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DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES FOR ON-LINE & VIRTUAL LEARNING TK-2ND GRADE

OCTOBER 2020

EARLY LEARNING

Orange County's Early Childhood Policy Framework specifically outlines policy considerations related to quality early learning experiences. Early learning is birth through eight years of age, when the use of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are critical to development and learning. Unfortunately, the stay at home order required DAP to take a backseat to mandates from the State to provide "rigorous" virtual learning opportunities. School districts and private programs scrambled to provide services to their families with little to no preparation on how to do this effectively and appropriately for our youngest learners.

ONLINE LEARNING

Early learning specialists were and are very concerned about the mandates for physical distancing and on-line learning, and their effects on the way young children learn. We must find a way to braid these two realities together to provide the "rigorous" learning in a virtual/hybrid and physically distant world, using DAP.

RIGOROUS LEARNING

A thought about the word "rigorous". You have most likely heard how distance learning programs are "rigorous". Of course, the intent is to ensure that academic rigor being prioritized for virtual or hybrid learning programs. Being that early childhood includes TK, K, first and second grade students, we must approach the word "rigorous" a bit differently than I think is intended for our older learners. Learning, during the brain's most rapid period of growth and pruning (birth through eight), is **rigorous** when it includes high quality, developmentally appropriate experiences.

DAP & LEARNING

DAP provide learning opportunities based on the developmental age of the child, enabling the brain to develop optimally and efficiently (**rigorously**). So, if we can agree that DAP is synonymous with rigor for our youngest learners, then we must successfully braid virtual/on-line learning and DAP to ensure a lifelong trajectory of health and wellness.



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PLAY & LEARNING

The most developmentally appropriate activity for a young child to engage in is play - unstructured and self-directed. Children who engage in play build resiliency and life-long social, emotional, cognitive, language and self-regulation skills. Play helps build problem solving skills, self-confidence and competence, emotional regulation, cooperation, and relationship skills. Through appropriate play, we utilize our executive function, which allows us to strengthen the skills needed to pursue goals, ignore distractions, and build resilience... to succeed in school and life.

NAEYC & DAP

The National Association for the Education of Young Children is currently revising their DAP position statement to include this new hybrid/on-line learning platform. Meanwhile, the Hunt Institute held a webinar on October 8th entitled Ensuring DAP Amidst a Global Pandemic. The panelists provided great insight on how we can do this right! Click [HERE](#) for a link to the content of this outstanding webinar.



RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, RESEARCH AND HEART

- ***It's all about relationships!*** We know that optimal learning takes place when a child feels safe and secure and has a positive and responsive relationship with their care-giver(s) and teachers (mom/dad/relative, etc.). If we focus on building relationships and providing a safe space in which to learn, I assure you, the growth and development of your students will follow.
- ***Consider your own health and well-being.*** If we do not take care of ourselves, we will not be able to be present, flexible, creative, or patient. We know that to be a successful brain architect, we must be in tune with our children. If we, as the educators are not in a positive mental space, we will not be able to flex and bend with what our students need at that moment.
- ***Now is the time to embrace parent engagement!*** We know that parents are the child's first teacher. Use this hybrid, on-line learning platform to coach families on DAP, active learning, and the power of PLAY. Use this time to work alongside your families so they are more comfortable and competent in supporting their child's growth and development



- **Remember to consider reasonable expectations!** The beauty of early childhood is that most children only need gentle guidance and exposure to developmentally appropriate experiences to naturally develop their skills. Now is not the time to force certain benchmarks. Gently guide development using positive, responsive relationships and DAP and your students will get there.
- **PLAY!** Inside and out. Provide enough time for children to engage in their own play schemas to promote those executive function skills. Through play, children not only build foundational social and emotional skills, but play also helps to decrease stress and tension they are undoubtedly experiencing right now.
- **Be silly and dramatic!** It is difficult to keep the attention of children in person, but even more so on-line. Over do it! This is the time to bring out all the stops: puppets, re-purposed household items, games, scavenger hunts (all kinds of pre-academic opportunities there!), eye-spy on Zoom, etc. This is your five minutes of fame!
- **Break up on-camera learning time.** As early childhood professionals, many of us do not want our children in front of screens at all, but that is not our current reality. Break up the activities in front of the screen with activities children can do off-screen. Try five to ten minute chunks of time on screen and off. The CDE has set daily screen time maximums to 45 minutes per session for preschool age children. For children five to eight years old, do your best not to exceed one-hour sessions and break up your time as much as possible.
- **Let go of non-essentials.** We all have our favorite activities or lessons we think are very *important* that we have *always done*. Examine the lesson: Is it developmentally appropriate? Is it essential to growth and development? Do the children think it is as fun as you do? Can it be modified for a different learning platform? If you answered no to any of those questions, perhaps you can let it go.
- **Give yourself grace!** Everyone is struggling; everyone has good days and bad days; you do not have to be the "perfect" teacher right now. What you need to do is enjoy your students, build positive and responsive relationships with them, provide developmentally appropriate activities and experiences, and PLAY.
- **BREATHE!** You've got this. You are the most creative and talented brain architects in the world. If anyone can do this, it is you - the early childhood educator!

Please visit our website to download our
Early Childhood & Education Toolkit

<https://earlychildhoodoc.org/communityaction/education-sector/>