

MCKOY, MAURI C. M.S. "I believe in it, it's a pretty solid teacher bible!" Student Teachers' Understanding of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): Alignment with NAEYC Definitions and Recommended Practices. (2022)  
Directed by Drs. Karen La Paro and Linda Hestenes. 115 pp.

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) refers to a research-based framework that outlines principles and guidelines that promote optimal education for young children and frames educators' use of intentional decision making. It is defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as "teaching methods that honor children's individual strengths and the role of play in children's learning" (NAEYC, 2020, p. 5). NAEYC provides specific recommendations to guide educators' instruction. Student teachers have the responsibility of providing children with meaningful learning experiences that reflect DAP in order to facilitate and support young children's development, growth, and optimal learning. The aims of the current study were to: 1) examine the understanding of and beliefs about DAP and how DAP practices are/should be reflected in the classroom of students who have completed student teaching, 2) examine how their definitions and discussions align with NAEYC's definition, and 3) highlight experiences that students report as contributing to their knowledge of DAP. Interviews focused on DAP were conducted with seven early childhood student teachers at the end of their student teaching experience. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes to answer each research question. Findings revealed that when defining DAP, participants frequently acknowledged individualization and ability-appropriateness specific to age. Participants' reports related to the importance of assessing, creating a community of learners, and achieving meaningful goals. Lastly, influences on knowledge of DAP were reported to be childhood experiences and course readings throughout the teacher preparation program. Implications for future research teacher preparation programs are discussed.

“I BELIEVE IN IT, IT’S A PRETTY SOLID TEACHER BIBLE!” STUDENT TEACHERS’  
UNDERSTANDING OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE (DAP):  
ALIGNMENT WITH NAEYC DEFINITIONS AND RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

by

Mauri C. Mckoy

A Thesis

Submitted to

the Faculty of The Graduate School at

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

Greensboro

2022

Approved by

---

Dr. Karen La Paro  
Committee Co-Chair

---

Dr. Linda Hestenes  
Committee Co-Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Mauri C. Mckoy has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Karen La Paro

Committee Co-Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Linda L. Hestenes

Committee Members

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Catherine Scott-Little

April 1, 2022

Date of Acceptance by Committee

March 22, 2022

Date of Final Oral Examination

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give a special thank you to my advisors, Drs. Karen La Paro and Linda Hestenes, for your continuous guidance, support, and prompt feedback throughout this process. Thank you for sharing your knowledge. Your effort and dedication are greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Dr. Catherine Scott-Little for your support.

I must first and foremost thank God for His unfailing love, guidance, strength, and comfort. Thank You for shedding light on me and giving me grace through this process. I want to truly thank my husband and best friend, Bruce, for listening to my frequent conversations about my thesis and for supporting me. I could not have done this without you, I would not be here without you! A thank you to my entire family and friends.

Lastly, this thesis is dedicated in its entirety to Garon Stradley Smith. The passion you always had for your students will live on forever. I will never forget you and I will always honor you through my work. Stradley, this is for you!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT Model and the Bioecological Theory of Human Development.....	4
Process.....	4
Person.....	5
Context.....	6
Time.....	7
CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).....	9
Definition.....	9
NAEYC.....	9
History of DAP.....	10
Importance of DAP to Children’s Learning and Development.....	13
NAEYC Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators.....	15
Student Teacher Beliefs about DAP: Relevant Studies.....	19
Influences on Student Teacher Knowledge of DAP.....	23
Childhood Experiences.....	23
The Student Teaching Placement: Pre-K and Kindergarten.....	24
Teacher Preparation Program.....	26
The Student Teaching Experience and Student Teachers.....	28
The Current Study.....	28
CHAPTER IV: POSITIONALITY STATEMENT.....	30
CHAPTER V: METHODS.....	32
Participants.....	32
Program Characteristics and Exposure to DAP.....	32
Recruitment.....	34
Procedures and Measures.....	35
Data Analysis.....	36

CHAPTER VI: RESULTS.....	38
Amber.....	38
Briana.....	38
Cia.....	39
Imani.....	39
Miranda.....	40
Tyla.....	40
Christina.....	40
Themes for Research Question 1: Students’ Definitions of DAP.....	41
Deductive Themes.....	42
Play-Based Approach.....	42
Joyful, Engaged Learning.....	44
Building on Children’s Strengths.....	46
Acknowledgment of Multiple Domains of Development.....	47
Individualization.....	48
Each Child is a “Valued Member of the Learning Community”.....	51
Acknowledgement of the Child’s Social and Cultural Context.....	52
Cultural, Linguistic, Ability Appropriateness.....	53
Family and Community Engagement.....	55
Inductive Themes.....	56
Different Conceptualizations of DAP.....	56
Themes for Research Question 2: Students’ Discussions of DAP and Recommendations.....	58
Deductive Themes.....	58
Create a Caring, Equitable Community of Learners.....	58
Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections.....	59
Observing, Documenting, Assessing Children’s Development and Learning.....	60
Teaching to Enhance Each Child’s Development and Learning.....	61
Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to Achieve Meaningful Goals.....	62
Demonstrating Professionalism as An Early Childhood Educator.....	63
Inductive Themes.....	63
Use of DAP Across Settings.....	63
Themes for Research Question 3: Students’ Experiences.....	65

Deductive Themes .....	65
Childhood Experiences .....	65
Home .....	65
School .....	66
Teacher Preparation Program .....	67
Courses and Coursework .....	68
Support .....	70
Course Instructor .....	70
The Cooperating Teacher .....	71
Inductive Themes .....	71
COVID-19 Context .....	71
CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION .....	74
Research Question 1: Students’ Definitions/Descriptions of DAP and NAEYC .....	75
Research Question 2: Students’ Discussions about DAP, and Alignment with NAEYC .....	80
Research Question 3: Influences on Knowledge of DAP .....	84
Connection to Theory .....	87
Strengths and Limitations .....	88
Implications .....	89
Conclusion .....	93
REFERENCES .....	95
APPENDIX A: INITIAL VISIT TO HDF 461 SCRIPT .....	109
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT VISIT SCRIPT .....	110
APPENDIX C: EMAIL REMINDER SCRIPT .....	111
APPENDIX D: EMAIL TO SELECTED PARTICIPANTS .....	112
APPENDIX E: EMAIL TO INDIVIDUAL STUDENT TEACHERS .....	113
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	114

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Used as a framework for teaching methods, developmentally appropriate practice broadly encompasses early childhood educators' ability to plan, teach, and assess children's learning and development while considering their individual developmental levels, and community and cultural features (Baumgartner, DiCarlo, & Casbergue, 2020). The overall teacher preparation experience is an opportunity for students to learn about development, theory, and a range of teaching strategies and practices and apply this content through hands-on classroom practice while under supervision of a cooperating teacher. Students' final classroom-based field experience is typically student teaching. This entire teacher preparation process serves as a transition for teacher candidates to becoming effective educators. Through their teacher preparation program, teacher candidates gain insight and awareness to what it means to be an educator, and how to support children's learning and development through use of DAP practices. As students spend an increasing amount of time in the classroom during student teaching, it is important to consider what student teachers know and understand about DAP including child-centered practices that are informed by what is known from theory and research about how children develop and learn, and educators use their knowledge about child development and learning to make instructional and curricular decisions as defined by Copple and Bredekamp (2009). This understanding has implications for early educators as the use of DAP has the potential to maximize children's learning and development during the early years which are crucial for later developmental outcomes (Brosh, 2020). During these final classroom-based experiences student teachers have the opportunity to gain increasing responsibility for providing children with learning experiences and environments that reflect DAP.



The overarching goal of the current study was to explore students' understanding of DAP. Specifically, the current study aimed to: 1) examine the understanding of and beliefs about DAP and how DAP practices are/should be reflected in the classroom of students who have completed student teaching, 2) examine how their definitions and discussions align with The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) definition, and 3) highlight experiences that students report as contributing to their knowledge of DAP. Although research shows that DAP is associated with children's learning and development across many developmental domains, there is little qualitative research that highlights the voices of students' understanding of DAP, contributing to the importance of the current study. Moreover, a question exists about if and how students' overall understanding of DAP reflects the concept as defined by NAEYC. The current study utilizes the NAEYC DAP Position Statement and Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators (NAEYC, 2020) as a conceptual framework. Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time (PPCT) model and bioecological theory of human development will help to make sense of the contextual factors that shape student teacher development. The findings of this study will be helpful in identifying how discussions of DAP with students who have completed student teaching reflect the NAEYC Position Statement and Recommendations for Educators. The findings also will be helpful in identifying future areas of research that need to be studied, and any areas for further examination and discussion in teacher preparation programs regarding DAP.

This paper will begin with an overview of the theoretical framework of the current study. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Model and the Bioecological Theory of Human Development are used to explain proximal processes and experiences that have influenced development and learning. Next, the definition, history, and importance of DAP are discussed followed by the NAEYC

Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators and implications for children's learning and development. I then discuss relevant studies, influences on student teacher beliefs about DAP, and the teacher preparation program. Following a personal statement, the methods, results, and discussion are presented.

## CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### **Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Model and the Bioecological Theory of Human Development**

The goal of the current study was to explore student teachers' understanding of DAP. Bronfenbrenner's theory helps to explain how an individual's development and learning is shaped by personal characteristics and outside influences from a variety of levels. As student teachers journey through the teacher preparation program, there are contextual and personal factors that influence their understanding and practices. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Model and Bioecological Theory of Human Development will help to explain how students who have just completed student teaching have developed their knowledge and practices related to DAP. It is important to keep in mind that students' experiences are just a small fraction of their learning, and while proximal processes are best captured in "real time," the current study relied on students' recollections to examine their understanding and learning of DAP.

According to Tudge et al., (2009), a study that is truly guided by the bioecological theory must include or consider the four elements of this PPCT model. Bronfenbrenner created the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model that explains the interrelation between four elements: person, process, context, and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Navarro et al., *under review*). Below, I explain these four elements and their application to the current study.

#### **Process**

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) explain that the person and the context directly and indirectly influence the power of proximal processes (i.e., complex, reciprocal interactions between an individual and other people or objects in the environment). According to Tudge et al. (2017) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), *process* refers to proximal processes that are key indicators of one's development. They are bidirectional, everyday interactions between

individuals and the environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). During the student teaching experience, student teachers' interactions with children, families, the cooperating teacher, and course instructors serve as proximal processes that influence student teacher knowledge and practices related to DAP. Also, interactions that occur over time with course instructors influence student teachers' understanding of various concepts, including DAP. For example, student teachers may engage in conversations with course instructors about DAP, read course materials on DAP, and/or complete assignments related to DAP. These repeated and varied interactions contribute to student teacher development. To address the process component of the theory, interviews in the current study included questions that captured students' understanding of DAP and with whom these conversations took place. I also asked students about any meaningful experiences they have had related to learning about DAP to allow for understanding of impactful learning experiences. These discussions focused on process may provide more information on significant interactions (with others and through course materials and assignments) that have helped to promote student learning and development.

