual, to help teachers be able to adapt for and be responsive to individual variation.* By observing, interacting, considering children's work, and talking with families, teachers learn the individual uniqueness of each child within a group, with particular life experiences, strengths, interests, and approaches to learning. Individual children have followed their own patterns of development, and the position statement demands a definition of developmental appropriateness that is responsive to every child's individuality. That individuality is related to both **genetic** and **experiential** factors, including the culture and context in which the child lives. As teachers support the growth and development of all children, they must use everything they can learn about each child, including individual learning styles and preferences, interests, personality and **temperament**, abilities and disabilities, challenges, and difficulties. Such knowledge allows teachers and programs to support the development of all children fully, including those with **disabilities** or **developmental delays**. The perspective of responding to individual children prevents viewing differences as deficits. Responding to children as individuals is fundamental to developmentally appropriate practice. One expert commented that, since the use of the phrase "DAP" may raise red flags with some school administrators, it could be equally appropriate to substitute the phrase "differentiated instruction" (Kauerz, 2013).

3. *What is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live.* Social and cultural contexts include the values, expectations, and behaviors of their homes and communities that must be understood to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful to the participating children and their families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, pp. 9–10).

One of the major differences between the first position statement on DAP and the 1997 and 2009 revisions is that the latter more fully recognize the role of the cultural context in which development and learning occur. In the first statement, cultural differences were considered one of the dimensions of individual variation. But group cultural differences are now recognized as separate from individual differences; that is, at the same time individuals develop with personal histories, they also develop within a cultural context that influences behavioral expectations shared within a group.

Culture consists of values, rules, and expectations for behavior that are passed on within families and communities, both explicitly and implicitly. Within contemporary society, children and their families form distinct cultural and linguistic groups that must be recognized with sensitivity and respect by classroom teachers. When the importance of culture in children's development is not recognized, problems can result for the children (see Figure 1-4).

Genetic
Regulated by inheritance of DNA, for specific characteristics.

Experiential
Learning related to experience.

Temperament
Characteristic disposition or style of approaching and reacting to situations.

Disabilities
Conditions that may include physical, mental, or emotional limitations on full function.

Developmental delays
Conditions where children's development in one or many domains may lag behind statistical norms.

Culture
A group's total way of life, including customs, beliefs, and values—learned behavior passed on from parents to children.

Figure 1-4 DAP emphasizes recognizing the influence of culture and home experiences on each child's development.

One set of problems comes when incongruent demands are made on children by home and school. Other difficulties come when cultural or linguistic differences are treated as deficits in the context of the school, instead of being recognized as strengths or capabilities. In this instance, children's self-esteem may be seriously undermined and their competence underestimated. The position statement's addition of the cultural context as one of the important factors in making decisions about the care and education of young children is significant.

Three dimensions—knowledge of age-related developmental information about how children learn; knowledge of each child's abilities, characteristics, and need for support; and knowledge of the cultural context from which each child comes—must be given attention when planning truly developmentally appropriate programs. As teachers make complex decisions for classrooms, they will find that the decisions they make one year may be quite different from those made the next year as a result of changing circumstances and people. Thus, the one fear expressed by those whose understanding of developmentally appropriate practices is limited—the fear that the position statements will result in creating uniform programs that all look alike—could never be realized.

When making appropriate decisions for the care and education of young children, it is essential for adults to have an attitude of respect. This attitude allows adults to accept children's developmental behaviors and differences without wanting to change them or hurry them on to a later stage of maturity. Respect demands that teachers recognize and accept the diverse backgrounds from which children come and the contributions of their families. Respect demands that teachers and families continue a dialogue of negotiation in making decisions for the benefit of the children. Respect for the process of learning allows adults to have faith in children's capacity to develop and change in their own ways, in their own time. Respect demands that adults search for developmentally compatible answers in each particular situation, not just move around solutions that have seemed to "work" with other groups. The attitude of respect for the developmental process allows early childhood professionals to feel unpressured in the face of questions about proving accountability. They know that curiosity, experience, support, and appropriate instruction ultimately move children on to increased knowledge and skills, given an environment that supports appropriately and does not thwart (see Figure 1-5).

To summarize the discussion up to this point, DAP is a philosophy of making decisions related to children's education based on child development knowledge. Professionals base