

Academic Rigor and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Can these 2 concepts co-exist in a
Pre-K and/or a Kindergarten
classroom?

What is Academic Rigor?

- “Rigor”, in the academic sense, is referring to that fine line between challenging and frustrating...pushing beyond what is easy.
- It means that students are challenged to think, perform, and grow to a level that they were not at previously.
- Students are compelled to grow, but not frustrated and overwhelmed in the process.

What is DAP?

- *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* uses developmental theory to promote instruction that focuses on the growth & development of individual children across all of their developmental domains in a manner that addresses the social and cultural contexts in which they live.

What is D.A.P. (con't)

- Developmentally appropriate practice requires
 - meeting the children where they are...which means that teachers must get to know them well
 - enabling them to reach goals that are both challenging & achievable
- DAP doesn't mean making things easier – instead, it means ensuring that goals and experiences are suited to their learning & development AND challenging enough to promote their progress and interest.

How do they work together?

- Academic rigor concentrates on one dimension of education – the academic.
- Developmentally appropriate practice considers the whole landscape of learning – the motivational, cultural, and social & emotional as well as the cognitive.

How do they work together (con't)

- An academically rigorous learning environment is one which each child has the opportunity and support from the teacher(s) to achieve academic goals & standards.
- It is not a checklist of teacher behaviors and a model lesson that covers content standards.
- Instead, it is the process of working with all children in a manner that addresses the whole child through hands-on learning.

What we know...

- If the child has attended a high quality preschool, many of them arrive to kindergarten ready to learn to read and write
- Quality ECE classrooms (Pre K & Kindergarten) incorporate math and literacy into hands-on, play-based activities
- Research shows that a child's ability to learn a 2nd language is most prominent before the age of 8

What does rigor look like in ECE?

- Challenges children academically
- Building background knowledge
- Teaching content through developmentally appropriate activities
- Differentiating Instruction
- Building knowledge together
- Creating multiple opportunities for learning
- Teaching to all developmental domains
- Integrating content areas
- Monitoring children's achievement
- Informing families

What does it look like?

- Academically rigorous, developmentally appropriate learning environments are those in which teachers provide children with multiple learning opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills needed for success in elementary school.

A teacher's perspective

- “I didn’t grow up in the era of testing; I was given time to learn.”
- Researchers continue to find what most Early Childhood teachers already know – that the brains of children this age are wired to learn through the very types of activities being pursued further to the side.

Kindergarten has shifted

- This shift occurred dramatically in just 12 years...1998 – 2010.
- More worksheets, more seat-time
- Having 5 year olds compose & write sentences
- Less art, science and dramatic play areas; fewer water / sensory tables
- In 1998: 31% of teachers believed that most children should learn to read in kindergarten
In 2010: 80% believed this.

Mister Rogers knew this...

- By helping children in his audience build a base of cognitive skills in developmentally appropriate ways
- Children are like little scientists trying to figure out how the world works
- An adult's interest in their ideas nurtures their curiosity ... and children who are curious will be eager learners.

How do we do this?

- Students need to understand that we all struggle and fail when we try something new, therefore we learn ways to modify what we are doing until we can do it fully and with success.
- Education – which includes rigor in a DAP setting – should push students to move beyond who and where they were when they entered the classroom.

The Administrator's Role

- Set appropriate expectations for what you want to see in preschool classrooms.
- Expect preschool teachers to teach students academic content.
- Talk with preschool teachers about instructional expectations

Rigor and developmentally
appropriate practice
can
peacefully coexist
in the same space
with best practices
that serve
the needs and interests
of young children.