### **Person**

The *person* concept in the PPCT model refers to individual characteristics (e.g., race, age, personality) that shape an individual's experiences and proximal processes. Person characteristics include three types: demand (i.e., immediate stimulus to another person like age, skin color, etc.), force (i.e., temperament, motivation, and persistence), and resource (i.e., skills, knowledge, current abilities, or previous experiences). In the current study, I acknowledged person characteristics by asking the students about past learning and experiences that have contributed to their knowledge of DAP. I asked demographic questions about professional goals and years of formal (paid) work experience. Some interview questions related to other person characteristics

like child-centered or teacher-centered beliefs about DAP, which are related to resource characteristics. These person characteristics may have impacted students' proximal processes during student teaching and other experiences throughout the teacher preparation program. Throughout this process, these characteristics could have helped to either promote or detract from proximal processes, influencing development.

### **Context**

The concept of *context* refers to the environment in which proximal processes occur. According to Bronfenbrenner, an individual's environment influences their interactions. The bioecological model refers to the interrelated system layers known as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). All of the systems provide context for understanding what proximal processes students may have engaged in throughout the program.

The microsystem is the "immediate" environment in which the individual (e.g., student teacher) experiences contact with others (Tudge et al., 2017; Tudge et al., 2009). Students' proximal processes occur in microsystem. Regarding context, the teacher preparation program is a part of the student teacher's experience in that this program requires completion and application of coursework through field experiences like practica and student teaching. Interviews with students included questions about how people in these settings have influenced their beliefs about DAP (i.e., cooperating teachers and/or course instructors). Interview questions included asking about coursework and experiences with instructors that have led to his/her understanding of DAP. Lastly related to context, I addressed any similarities/differences in student teacher beliefs about DAP related to their student teaching placement (i.e., if they are placed in PreK or kindergarten). Interview questions included questions that relate to thoughts

about DAP in kindergarten. The mesosystem is a “system of two or more microsystems,” and emphasizes similarities and differences between microsystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Participants in the current study have experienced student teaching and course experiences that, taken together, are the mesosystem. Participants responded to interview questions about how these experiences contributed to their learning about DAP. The current study does not call attention to the exosystem, which is comprised of forces that indirectly influence proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Navarro et al., *under review*). However, the macrosystem describes the cultural context related to the developing person (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In my past experience, I witnessed a child and family from an Asian culture who used worksheets and other activities that were less child-initiated and more teacher- or parent-directed. A student teacher who has experienced this in his/her culture may view child-initiation as less significant and teacher-direction may relate more to their teaching philosophies. In this way, we can see how culture could shape one’s beliefs about DAP and practices related to DAP. In the current study, students were asked to recall any cultural influences that have shaped their knowledge about DAP.

Overall, I explore what course microsystems and how the student teaching placement microsystem have played a role in students’ learning about DAP.

## **Time**

*Time* is the final element of Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model. This element explains how development happens over time and that values, beliefs and practices change with respect to time (Tudge et al., 2017; Tudge et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner viewed the concept of time as so important because it is an element that influences an individual’s development, over the lifespan, and even across generations. Particularly with the current study, the concept of time is important

since students were interviewed about their understanding of DAP at the end of their student teaching experience. This time period takes into account what students have experienced that has contributed to their knowledge about DAP, and experiences in the four-year teacher preparation program that have contributed to their knowledge near the completion of their program. I addressed the time aspect by asking how they planned to [continue to] implement DAP in their own classrooms. Additionally, how students have developed their knowledge about DAP over time, particularly throughout the teacher preparation program, provides information about how proximal processes in certain contexts develop over time such as practica, and student teaching in the context of COVID-19. Because this pandemic heavily impacted teaching as a whole, it may be related to themes that emerge with students as they discuss previous work/teaching experiences related to their knowledge of DAP.

Overall, Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model and bioecological theory provide a framework for examining student teachers' understanding and use of DAP and exploring person process, context, and time factors that may contribute to their knowledge and practices. It is important to understand the context for what students learn in their coursework (explained later), which will potentially influence their development. One limitation of the current study's use of this theoretical framework is that the study only focuses on a small fraction of students' experiences and course work. Furthermore, relying on students' recollections to capture their proximal processes is a condensed method that is not entirely true to the theory itself because their interactions are not captured in "real time".

## CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

#### **Definition**

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as, “methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning” (NAEYC, 2020, p. 5). DAP, which is considered a broad concept across the field of early childhood education (Kim, 2011), is emphasized by NAEYC as a framework that is “grounded both in the research on child development and learning and in knowledge about educational effectiveness and promotes young children’s optimal learning and development” (NAEYC, 2020, p. 5). DAP has a strong emphasis on recognizing children as whole individuals. For example, DAP practices should reflect children’s individual strengths, as children are valued as unique members of the classroom community. Hart, Burts, and Charlesworth (1997) explain that DAP includes the child-centered perspective with each child’s needs as the center of the classroom curriculum. Furthermore, practices implemented by educators should support children’s cultural, linguistic and ability in order to reflect DAP (see NAEYC *DAP: Defining Developmentally Appropriate Practice*; Nelson and Smith, 2004).

#### **NAEYC**

NAEYC is a prominent early childhood professional organization that promotes high-quality learning for children birth-8. NAEYC published DAP and currently provides guidance for educators’ understanding of DAP. Through connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research (NAEYC, 2020), NAEYC seeks to strengthen and improve the field of early childhood and has emphasized the importance of high-quality early childhood programs. The current study



uses NAEYC'S current definition of DAP and uses NAEYC as a conceptual framework.

NAEYC has published many foundational documents that inform the decisions and practices that early childhood educators make to implement DAP in their classrooms. The current study calls specific attention to two of these foundational documents: The DAP Position Statement, and Recommendations for Early Childhood Educations. These documents are discussed in the next section.

### **History of DAP**

DAP is a term that has been constantly evolving in the field of early childhood education. The DAP Position Statement was created because educators have the “responsibility to plan and implement intentional, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that promote the social and emotional development, physical development and health, cognitive development, and general learning competencies of each child served” (NAEYC, 2020).

NAEYC developed the first DAP Position Statement in 1987 that included the original definition of DAP, as well as guidelines for how educators could provide children with developmentally appropriate environments and teaching. The DAP Position Statement is a framework of principles and guidelines that are research-based and that aid educators in intentional decision making. The third edition of the DAP Position Statement was released in 2009. The fourth edition of the new DAP Position Statement was announced in 2020, and released in 2022 (see [Announcing NAEYC's New Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice | NAEYC; Friedman et al., 2021](#)). This new edition reflects new research and underscores the value of social, cultural, and historical contexts.

The development and subsequent revisions of the DAP Position Statement were in response to concerns and new evidence and findings related to children's development and

learning. Historically, the two issues that gave rise to the original DAP Position Statement were due to 1) concerns about inappropriate teaching as the rise in public prekindergarten programs continued, and 2) the launching of NAEYC's system for national accreditation (how programs demonstrate high-quality for young children). Because the definition and guidelines changed over the years, misunderstandings about DAP emerged, leading to inconsistencies and misinterpretations. One of the biggest misconceptions about DAP was that there was an "overdependence of DAP" and that it did not allow for consideration of the role of children's homes, communities, and cultures in how they grew and developed (Cannella, 1997; Walsh, 1991; & Lubeck, 1998). These concerns and misconceptions resulted in NAEYC having to address the issues and make more changes to their position statement about DAP.

In light of the critiques and research findings, NAEYC has implemented many changes to the DAP Position Statement over the years. I will not discuss the entire history of these changes, but I will call attention to a few. Originally, the Position Statement focused on children aged 4-5 years-old, but eventually included birth-8 years of age. According to NAEYC (2020), this change brought about a better understanding of DAP in the field of early childhood that educators could share with families of children, policymakers, and other professionals. An additional change to the DAP Position Statement was omitting the term "best" practice. Although previous editions utilized this term to refer to quality practices, the word "guidelines" is now used instead of the word "best" (NAEYC, 2020). According to NAEYC's webpage on Reframing "Best" Practice, the term "best" reflects the dominant culture the US- white, middle-class, heterosexual individuals who are European. "Best" practice entails assumptions being made from educators' personal experiences that can be biased. Therefore, "best" practices were

reframed as guidelines for educators. These guidelines are based on research on the development and education of young children and are therefore referred to as "evidence-based."

The Recommendations for Early Childhood Educations have the potential to improve teachers' decision-making and teaching methods (Wheatley, 2003), meaning educators use them as guidelines in their daily classroom instruction and interactions. As mentioned in Hyson (2000), as teachers uphold these standards, children receive the greatest benefits. The recommendations focus on children's strengths, families, awareness of educator biases, and advocacy within the field. Both the DAP Position Statement and Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators relate to Bronfenbrenner's theory through context in which students develop, specifically the exosystem. As teachers may use the Recommendations as teaching strategies in the classroom, this may indirectly influence how the student learns about and/or understands DAP.

The conceptualization of DAP is constantly evolving. These revision changes have also brought about different ways that researchers examine the framework. DAP has been studied by some researchers in comparison to its counter concept - DIP (developmentally inappropriate practice). DIP is thought to reflect various content areas in a classroom setting that do not allow for integration, relevance to children, or hands-on experiences (Hart et al., 1997). In studies conducted by Hyson et al. (1990) and Shiakou and Belsky (2009), DAP and DIP concepts were examined in terms of which concept reflected better outcomes for children in classrooms (one classroom was considered to reflect DAP while another was considered to reflect DIP). DAP has been associated with child-initiated experiences and described as *non-didactic*, while DIP was associated with more teacher-led experiences or highly academic programs that stress basic skills and described as *didactic* (Miller & Bizzell, 1983; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995;

Akin, 2013). As aforementioned, these concepts, whether referred to as DAP versus DIP or non-didactic versus didactic are prevalent in previous research focused on understanding DAP and children's experiences in early childhood classrooms.

### **Importance of DAP to Children's Learning and Development**

Although the definition of DAP has evolved over the years, its contribution to the field has brought about changes that promote optimal learning experiences for children through evidence-based guidelines for educators. DAP and children's learning and development is not the focus of the current study; however, this section provides support for the importance of preservice teachers' understanding of DAP to implement these learning experiences for children.

Studies show that DAP impacts children's cognitive development, specifically creativity and divergent thinking. According to the North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development (2013), cognitive development refers to how children acquire, organize, and utilize information in complex ways (p.118). Studies conducted by Brown and Lan (2013), Hyson et al. (1990), and Miller and Bizzell (1983) all support implementing practices that reflect DAP being beneficial to children's cognitive development. In a qualitative meta-analysis conducted by Brown and Lan (2013), researchers used a template analysis to code 12 qualitative studies that were based on original research and involved early childhood teachers and administrators. It was revealed that implementing DAP practices positively influenced children's cognitive development. Teachers' DAP practices included free-play in classrooms, asking children questions during their play, and scaffolding children's learning. Hyson and colleagues found that children in classrooms that reflected DAP scored higher on measures of creativity and divergent thinking when compared to children in classrooms that were more focused on academics and teacher-directed experiences (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 1990; Hyson 2000). In previous research, such

as the work conducted by Marcon (1992), findings indicate that classrooms considered to reflect DAP (e.g., play-based schedules, asking children questions to promote high-order thinking) provided children with a greater vocabulary, leading to increased verbal skills for children in these classrooms, along with greater receptive language (Dunn, Beach, & Kontos, 1994). Taken together, this research supports the idea that DAP is beneficial to children's cognitive development (e.g., creativity, divergent thinking). This information highlights why it is important for educators to implement strategies that reflect DAP while considering children's cognitive development.

In addition to cognitive development, studies show that DAP also impacts children's social/emotional development. Social/emotional development encompasses children's feelings about themselves, others, and how they manage emotions (NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development, 2013). According to this source, as children learn how to maneuver relationships early in life in a healthy manner, they gain skills that help them to adjust to the demands of life as they grow older. Several research studies show that the social/emotional domain of development is positively impacted by educators' use of DAP. For example, Shiakou and Belsky (2009) assessed children's social/emotional functioning at the end of the school year in terms of their confidence in learning, feelings about school, anxiety, and social skills. It was found that children with a greater exposure to DAP in their classrooms (e.g., child-direction and free-play) scored higher at the end of the year in all areas except for anxiety (anxiety was found to be lower). Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milburn (1995) also revealed findings that support DAP being important for children's social/emotional development. Children in developmentally appropriate programs demonstrated more pride in their own accomplishments and reported to worry less about school, whereas children in more didactic programs demonstrated lower

expectations of success and showed less pride in their accomplishments along with increased worry about school in general. Findings from earlier studies of DAP also suggest that children in classrooms that reflect DAP seem to demonstrate less stressful behaviors and are able to navigate their classrooms successfully (Burts et al., 1990; Hyson et al., 1990). Taken together, this research, supports the role of DAP in children's social/emotional development. This information highlights why it is important for educators to implement strategies that reflect DAP while considering children's social/emotional development.

The aforementioned research briefly discusses the importance of DAP as it relates to children's cognitive and social/emotional development. Because prior research supports the notion that DAP is important for children's learning and development, and because NAEYC provides research-based recommendations to implement DAP; it is necessary for educators including student teachers who are about to enter the profession, to be able to understand and articulate their views of DAP and how they plan to implement DAP into their own classrooms.

### **NAEYC Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators**

The Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators are also significant for children. Students in the current study may have learned concepts in their courses that reflected the third edition and perhaps the announcement of the fourth edition of the DAP Position Statement and Recommendations. The difference between the two versions that is essential for the current study is the addition of a sixth recommendation in the 2020 announcement. Below, I explain each recommendation according to the 2020 announcement and provide research that explains the relevance of each recommendation to children's learning and development.

The first recommendation is to create a caring, equitable community of engaged learners. This recommendation emphasizes upholding the unique value of children and their families,

recognizing children's strengths, developing trusting relationships, scaffolding learning, and more. This recommendation holds value to children's learning and development through, for example, the nurturing relationship between the teacher and the child. Teacher-child relationships are found to positively impact children's school readiness skills (Graziano et. al., 2016), and more specifically their language development (Yoleri, 2016). Pianta and Stuhlman (2019) found that teacher-child relationships are associated with changes in children's academic and social skills, supporting the idea that teacher-child relationships are important for school success. Additionally, Mohamed (2018) found that teacher-child conflict predicted more frequent internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in preschoolers, suggesting that more positive teacher-child relationships contribute to less of these behavior problems. The research mentioned here emphasizes the importance of trusting relationships (like the teacher-child relationship), as mentioned as a part of the recommendation. This recommendation supports Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model through highlighting that educator (such as student teachers) develop their understanding through the interactions and relationships that are formed in the microsystem or classroom setting. These interactions (like the teacher-child relationship) contribute to not only the student teachers' development, but children's development as well. The implications that the teacher-child relationship has for children helps to understand why this strategy is one that should be implemented by educators and why it serves as a recommendation from NAEYC.

The second recommendation for educators to implement DAP is to establish reciprocal relationships with families. This includes honoring families' preferences for their child(ren), making time for including families in decisions, upholding the value of multilingualism to families, and more. Studies have shown that family involvement is beneficial to children. For example, Ansari and Gershoff (2016) found that greater parent involvement leads to increased

cognitive stimulation in parents, which leads to positive impacts on children's academic and behavior skills. In terms of family-school partnership, Evangelou, Brooks, and Smith (2007) found that children's progress in language and early literacy skills was apparent as parents participated in a partnership with their children's childcare centers. This type of family participation could possibly grow as educators practice multilingualism (communicating in the home language) with family members, as communication with families in the home language encourages family participation in student learning (Coady & Ankeny, 2019). Furthermore, educators should uphold the importance of children's home language and community so that children feel valued, appreciated, and maintain self-esteem in their classrooms. Educators should also encourage children's development of their home language while fostering the English language (NAEYC, 1996). In thinking about the mesosystem from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, the interactions that student teachers have with families impacts their own development as well as the development of the child. Taken together, this research emphasizes the importance of family relationships and involvement and the implications for children's learning and development. Because educators' acknowledgement of children's home language and culture strengthens family connections (NAEYC, 1996), establishing family relationships is upheld as a recommendation for educators.

The next recommendation for educators to implement DAP is to observe, document, and assess children's learning and development while being aware of how our own culture and background can affect judgement. This recommendation also emphasizes upholding each individual child's cultural being while considering societal and structural perspectives. This recommendation holds value for focusing on children's strengths and utilizing authentic assessments when collecting data on children (i.e., conducting assessments via children's home



language). The term cultural responsiveness is apparent in this recommendation. Cultural responsiveness refers to one's ability to be aware of their own cultural identity and the ability to learn about other cultural norms of students and families (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). In regard to proximal processes in Bronfenbrenner's theory, cultural experiences can shape how student teachers engage with children and even how they accommodate diverse cultures in the classroom setting. According to these researchers, as students experience educators who are sensitive to cultural differences and the unique needs of marginalized communities, there is a greater chance of success in student learning and achievement. As educators practice culturally responsive teaching, they are able to provide children with meaningful experiences while valuing each student individually.

The fourth recommendation is to teach to enhance each child's development and learning. This recommendation focuses on educators' use of teaching practices that facilitate children's learning in all developmental domains and content areas. Through play, educators provide many opportunities for children to make individual choices and interact with peers (see *NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice, 2020*). Play has been found to be important for children's acquisition of language skills and creativity, cultural knowledge, cognitive flexibility, and emergent literacy abilities (Holmes et al., 2017; Moller, 2015; Nell et. al, 2013; Russ & Wallace, 2013).

The fifth recommendation is to plan and implement an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals. The classroom curriculum guides teacher instruction and learning experiences that yield outcomes for children. It is essential for educators to provide children with learning experiences embedded within the curriculum that are culturally relevant, avoids stereotypes and biases, and meets the needs and interests of each child (see *NAEYC Developmentally*

*Appropriate Practice, 2020*). Educators' understanding of children's individual goals allows for choosing the most appropriate method of instruction to create an individual, more efficient learning environment for each child (NAEYC, 2022; *UK Essays, 2018*; Moffat, 2016).

The final recommendation is to demonstrate professionalism as an early childhood educator. As educators utilize the guidelines listed above to drive their teaching practices in the classroom promotes children's development and learning. As mentioned in NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice (2020), educators use the guidelines to conduct themselves in a professional manner and serve as advocates for children and their families. Professionalism constitutes educators' knowledge and skills, quality of teaching, family engagement, and many other critical components for children (Wechsler et al., 2016; Braidt, 2014).

Overall, the six recommendations have implications for teachers and associations with children's learning and development. These recommendations are not an exhaustive list of effective teaching strategies; continually educating oneself about how to provide these for children and families is recommended. Additionally, the recommendations connect to Bronfenbrenner's theory by providing a context for understanding student teacher development and how student teacher development is shaped by factors put forth by a professional organization. All of the recommendations have implications for children's learning and development, making it clear why they are significant for educators to understand.

### **Student Teacher Beliefs about DAP: Relevant Studies**

Student teacher beliefs about DAP has been examined in studies. In the research discussed below, it is important to know that if the term *pre-service teacher* is used, this does include student teachers, which is the focus of the current study.

Researchers assert that teachers' classroom practices for pre-service and in-service teachers are based on their beliefs (Akin, 2013). Results of many research studies provide information about how student teachers perceive DAP and it has been found that student teachers value DAP and find it to be an important concept (Betawi & Jabbar, 2019; Akin, 2013). Betawi and Jabbar (2019) examined perceptions of preservice teachers about DAP as well as the influence of demographics on their perceptions. The sample of 253 students included preservice teachers across all four college years, with 189 being student teachers. They found that preservice teachers value or have a high perception (i.e., rated as important and/or valuable by the participants) of DAP according to the Teacher Belief Scale (TBS). More specifically, DAP was seen as meaningful and valuable to preservice teachers. Akin (2013), focused on 507 early childhood preservice teachers in their study of DAP across five different universities. Findings from this study also suggest that pre-service teachers value DAP, specifically child-centered approaches. Raftery (2016) investigated preservice teacher beliefs and future use of DAP as well as how teacher practices might impact children's outcomes. This study revealed that not only do preservice teachers reportedly value DAP, but they associate DAP with positive child outcomes. Using the TBS and the Instructional Activities Scale (IAS) to assess beliefs and reported practices, participants' scores on these measurements were positively correlated, indicated that the more belief in DAP, the more likely they indicate intended use of DAP practices. With a similar focus, Kim (2011) examined preservice teachers' beliefs about DAP and DIP, and how they define and interpret the principles and characteristics of DAP. Results revealed that preservice teachers possessed strong beliefs about DAP- the mean score of the TBS items assessing DAP was 57.32 with a possible range of 13-65. Following completion of the TBS, three participants participated in interviews. It was found that students' responses regarding

components of DAP were varied- one focused on children's perspectives, one on classroom structure, and one on children's individual needs. Only one of the three participants mentioned three specific components of DAP. The current study will build from these findings and focus on students' understanding of and beliefs about DAP. Taken together, this research indicates that student teachers believe that DAP is a significant concept to learn and understand.

One difference between the above studies is situated in methodology. While Kim (2011) used a mixed-methods analysis, the other two studies were strictly quantitative. Betawi and his colleague used descriptive statistical analyses by computing means and standard deviations. These researchers had preservice teachers to complete the TBS which consists of two subscales: the TBS portion and the IAS (Instructional Activities Scale). The TBS assesses preservice teachers' beliefs and activities related to teaching practices, while the IAS assesses how frequently teachers and future teachers thought they should practice DAP. One of the limitations of this study was that the researchers failed to capture how frequently preservice teachers believe DAP should be implemented because completion of the IAS portion of the measurement was not a part of the study. This is unlike Raftery (2016) and Kim (2011), who also used the TBS as a measurement, but both portions were completed by participants.

Kim (2011) and Raftery (2016) used additional methodologies to understand more than what the TBS results could offer- they perhaps desired additional information than preservice teachers' beliefs about DAP. To capture preservice teachers' perceptions of how different teaching practices impact children's development, Raftery (2016) administered the Vignette assessment. The Vignette assessment involved preservice teachers' review of written scenarios that they must rate using a Likert-type scale in order to indicate the expected improvement in the target child's development. As reported by Raftery, some of the means suggested "moderate"

intent of preservice teachers to use DAP instructional strategies, and “moderate” beliefs that DAP is important. This demonstrates the use of measurements might not always be the most efficient when capturing perceptions about DAP. Shedding light on mixed-methods, Kim (2011) additionally conducted qualitative analysis through individual interviews to gain insight on preservice teachers’ definitions of DAP and their intentions to implement DAP in the classroom. Interview questions in this study are surprisingly not revealed anywhere in the study, however the goal of the individual interviews was to understand beliefs about DAP.

The methods across these studies illuminate limitations. All of the studies use quantitative methods, with Kim (2011) additionally using a qualitative approach. The use of quantitative measures fails to capture a deeper understanding of what preservice teachers believe about DAP. For example, results that indicate “moderate” beliefs (such as those in Raftery, 2016) are difficult to interpret and fail to paint the bigger picture of what preservice teachers believe. There needs to be more qualitative research that allows student teachers to express their perceptions about DAP. Although Kim (2011) did use interviews, this individual only conducted interviews with three out of the sixty-five participants. These three participants had great variation across their responses. Only including three participants fails to give a broader understanding of how preservice teachers generally define DAP and their beliefs on how to implement DAP.

There is also a lack of theoretical foundations in some research. Betawi and Jabbar (2019) use a theoretical foundation that focuses on cognitive learning theories such as the concept of constructivism that is tied to Piaget and Vygotsky. The connection with their theory allows their study to shed light on teacher knowledge and how absence of teacher knowledge can inform practices considered to reflect DIP. Neither Raftery (2016) nor Kim (2011) recognize

theoretical underpinnings in their studies. Using Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model and bioecological theory may help to delineate factors from past proximal processes that influenced current beliefs and practices related to DAP.

Taken together, these key studies demonstrate that there is a need for more qualitative work in capturing preservice teachers' understanding of DAP. The current qualitative study captures various factors that influence the development of the student teacher and allows us to capture possible influences on a larger scale. Due to the variation in responses in the study by Kim (2011), this researcher acknowledges that diverse perspectives exist, revealing variations in knowledge as it relates to pedagogy and subject among preservice teachers. Gaining broader understanding of preservice teacher perceptions seems to be captured best using in-depth interviews. In the next section, I discuss research about the influences on student teacher beliefs about DAP.

### **Influences on Student Teacher Knowledge of DAP**

#### **Childhood Experiences**

The influences on teacher beliefs stem from in part childhood experiences, the cooperating teacher, and even the student teaching placement. These influences on student teacher perceptions about DAP are apparent throughout research. Many research studies support the idea that pre-service teachers come to understand DAP through their past educational experiences and preconceptions of teaching that are shaped by their own experiences as a student in the classroom (Bramald, Hardman, & Leat, 1995; Clark, 1988; Salisbury-Glennon & Stevens, 1999). These experiences serve as resource characteristics from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory. Studies also state that student teacher perceptions are impacted by their demographic characteristics and culture (Betawi and Jabbar, 2019; Akin, 2013). Rath (2001) suggests that

what pre-service teachers experience in their upbringings, personal lives, and during earlier school experiences shape their beliefs.

### **The Student Teaching Placement: Pre-K and Kindergarten**

Student teacher beliefs may be shaped by the specific student teaching placement. Because student teachers are placed in various early childhood placements (e.g., preschool, kindergarten), it is important to consider how placement experience may influence student teachers' perceptions of DAP.

Pre-K and kindergarten are often grounded in different perceptions from administrators and teachers of how DAP should be implemented in the classroom. While Pre-K is generally more play-based and aligns with DAP, kindergarten follows a more rigorous curriculum that often involves the use of worksheets and standardized testing. Given these differences, one might wonder how these two types of placements may impact student teachers' understanding of and beliefs about DAP. The cooperating teacher and the placement setting are both influential in the development of the student teacher.

Smith (1997) examined student teacher beliefs about DAP in relation to context. Specifically, this study looked at socialization, the influence of the cooperating teacher in shaping student teacher beliefs about DAP. There have been previous arguments by researchers such as Borko and Mayfield (1995), who suggested that cooperating teachers may have a stronger influence on student teacher beliefs than university supervisors. This idea supports the notion that student teachers may experience more proximal processes with cooperating teachers that in turn shape their development. Supporting this argument, Hogben and Lawson (1983) believed that student teacher attitudes become more similar to those of the cooperating teacher as student teaching progresses. Although the current study does not focus on nor gather data from

cooperating teachers specifically, their profound influence during student teaching contributes to the decision to study students who have just completed student teaching.

Requirements for kindergarten typically limit kindergarten teachers' implementation of DAP. The kindergarten classroom may follow the K-12 Standard Course of Study that is focused on expectations for student knowledge, academic achievement, and testing across multiple content areas. Although NAEYC's Recommendations for Educators applies to students birth-8, the standards of the public school system are often not sensitive to these recommendations (Goldstein, 2007). There is usually less room for individualized planning and child-centered approaches in the classroom. According to NAEYC (2020), educators must create a balance between kindergarteners' abilities and needs, and the kindergarten curriculum. Student teachers who are placed in kindergarten settings must learn this same balance in order to continue to implement practices that reflect DAP. If the demands of the kindergarten curriculum and expectations of teachers disregard the value of DAP, student teachers in this placement may take on this same perception.

Another way to think about the role of placement is in terms of play versus academics. Play is an essential part of DAP, where academics is secondary. Academics, however, is a large component of the kindergarten curriculum and expectations (Booher-Jennings, 2005; French, 2004 seemingly across the world. In a study conducted by Hedge and Cassidy (2009), only a few kindergarten classrooms in India allowed their children 30 minutes of free-play in centers. Also in these classrooms, worksheets were considered to be essential to children's learning. These educators may utilize these tools due to the strict demands and constraints of the curriculum. Other studies have also shown that kindergarten teachers in the US also carry this same burden of providing worksheets and little free-play to students in an effort to meet curriculum demands



and state regulations (Stipek & Byler, 1997; Goldstein, 1997). Goldstein (2007) found that teachers reported not finding difficulty in honoring DAP in their kindergarten classrooms, but only because their principal allowed them to ignore some of the district's regulations and allowed them to incorporate materials of their students' interests, all while still meeting the mandates of the curriculum. For student teachers in classrooms such as this, the value of DAP is still being upheld, which could positively impact their perception of DAP. The differences in the role of play in Pre-K and kindergarten underscore the role and implementation of DAP in these two different settings and potentially how student teachers define DAP and discuss their beliefs and ideas for implementation.

### **Teacher Preparation Program**

In examining student teacher beliefs about DAP and potential influences on their development, it is important to understand the overall teacher preparation experience. This section explains teacher preparation, student teaching, and provides information specifically about student teachers.

*Teacher preparation* is a complex term that refers to a combination of university courses and classroom-based experiences (Maynard, La Paro, & Johnson, 2013; Zeichner, 2010) that preservice teachers (students who are learning to become educators) participate in to gain knowledge and experience (Sumrall et al., 2017). Classroom-based experiences serve as hands-on learning opportunities for preservice teachers to implement course content, theory, and evidence-based practices. According to Edens (2000), university students learn information while in the teacher preparation program to help form their beliefs and knowledge about becoming an educator. Based on The University of North Carolina at Greensboro teacher

preparation curriculum, preservice teachers engage in practicum courses and methods courses, finally completing student teaching during the first semester of their final year.

As teacher candidates complete required coursework, several practica, and student teaching in the teacher preparation program, there often is a shift in their thinking and learning. This shift tends to transform from a theoretical orientation that is often experienced at the university setting, to a more practical, hands-on way of thinking (i.e., practical concerns of the classroom) (Smith, 1997). Eventually, student teachers are expected to utilize the preparation that they have received from their teacher preparation program and the reality of classroom concerns to form his/her beliefs. La Paro, Siepak, and Scott-Little (2009) found that near the end of the teacher preparation program, students share more similar beliefs about children and their development to faculty than students who are at the beginning of the program. More specifically, students shifted from a teacher-directed view of education to a viewing teacher instruction as facilitation of children's active learning. Similarly, Scott-Little, La Paro, and Weisner (2007) found that students who were further along in the program had a more-developed child-centered view and had beliefs that reflected DAP. According to Smith (1997), student teachers often seek this idea of continuity of experience as they try to resolve dissonant perspectives. What students experience in required courses, along with assignments that they complete that pertain to DAP, can all influence what that student believes about DAP. As students embark on this journey in their teacher preparation program, they form their own beliefs and theories. Research studies (Akin, 2013; Clark, 1988; Fang, 1996; Buchanon et al., 1998; McMullen, 1999; Vartuli, 1999) all support the idea that teacher beliefs and theories are predictors of classroom practices. Therefore, understanding students' definitions and beliefs about DAP as they complete or after

they complete student teaching is important to thinking about how DAP is included in teacher preparation programs and how students may be learning about DAP.

### **The Student Teaching Experience and Student Teachers**

*Student teaching*, as defined in the current study, refers to the classroom-based experience that takes place during this university students' first semester of their final year in 4-year degree teacher preparation program. *Student teacher* refers to university students who are completing a full-time, classroom-based experience in order to gain information and knowledge and apply previously-learned course work. During student teaching, students are in either preschool age early childhood placements or kindergarten classrooms. Both Zeichner (2010) and Sumrall et al. (2017) found that student teaching has been identified by graduates as the most influential experience of the overall teacher preparation program. Student teaching is different from prior practicum experiences students complete in that students have the responsibility of being the lead teacher, responsible for completing lesson plans, engaging with families, and completing any other tasks associated with being the lead teacher in the classroom.

### **The Current Study**

Research that focuses on preservice teachers' perceptions of DAP is limited (Betawi and Jabbar, 2019; Akin, 2013), and research focusing on how student teacher beliefs align with NAEYC has not been conducted. There is a need for more research in the field that specifically focuses on DAP. Student teaching may be an optimal time for these studies being that student teachers are very close to entering the field as licensed educators responsible for planning and providing optimal learning experiences for children. Through qualitative interviews, the current study aimed to: 1) examine the understanding of and beliefs about DAP and how DAP practices are/should be reflected in the classroom of students who have completed student teaching, 2)

examine how their definitions and discussions align with NAEYC's definition, and 3) highlight experiences that students report as contributing to their knowledge of DAP. As proposed by Bronfenbrenner's theory, individuals (i.e., student teachers) develop as their proximal processes are influenced by interactions with others (i.e., course instructors, cooperating teachers) and experiences (i.e., courses). Thematic analysis also allowed for clarification on how themes reflect the NAEYC 2020 DAP Position Statement and Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators (although participants in the current study may have been exposed to the 2009 and 2020 NAEYC data, the Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators is the same information with the addition of a sixth recommendation). It is important for educators to understand DAP and implement strategies that are beneficial to children's learning and development.

To address the aims described above, the following research questions were examined in the current study:

- **Research question 1.** How do student teachers define DAP and how do their definitions reflect the NAEYC definition of DAP?
- **Research question 2.** How do student teachers' discussions of DAP (i.e., their beliefs and plans for implementing DAP in their own classrooms) reflect NAEYC Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators?
- **Research question 3.** What kinds of experiences have contributed to students' understanding of DAP?

## CHAPTER IV: POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

To honor transparency in my research, I would like to acknowledge my own biases that may impact the current study. First, I would like to acknowledge that I attended and completed the same teacher preparation program as the participants recruited in the current study. With that being said, I could have bias in what I think student teachers report about DAP because I completed the same courses and process as they are. After completing the program and receiving my Birth-kindergarten Educator License in 2014, I became a teacher. I served as an educator for 2 years with toddler- and preschool-aged children at the Child Care Education Program at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and taught 4 years as an NC Pre-K teacher with Chatham County and Guilford County Schools. Throughout my 6 years of teaching experience at these different settings, I learned something uniquely different about meeting the needs of various groups of children: toddler/preschoolers, 4-5-year-olds, children with and without disabilities, and children and families of American, Asian, and Hispanic/Latinx cultures. I also learned a lot about what it meant to provide children with a balance of child- and teacher-directed learning experiences, depending on their individual strengths, interests, and needs.

My experience as a teacher and my own views and opinions about DAP that are based on my experience in the classroom could influence how I plan to conduct the current study. For example, I do believe that some children (i.e., children who have never been in child care settings before, children who may exhibit aggressive behavior towards others, and/or children who need more support in focusing on tasks at-hand) benefit from a little more teacher-direction than others. However, I believe it is the duty of the teacher to help that child develop to a place where he/she can participate in experiences that are more child-directed. I think that it's a matter of what the child benefits from, and sometimes this can depend on their age and time of the

school year. Moreover, in my experience I have learned that having a balance of child- and teacher-direction can be beneficial for children. Play, a huge part of DAP, is something that I do value and think is very important. I think that free-choice play is beneficial to children because it allows them to gain confidence in exploring their environments and interacting with other children. I also think that structured activities are important. I believe a balance of play and structured activities help children to regulate themselves by allowing them free exploration at times, and then times for listening more attentively and following directions, whether it be story time or learning Foundations (alphabet curriculum used in Pre-K and up). With that being said, this potential bias could influence my expectations for how student teachers respond to the interview questions as they express their own beliefs about DAP. It could also impact the analysis process. To control my biases, I was intentional about reporting any and all themes that emerge from interviews, whether they aligned with my own personal beliefs or not. I also was intentional about not projecting my own thoughts and opinions onto student teachers and remaining open by asking questions. Lastly, I worked with another graduate student through the analysis process to ensure that the data I presented included all participants.

## CHAPTER V: METHODS

### **Participants**

Participants in the current study were enrolled in a 4-year teacher preparation program at a medium-sized university in the southeast. BK licensure students enrolled in student teaching at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) participated in semi-structured interviews via Zoom at the end of the fall 2021 semester. A total of 7 students participated. Ages of participants ranged from 33-60 years. Four participants identified as White or Caucasian and 3 identified as Black or African-American. Four students completed their student teaching in an NC Pre-K classroom, and three students completed student teaching in a kindergarten classroom. Students' years of previous formal work experience ranged from 10-20 years. Three were non-licensed teachers in either Pre-K, kindergarten, or a home childcare setting. Three were in teacher assistant (TA) or instructional assistant (IA) positions with 4- and 5-year-olds, and one teacher was a home-based specialist. Upon receiving licensure, two reported wanting to remain in supporting roles as a TA or an IA. With some overlap, three desired to be a licensed teacher in either Pre-K or kindergarten. One participant desired to teach only in Pre-K, one only in kindergarten, and one desired to continue in her position outside of the classroom as a home-based specialist.

### **Program Characteristics and Exposure to DAP**

The Birth-Kindergarten Teacher Licensure Program at UNCG aims to prepare students for various careers such as teaching in NC Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms. Students are required to complete 120 credit hours and participate in classroom-based field experiences in inclusive early childhood settings throughout the program. At the completion of the program, graduates are eligible for birth through kindergarten licensure. The student teaching course is

taken in students' senior year and requires 16 weeks of full-time student teaching progressing from observing, to planning, to lead teaching.

Syllabi for courses required in the teacher preparation program were examined for content related to DAP. This syllabi review was conducted to have an estimate of the degree to which participants were exposed to DAP throughout the program, although it is acknowledged that some information actually taught in class may not be reflected on the syllabus and students may have been in courses with slightly different syllabi. This information provides a conservative estimate that acknowledges DAP-specific topics and readings in the teacher preparation courses.

Four reviewers in groups of two examined syllabi for 8 courses. Reviewers examined the syllabi for terms "DAP" and/or "developmentally appropriate practice" in course description, course objectives and/or student learning outcomes, weekly topic, assignments related to DAP, and course readings (books and/or articles). Only two of the eight course descriptions contained the key DAP terms, however the other three syllabi contained some goals and objectives (or student learning outcomes) that mentioned DAP. In three syllabi, DAP was listed at least once as a topic during the semester. Although the other four syllabi did not DAP at least once during the semester, some still listed DAP-related readings for various weeks. At least four of the syllabi explained that students' assignments were related to DAP through evaluation: 1) creating developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor learning environments, 2) assignments that require students to discuss developmentally appropriate practices along with teaching strategies, content areas, and other aspects, 3) and assignments that require observation-based planning and use of developmentally appropriate practices. Course readings seemed to provide the most DAP content for students. Six of the eight courses required at least one DAP-related reading. More



specifically, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs by Carol Copple and Sue Bredekamp appeared in four of the syllabi. One syllabus mentioned DAP- and NAEYC-related readings. Overall, the syllabi review information allows for a better understanding the inclusion of DAP-related content in courses.

### **Recruitment**

To begin the recruitment process, I communicated via email with the Student Teaching Coordinator at UNCG to schedule visits to three sections of the student teacher courses. There was a total of six sections, however I randomly selected three from which to recruit participants. Course instructors from the student teaching seminar (HDF 461) were contacted via email to schedule a time to visit their courses twice- first to tell students about the study, and second to seek student consent. Upon my first visit to each course, I explained to students that I was a former teacher early childhood who completed the B-K licensure program at UNC Greensboro, and that I was interested in hearing about their beliefs about DAP (Appendix A). I informed them that I would return to ask for their consent to participate in the study in the next few weeks (Appendix B).

Upon my return to each of three courses, I reminded students of the purpose of my research, and informed them that they would receive a consent form via email. They were instructed to read the consent form and email me if interested in participating. I informed students that of those who participate, three would be entered into a drawing to receive a \$20 gift card.

Four students expressed interest after the initial email message. I asked students for their availability beginning the week of December 6, 2021 and sent them a confirmation email (Appendix D). Forty-eight hours before the scheduled interview, participants were sent a

reminder. Initially, I planned to sort students who were interested into two groups: Pre-K and kindergarten, and randomly select four or five students from each of these two groups. However, because only four students expressed interest, I continued the recruiting process. I sent a second general reminder to all students via email, and then began emailing students individually to gain four more participants (Appendix E). Overall, seven students participated in interviews.

### **Procedures and Measures**

I conducted a pilot interview with advanced students in the teacher preparation program, but who have not yet completed student teaching, to gain a general understanding of how students may understand and respond to the interview questions. The course instructor asked students who were interested in the interviews to contact me directly. I conducted individual pilot interviews with two students via Zoom. I made changes to interview questions and the interview protocol based on how students answered the questions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with student teachers at the end of the student teaching experience. Interviews were conducted at this time to remain sensitive to student teachers who were completing their edTPA portfolios for licensure. At this point, students had completed 16 weeks of student teaching. Zoom interviews were scheduled for an hour and automatically transcribed. To ensure that each meeting was confidential, I ensured that I was in a private location during the interviews and ask the participant to be sure of this as well. Each participant had a unique Zoom link for their interview that only the participant and I could access. To ensure greater privacy, each Zoom meeting had a “waiting room” where I had to “admit” the participant to enter the room. I followed the Interview Protocol (Appendix F) for all interviews. Interviews began with demographic and background questions, leading into questions

related to DAP, influences on students' understanding of DAP, and students' plans to implement DAP in their own classrooms. Interview questions are found in Appendix F.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon completion of interviews and editing of transcriptions, thematic analysis was used to understand the themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes or patterns across data. I used primarily deductive analysis- focusing on one research question at a time. I examined each interview for codes that seemed to align with each research question and matched themes from interviews to components of the definition of DAP and the Recommendations. Inductive themes are also included after deductive themes. I reread interviews when checking codes before creating themes from the inductive process. Specifically for inductive analyses, there are 6 phases (Braun and Clark, 2006; 2012) that I followed. The stages are as follows:

1. Phase 1- Familiarizing yourself with the data: transcribing, reading, re-reading, noting down initial ideas
2. Phase 2- Generating initial codes: coding interesting features of the data, collating data relevant to each code
3. Phase 3- Searching for themes: collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Phase 4- Reviewing themes: generating a “map” of themes
5. Phase 5- Defining and naming themes: refine specifics of each theme, generate clear definitions and names for each theme

6. Phase 6- Producing the report: selection of vivid examples, relate back of the analysis to research question and literature, produce a report of analysis

For reliability purposes, I worked with another graduate student to analyze the data. The graduate student and I discussed on multiple occasions the purpose of my research study, research questions, participants, and procedures. The graduate student examined four of seven interviews, highlighting the main ideas and creating codes. We discussed the codes that we had independently generated and ensured they aligned. After I created themes, the graduate student reviewed my themes to ensure that information was being captured accurately and that data significant to my research questions was captured. The graduate student also examined additional themes that did not connect directly to a research question. Because the graduate student was an early childhood teacher, she was helpful in bringing her knowledge of DAP practices and understanding what the participants were reporting. This collaborative work allowed for consistency and ensuring that main ideas were being captured.

## CHAPTER VI: RESULTS

The research questions in the current study were: 1) How do student teachers define DAP and how do their definitions reflect the NAEYC definition? 2) How do student teachers' discussions of DAP (i.e., their beliefs and plans for implementing DAP in their own classrooms) reflect NAEYC Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators? 3) What kinds of experiences have contributed to students' understanding of DAP?

Students' overall cultural and family information, student teaching experiences, work experiences in early childhood, and childhood experiences are included to emphasize the lens through which each participant responded during the interview. Below are brief introductions to the participants to provide background information about who they are and their experiences. Following this information, I report deductive themes. Inductive themes are reported at the end of research question as "Different Conceptualizations of DAP," "Additional Themes," and the mention of COVID-19.

### **Amber**

Amber is a White, 35-year-old female with 17 years of experience in early childhood. She currently works in her home childcare with two- to four-year-old children. Her desired occupation is to be a Pre-K or kindergarten teacher, and eventually a childcare director or childcare consultant. Amber remembers always wanting to be a teacher as a child, and specifically remembers playing in centers in kindergarten. She would line up stuffed animals and pretend they were her students. Teaching has always been a part of her life.

### **Briana**

Briana is a Black, 47-year-old female with 17 years of experience in early childhood. She currently holds a TA position in kindergarten and has expressed that she likes being a support for

the lead teacher. Briana desires to be a kindergarten teacher; however, she is not sure if she wants to leave her current role behind. She remembers being raised by a strict, authoritative mother who used harsh discipline. As a result of Briana feeling that her voice was not heard as a child, she now gives children the opportunity to have a voice, honors conversations with children, and values guiding and not forcing their learning.

### **Cia**

Cia is a 60-year-old female who identifies as Black. With a total of 20 years of experience in early childhood, she has served as the children's director at church, worked in several areas in the field, and has served as a kindergarten teacher at a charter school for the past 17 years. Cia was raised by a single father. Due to the absence of her mother in her life, Cia has always desired to be a part of her own children's lives and has compassion and a heart for children. She values teaching children about respect because of the values her father instilled in her.

### **Imani**

Imani is a 33-year-old Black female with 15 years of experience in early childhood. She currently serves as a home-based specialist, providing educational activities for children who are on the wait list for Head Start. She is unsure of her professional goals, and for now desires to continue as a home-based specialist. As a child, Imani remembers not being able to attend preschool or Pre-K. In kindergarten, she remembers the absence of play for children, completing a lot of homework, the inability to pay attention, and feeling bored. She now wants to ensure that children are happy and engaged as she serves them in her current position. She believes children's need for positive experiences is more important than academics because the academic piece will eventually come.

### **Miranda**

Miranda is a 35-year-old, White female. She has 15 years of experience working with young children, has an associate's degree, and is currently an instructional assistant (IA) with four- and five-year-old children. Miranda desires to continue serving as an IA, but eventually wants to be a Pre-K or kindergarten lead teacher. As a Christian, Miranda instills her beliefs into her own children, and believes in instilling kindness and love into the children in her classroom. She was raised by both parents who had a healthy marriage, so the sense of family, love, and community has always been a part of her life. Her values of a sense of community and closeness have transferred to the classroom setting and she shows children love and care.

### **Tyla**

Tyla is a 35-year-old, White female. She is currently a TA in an exceptional Pre-K classroom, where she also completed her student teaching. Tyla has 16 years of experience in Christian centers, for-profit centers, Head Start, in-home centers, and a number of other early childhood settings. She had a "rough" childhood and was raised by a single mother. She will be the first family member to graduate with a four-year degree. Tyla's mother always wanted to be a teacher but passed away as a result of a heart attack, so Tyla's degree attainment is personal. Tyla values a healthy family environment, and, because she endured a rocky start to life, she has great compassion and understanding for children and families in need. She often seeks resources for families and is careful to speak with children in a kind manner.

### **Christina**

With over 10 years of experience, Christina is a bilingual, 33-year-old, White female who is currently a non-licensed lead teacher in a childcare. In her years of experience, she has worked in after-school care, and provided nighttime childcare for parents taking English as a Second

Language (ESL) classes. Christina seeks to be a licensed Pre-K teacher. As a child, Christina remembers feeling stressed when learning to read as a first-grader. While her dad was goofy and her mother was strict, both of her parents were teachers. She believes that she obtained the characteristics of her parents, and it is evident in her teaching style. In other words, she can be a “big kid” as a teacher, but also enforces rules and expectations for children. Christina remembers babysitting often when she was younger and always wanting to be a teacher.

### **Themes for Research Question 1: Students’ Definitions of DAP**

Key components or themes of NAEYC’s definition of DAP were identified by individual interpretation. I highlighted what I interpreted to be the most important components of the definition from the NAEYC definition. These key components are listed as bolded headings with supporting quotes. Overall, individualization and ability-appropriateness (e.g., age) were discussed frequently across interviews. Results of each key component are presented in the order they appear in the definition.

The NAEYC definition is as follows (NAEYC 2020):

Methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, **play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning**. Educators implement developmentally appropriate practice by recognizing the multiple assets all young children bring to the early learning program as unique individuals and as members of families and communities. **Building on each child’s strengths**—and taking care to not harm any aspect of each child’s physical, cognitive, social, or emotional wellbeing—educators design and implement learning environments to help all children achieve their full potential across **all domains of development** and across all content areas.

Developmentally appropriate practice recognizes and supports **each individual** as a



**valued member of the learning community.** As a result, to be developmentally appropriate, practices must also be **culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate** for each child. The Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement is a framework of principles and guidelines to support a teacher's intentional decision making for practice. The principles serve as the evidence base for the guidelines for practice, and both are situated within three core considerations—commonality, individuality, and context.

## **Deductive Themes**

### ***Play-Based Approach***

Opportunities for play involves educators fostering play in the classroom environment through centers, free choice, and being intentional with what materials and experiences are offered to children. This theme represents students' acknowledgement of play. Overall, play-based learning was not discussed frequently across interviews.

While Christina was explaining her love for Pre-K as opposed to kindergarten, she mentioned how much she loves to play with children in her classroom. When asked if she believed that play was a component of DAP, Christina responded:

I love play, I love to play, I love to offer opportunities for play. I was like, "I don't want to do like sitting in desks all day"- no.

It's [play] everything! They [children] learned so much through play and if you don't give them that free time and everything it's just... You're planning for everything, and they have to do this, and they have to do that, they're not gonna learn. They learn so much through play and it's always interesting to hear the conversations, different things they do without me even being part of it, I'm like where'd you get that from like it's so shocking.

Tyla agreed that play was an important component of DAP. When asked about specific strategies that teachers should implement to provide a classroom that reflects DAP, she stated:

Teaching through play is important. And that [teaching through play] can be one-on-one with a teacher and student, it can be teacher in a small group, it can even be peer to peer... because some children learn better from their peers than they learn from their teachers.

Other participants also supported the idea of play when defining and describing DAP. The quotes below highlight the use of centers and allowing children to use their imaginations to create their own learning experiences, something offered through play:

I mean because the whole purpose of teaching is to focus on what the child wants and to expand on that to be able to open it up to different centers and different ideas and different contrasts. Like my children just started focusing on restaurants- did I start that? Nope! They started on their own, so then we expanded and I added different materials on the playground for that, and they built this huge, huge kitchen and they did a drive-thru, and all this different stuff. I didn't start that though, but they did.

You have your different centers even for infants because I've taught from infants all the way up until five-year-olds, so I've seen the different centers... you have at least the books, you have the manipulatives, you have the puzzles, you have the stuffed animals and just a little different you know fish, which is science, included in that too. But then when you get older, you have science, math, you know every single center that's covered- blocks and dramatic play, all that also.

### ***Joyful, Engaged Learning***

Joyful, engaged learning involves educators providing children with experiences that allow for happiness, are based on children's interests to maximize their engagement, involve hands-on learning experiences, and are offered as choice for children. Joyful learning is a positive intellectual and emotional state of learners that, I believe, begins with the educators' desire for children to be happy. Because these different elements can foster children's enjoyment of their ambiance and learning experiences, the learning can be considered joyful and engaging for children. Some participants discussed engagement through conversations with children, however this theme was not frequently discussed across interviews.

When Imani was asked about how she interacts with and engages children in her work, she emphasized children's happiness:

I want them to have a positive, you know, I want them to be happy, I want them to have positive memories about school like I think that's the biggest thing because... I mean, you learn it, you get it. Some [of] all the cognitive stuff you get it along the way, you know? Even if you're not writing your name by the time you're three and you're not recognizing site words - it comes. I'm just convinced it comes. And so, you can miss that and gain that part later, but you can't regain a bad experience... Even if you have more good experiences, nothing takes away from that bad or mediocre experience, you know? I'm all about, you know, making sure they feel that... I'm all about my butterflies and unicorns, okay? Like, let them be happy.

Amber shared her thoughts on engaging with children through conversation, by making activities hands-on, and using materials to incorporate into their lessons as a means to further

engage children in their learning. Learning about children's interests allows educators to provide them with experiences in which children will be more engaged. Amber reported:

I'm all about let's talk about it [referring to her and children's conversations and encouraging them to use their words] and then kids be having some good stuff. They tell all the stories!

I noticed in kindergarten even though it's harder to make some of the practices all the time, I still saw my CT implement DAP practices such as you know, like in a math lesson she would have them in a group in a circle and she would use objects when she was teaching shapes or if she was teaching them [unclear], sometimes we use skittles or use cheese balls as spheres, you know. She brought in different aspects hands-on learning and they and they wouldn't understand and get it, and so seeing her do it, I was able to know okay it's still possible [to implement DAP in kindergarten] ...

Joyful, engaged learning can also be viewed as children interacting with one another and having opportunities for leadership as a means to engage them further in the classroom. Cia shared:

I want them [the children] talking, I want them teaching, I want them engaging, not only with me but with each other.

Specifically focusing on children's interests in order to promote engagement, Christina and Imani stated:

...Okay he loves trains, let's focus on that, let's focus on what he wants to be interested in, to expand his knowledge and maybe something else of counting the trains or sorting the trains in different ways. -Christina

Once everything is kind of established with, you know, expectations and rule, you know, rule safety, and just respect of each other and environment, you know, letting the kids kind of lead the way and then just teach them based on..., you know, what they're interested in, is like, it just yields the best results, you know? You have more participation, they're more intrigued, they tend to participate for longer periods of time when it's their idea or something that they chose or, you know, their interests, so... -

Imani

Additionally, joyful, engaged learning can be interpreted as incorporating simple, fun brain breaks for children. Briana reported the use of dance in her kindergarten classroom. Dance is incorporated throughout the day to increase children's engagement in their learning:

We dance! When we're counting, we have our counting that we dance to, we have our letters sounds that we dance to, we have our shape songs that we dance to. And what's funny is when you're in the cafeteria and you hear them say \*singing\* "Shapes!" And they're sitting at the table, but that's how they're learning. So, we're integrating song and dance, and you know fun activities into the curriculum, even though we're told we're not supposed to, we still are and we can show that they're making growth so then when we're told we're not supposed to, we can say, but this is how they grew.

### ***Building on Children's Strengths***

Building on children's strengths involves educators assisting children in their understanding and making connections during learning. This can involve specific strategies like *scaffolding*, a teaching method using support to help a child reach a higher level of skill development or comprehension (Rock, 2022). Additionally, building on strengths can involve understanding how to meet children where they are and support them in reaching their goals.

Therefore, this theme captures participants' acknowledgement of the importance of building on children's strengths through scaffolding and meeting children where they are. Overall, participants did not discuss *building on children's strengths* frequently across interviews.

Amber explained the teacher's role in implementing DAP as facilitation and fostering responsibility and individuality for children. She highlighted the importance of scaffolding as a means to build on children's individual strengths. She stated:

We have the milestones that we know to guide by and what learning experiences to create to scaffold them to the next level.

Christina acknowledges the importance of building on children's strengths by explaining the importance of focusing on where children are individually. She explained that she doesn't push children to know how to write their name, she wishes to meet them where they are. This, in a sense, serves as an example of building on children's strengths. When asked about specific strategies that teachers should implement, she reported:

Because every child is different, some my children can't even hold a pencil so I focus on what they're able to do and be able to guide them on where they're at. So, to be able to sit and say, "well, you need to write your name"- no! [Instead,] Can you draw a circle for me? Let's focus on that, let's get the foundations first started instead of "you need to write your whole name."

The teacher needs to understand dap to know hey okay my child's not there yet, I'm going to work with them to get to that next step, but I'm not going to expect, you know, the seventh step when they're only on level 2 right now.

### ***Acknowledgment of Multiple Domains of Development***

NAEYC (2022) emphasizes that all domains of child development are important because each domain supports and is supported by one another. As children experience learning and/or gains in one domain of development, they additionally experience changes in other areas. This theme includes participants' acknowledgement that as a part of DAP, children's learning occurs across many domains of development, as well as acknowledgement of multilingualism. Amber reported:

Um, to learn in all areas of all their domains, so you know cognitively, socially, so there should be different materials for that. So, a housekeeping area, manipulatives, things like that that spark their interests and abilities and that build on their prior learning.

Imani reported:

It should more be suited towards those developmental goals in those different, you know... what's the word I'm looking for... The different domains of child development that's what we want to be highlighting.

### ***Individualization***

Individualization involves educators' acknowledgement that children have individual goals, strengths, interests, needs, etc. This theme can overlap with building on children's strengths, as meeting children where they are developmentally does allow the educator to build on strengths as well as understand that each child has individual needs. Participants highlighted individualization through discussing individual approaches and even acknowledging that understanding children individually can allow for scaffolding. This theme was discussed frequently across interviews.

When asked why DAP is important for children, Amber stated:

Because like we first mentioned with the individual approach- we're not putting them in a box and saying oh you're four years old, you don't know your letters, something is wrong with you. You know DAP doesn't work that way. It's working with where they're at and building for the next level, what's appropriate for them and their needs. We have the milestones that we know to guide by and what learning experiences to create to scaffold them to the next level.

Answering the same question as Amber, Miranda's answer emphasized understanding what children already know individually and scaffolding their learning on an individual basis. She explained:

I think, incorporating and scaffolding and building up on that on what I already know about the child and how I can scaffold it but still make an age-appropriate and not too difficult I think that's really important...

Tyla, referring to kindergarten expectations, explained that DAP is important for children in kindergarten despite how rigorous the kindergarten classroom schedule is. She sheds light on the idea that educators' use of individualization is important to allow children to work in small groups and acknowledging children's unique learning needs. Tyla stated:

Individualization is the key and being able to pull them for small groups. Their [kindergarten] expectations are high. But if you have the approach where every child is different and have learning needs, and you can use developmentally appropriate practices such as scaffolding to get them to the next level, and then you can- using things like peer groups. That's one thing that worked well in kindergarten you know you put high and lows together so they can learn from their peers and other times, it might work better to have children at the same level together during a math assignment so they don't get



frustrated or thinking that someone knows better than them. So, knowing those principles, practices, and what would work better at a certain- whether you're teaching science, math, or social studies.

Students also reported meeting children's needs or meeting children's developmental needs or "where they are" is a part of DAP. Tyla stated:

So, you kind of have to look at DAP on an individual and domain basis to figure out what is right for the child," "It's just making sure you meet all those children's needs...

Individualization is the key and being able to pull them for small groups.

Also highlighting individualization, Amber's answer emphasized meeting children where they are as a way to individualize their learning:

Every teacher has to be willing to understand each child where they are developmentally... to be able to be understanding of what each child needs, what's appropriate, what's not appropriate, where the child should be," and "It goes back to DAP because it's still individual you still need to do what's best for that child and that child might not be what's best for the other 27 in the classroom.

But sometimes we just have to think what's best for the individual child and it might not be being with a lot of children, you know? This child might do better working one-on-one or in a smaller group or a smaller setting.

DAP is working with where they're at and building for the next level, what's appropriate for them and their needs.

To Cia, while individualizing is important and a part of DAP, she believes assessing children's learning is needed in order to individualize:

What I done earlier this year when we started in August- I gave each student and assessment, it was individual assessment. That way it let me know what the student or what the child knew [and] what the child didn't know. ... Then I was able to come up with materials, assignments, and lessons that needed to be taught...

Christina also stated:

So, for example, like a child- a teacher wants the child to throw the ball, but the child at this point has not been able to roll the ball, for example. Like they have individual goals but it's not developmentally appropriate for that individual and also through that lesson plan to what the next step is.

***Each Child is a “Valued Member of the Learning Community”***

*A valued member of the learning community* means: 1) each child adds value and has a part in the classroom- the classroom is a community where everyone does their part and works together, 2) children are individuals and their boundaries should be respected, and 3) patience with children is necessary, and 4) educators should advocate for children's rights (NAEYC, 2022). All of these elements support children in their understanding that they are valued individuals and are important to their classroom. Overall, this theme was not discussed frequently across interviews.

Imani acknowledges that their classroom is a community and each member has a part:

We like to refer to our classroom as a little community. So y'all have a part, right? And um.. but in a community, everybody's not good everything, you know, some people have better skill sets in this area so we have to find out how to kind of weave all that together to make this thing work, you know...

Tyla acknowledged a child in her classroom that has a disability. Her consideration of this child's needs acknowledged the child as a valued member of the classroom:

I try to and we try to teach our friends that are typical- 'cause we have one little girl who will go around and destroy anything if they're building with blocks, if they're coloring on a paper she'll go around and destroy it. And we use the word that is our "special friend". We're learning how to- we're teaching her how to be engaged, we're teaching, you know she's still learning. And the children in my classroom know that and they'll call her by name.

Christina described her teaching methods in a way that values children and their developmental levels. She emphasized the importance of respecting a child's boundaries between the child and a teacher assistant, and also advocated for the child's developmental needs. She reported:

I'm not gonna force it unless they're interested in writing their name, I'm not gonna make them and force their hand to write their name. That's not okay.

### ***Acknowledgement of the Child's Social and Cultural Context***

This theme represents the recognition of children's cultural and social contexts. Overall, the child's social and cultural context was mentioned, however it was not frequently discussed across interviews. Acknowledging culture, Briana stated:

You have to look at their culture, their family background, their culture, you know their experiences, and integrate that in so that those kids can feel at home, feel a part of it, because once they feel a part of it, they're going to be involved.

Christina explained the importance of considering where children come from:

It's important to engage in those conversations [with families] and expanding to understand where they're [children] at, yeah, because I don't know every single home I don't know they go to every single day so just understanding, where they come from is a huge part of it too.

Cia declared:

And children coming from various backgrounds, you know, you have some that... well even during the pandemic, where the parents sat home and taught them, and you know they learn how to write their names and ABCs and different things like that.

### ***Cultural, Linguistic, Ability Appropriateness***

Cultural, linguistic, and ability appropriateness involve educators' accommodations for children in their diverse needs. This theme is somewhat related to the previous theme, the child's social and cultural context, because in order for educators to implement practices that are culturally-appropriate, this requires acknowledgement of the child's cultural background. Specifically, the current theme captures participants' recognition that practices are culturally-appropriate (i.e., acknowledging different social and cultural contexts), linguistically-appropriate (i.e., educators use appropriate language with children), and ability-appropriate (i.e., adhering to the unique developmental levels and individuality of each child including age, strengths, interests, etc.). Overall, participants frequently discussed ability-appropriateness, specific to children's age, across interviews.

When discussing appropriate ways to accommodate for children's diverse needs, Christina stated:

I mean really that's just understanding exactly what is appropriate for age. If I see a teacher trying to make sure that a one-year-old is potty-trained that's obviously not appropriate.

Amber acknowledged that age was a component of DAP, emphasizing that basing lessons and experiences on children's age makes practices DAP. She stated:

Yes, [age-appropriateness is a component of DAP], because what we know that a one-year-old should be doing different things than a four-year-old should, however, not all one-year-olds are going to learn at the same rate.

Age-appropriateness is a part of ability-appropriateness because ability involves children's individuality including age differences. When referring to accommodating for children's different ages, some responses included discussions about materials and use of labels. Amber explained an example of providing materials appropriate for a three-year-old. Her answer is based on age, a component of ability-appropriateness. She explained:

I think of developmentally appropriate practice, having materials that are developmentally appropriate for them, you know I wouldn't expect a three-year-old to be writing with pencil and paper. They should be using playdoh and Legos and aspects that help them fine motor skills to get to that writing aspect and not writing, you know? So, writing materials that are developmentally appropriate for them.

Continuing to focus on age, Imani stated:

You need to know what these children are learning and where they're at and what their abilities are. At this particular age.

Although some students acknowledge age as a part of ability-appropriateness, Tyla and Briana's answers indicate something more. Below, their responses highlight the idea that age-

appropriateness encompasses children's developmental age as opposed to their physical age.

Tyla stated:

Age-appropriateness is not necessarily a numerical age, because there again, um, I have some children who are five but they're on the developmental level of a three-year-old, so you can't look at their numerical age, but it's a developmental age.

Similarly, Briana reported:

So, you want to meet them where they are at their age, instead of trying to put them at an older age and trying to... but guide them from where they are and gradually take them to the next level based on them. Because even though it's age-appropriate it doesn't always mean it's developmentally appropriate.

### ***Family and Community Engagement***

This theme represents students' acknowledgement of involving families and communities, along with the connection between home and school as a part of DAP. Taking the time to speak with families and explain children's individual levels or experiences in the classroom and acknowledging cultural differences are considered to be a part of family and community engagement.

It is clear that some students have frequent conversations with families. For example, Christina reported:

Yes, you know and letting parents understand that, too, because- Oh, he doesn't know how to write his name – okay, and? You know I had a parent that was like Oh, my goodness, he just learned so different. I was, like every child does. And engaging in those conversations and expanding to understand where they're at yeah because I don't know

every single home, I don't know what they go to every single day, so just understanding where they come from is a huge part of it too.

Briana explained the importance of family night in kindergarten. She talked about her love for these opportunities as they allow families to come into the classroom and interact with teachers and children. Valuing family engagement, she explained:

So, you know it was like a lot of involvement, things that you know you do like programs after school to where parents can come in, like similar to tonight we did a program at my school tonight where the parents came in with the kids each grade level had a set-up, but the parents were able to meet the teachers, interact with them, we gave them manipulatives and different things like that so working with... just... for me having that parent involvement meant a lot.

Multilingualism can also be interpreted as a component of family engagement. As educators value children's home languages, they are able to involve and respect diverse families. When explaining the value of multilingualism and acknowledging children's cultural differences, Briana also stated:

Once the parents see that the kids are a part of it, they're going to want to be involved, you know, because they're going to feel like you're honoring their beliefs, their culture and... If that teacher is not willing to do that, then it's always going to be a disconnect, you're going to have those parents that are not going to participate, that are not going to respond to your messages. Because if you don't respect me and how I'm raising my kids, why should I respect you?

## **Inductive Themes**

### ***Different Conceptualizations of DAP***

Below are additional ideas reported by participants related to the definition of DAP. The sections below are not necessarily themes, but they show students' different descriptions and conceptualizations of DAP.

It was clear that some students define and describe DAP as a practice for teachers to follow:

I think DAP is like a skeleton or like a roadmap to kind of, you know, even though we don't have to... everything is not exact but it gives you a... a basis of where things should be and what's happening in this child's life, you know, so, um. And then I mean it says it is developmentally appropriate practice, so it is a practice, so it's not set in stone, it doesn't mean that, you know, one size fits all but it's just it's just best practice, you know.... but for the most part it's just like your skeleton it's like your roadmap. Okay, this is this is like it's like your toolkit? There it is!" At another point in the interview, she stated, "I believe in it, it's a pretty solid 'teacher bible,' you know. -Imani

I also believe that DAP is not set in stone, if it says a child is supposed to... we'll just use something simple like... walk at 12 months and they don't, that doesn't mean that there's an issue, it just means, "well, they didn't walk at 12 months" you know?"

-Tyla

Some participants' interpretations related to DAP as a set of standards or a "fluid model":  
Because I mean it's [DAP] not a standard because I think every child learns differently but I think it's a way for children to understand what the next thing is for them, the next goal is for them developmentally..." -Christina

Using a center approach will back the DAP standards while still being able to meet the standards of North Carolina. -Amber



I think of the DAP on a fluid model, because what might be developmentally appropriate for one four-year-old may not be developmentally appropriate for another four-year-old... -Tyla

One participant shared information relating DAP to a book versus a practice:

I would say, if people wanted to learn more about the academic achievement of an early childhood of a child, I would say, read DAP. I would just hand them the book [Copple and Bredekamp] and then say, do you have any questions for me? -Miranda

The differences in students' descriptions of DAP and how it is conceptualized reveal that there may be some misconceptions about DAP. This is particularly significant because this sample was derived from the same teacher preparation program and calls into question the variation in influences on their learning about DAP. Some of these influences are discussed later.

### **Themes for Research Question 2: Students' Discussions of DAP and Recommendations**

Students' reports on their plans to [continue to] implement DAP are aligned with NAEYC's Recommendations in place for Early Childhood Educators. The bolded headers below come from the list of recommendations from NAEYC (2022) used to guide educators' instruction. Each recommendation is listed along with supporting themes and quotes from participants. "Additional Themes" contains data that emerged from inductive analyses.

#### **Deductive Themes**

##### ***Create a Caring, Equitable Community of Learners***

This recommendation encompasses educators' ability to create and foster an environment conducive to children's learning and development. This foundation typically consists of nurturing, caring relationships between teachers and children, between children, and even between teachers and families. Below are quotes from participants that reflect community and

closeness in the classroom in their discussion of DAP and what they plan to do in their classroom. Overall, this theme was reported frequently across interviews.

Emphasizing the importance of healthy relationships, Miranda reported:

We give each other hugs, we say I love you, and so I think it's just to bring in that closeness of a family and we call our, you know, we our classroom is called the school family. And so just really loving and teaching I think that's what I grew up with, and what I would like to incorporate. Just a close knit of friendship and a family and, yes, I have my own kids but the nine children that I have in my class I call them my kids you know.

Acknowledging that the teacher-child relationship consists of a balance of fun and expectations, Christina stated:

The kids are like don't mess with Ms. \*\*\*\* but oh my gosh she can be so fun, like the kids call me the big kid in the classroom but they're like, but when you lay down the law, you lay down the law, so I have that kinda that... where like you can be silly but they know don't push it.

Imani highlighted the importance of individual roles and value that each member brings to the classroom community, which is also aids in creating a caring community of learners. She reported:

We like to refer to our classroom as a little community. So y'all have a part, right? But in a community, everybody's not good everything, you know, some people have better skill sets in this area so we have to find out how to kind of weave all that together to make this thing work, you know?

### ***Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections***

This recommendation refers to educators' ability to engage in respectful, reciprocal relationships with children's families. Supporting this theme, participants acknowledged family involvement and communication with families. As educators foster family involvement in classrooms, they have opportunities to build trusting relationships with families. Overall, this theme was not reported frequently across interviews.

When asked about her plans of implementing DAP, Tyla provided details about how her childhood influenced her knowledge of DAP. She explained that connecting with families through partnerships is something personal to her:

I had a rough childhood and so... I didn't have all of the things that children around me had. So, I kind of... and one thing specifically in working in Head Start and now in NC Pre-K I see it a little more too, focusing on having a healthy family environment in the classroom.... It helps me understand where other children are.

### ***Observing, Documenting, Assessing Children's Development and Learning***

This recommendation involves educators' knowledge of where children are developmentally and using this information for assessments and to inform planning. Overall, the assessment component of this recommendation was frequently discussed across interviews. Cia acknowledges the importance of assessing children's development:

What I done earlier this year when we started in August- I gave each student and assessment, it was individual assessment. That way it let me know what the student or what the child knew [and] what the child didn't know. Once I did the assessment, then I was able to come up with materials, come up with assignments, lessons that needed to be taught to keep the individual "high-flying" and then... to still cater to my "low flyers",

again still reaching that goal of getting to where the “high-flyers” are, and getting the “high-flyers” flying higher. If that makes sense.

I plan to keep assessing each student and then teach them but also let them learn at their own pace without forcing, if I can use that word, forcing anything on them because either they gonna get it or they're not.

Imani acknowledges that assessing children’s development helps to move them towards their developmental goals:

Of course, if they had like, like these assignments, or like worksheets and everything all this, you know, like individual “sit and stay” type of work, I was like, “Okay, no, this is not developmentally appropriate,” you know? It should more be suited towards those developmental goals.

### ***Teaching to Enhance Each Child’s Development and Learning***

This recommendation is grounded in intentional teaching, providing children with choice, acknowledging play, scaffolding, creating meaningful learning experiences, etc. This theme highlights educators’ use of intentional teaching strategies and opportunities offered to children. Overall, this theme was not reported frequently across interviews.

We use modeling a lot with our EC children to teach them and typically that comes more from the teachers than pursue the peers, but we also do use the scaffolding model a lot where the peers are teachers as well. It just kind of is individualized between children.

We are like 50% EC children, so sometimes it's hard. -Tyla

Focus on the child's needs or the child's interests because if you have a child who never plays dramatic play but you are adamant that he has to learn to put on a dress or you

know pretend to take care of a baby doll but he's not interested in it, he's not going to do it, you're not going to get that result that you want at the end of the day. -Christina

I believe that children develop socially first, if you can develop them socially and emotionally, then you can develop them academically. And if you overthrow the academic in the front, you're going to have behaviors. Because you're not meeting them where they are meeting them socially emotionally where they are. You're trying to take them from the bottom step up to the fifth step and skip those three or four or five steps in between. And to me, it is important, it's important to you know for these kids to have the opportunity to learn those social skills, to learn how to share, to learn how to communicate to learn how to problem solve for themselves, because you can always problem solve for them and you're not always going to 100% be there, so they need these skills and I feel like developmentally appropriate is where that rubber meets the road. - Briana

I think incorporating and scaffolding and building up on that on what I already know about the child... and how I can scaffold it but still make an age-appropriate and not too difficult. I think that's really important. -Miranda

### ***Planning and Implementing an Engaging Curriculum to Achieve Meaningful Goals***

This recommendation involves educators' use of classroom curricula to help children achieve meaningful goals. This recommendation connects to *joyful, engaged learning* in terms of children's levels of engagement in the classroom. This recommendation is focused more on how the teacher should help children to engage. Engaging curriculum, helping children achieve meaningful goals, learning through play, etc. are all considered as educators plan and implement an engaging curriculum. Additionally, educators' acknowledgement that children's individual

goals are incorporated into the curriculum is important. Overall, this theme was reported frequently across interviews. Participants reported:

You have to make it where they want to learn and where they want to play and bring in things that they want to talk about. My favorite example is maybe we're talking about gingerbread men and- but we go out on the playground and we see a butterfly. And the children become engaged in that butterfly. Well, your topic just changed for the day because you need to talk about that butterfly. -Tyla

### ***Demonstrating Professionalism as An Early Childhood Educator***

*Demonstrating Professionalism* emphasizes educators' responsibility to practice and implement the aforementioned recommendations. "Educators use the guidelines of the profession...as they conduct themselves as members of the profession and serve as informed advocates for young children and their families..." (NAEYC, 2020). In participants' discussion of DAP, professionalism and advocacy were not mentioned.

### **Inductive Themes**

#### ***Use of DAP Across Settings***

During interviews, students were asked about potential challenges or drawbacks with DAP. Student's participants seem to vary by context and/or composition of their classroom.

Some participants reported:

In kindergarten it's hard to do both because you have two entities. You have the school board and people you know in government that they know best, then you have those that have understand the DAP appropriateness that know how we know best or that that area knows best so... Other than that, I think, developmentally appropriate practice itself makes a lot of sense and obviously I don't see there being a lot of drawbacks... -Amber

I mean the, the only drawbacks I see is that... it's not, it's hard to implement in the public school system. Because like I said, you know, there are no centers there is no play the only play is on the playground, you know. We still have some blocks and things in the classroom so that if it rains... and the kids love it. But that's the only time they get to use those things, because everything within the classroom now is a strict schedule.... I mean it's not a drawback from developmentally appropriate but it's being able to implement it, knowing that it needs to be there [in the kindergarten classroom].

-Briana

Like when you have children with developmental needs, you know, inclusive classrooms, a whole bunch of different children developing very differently, I think sometimes DAP and not that it's wrong, I think, just sometimes it kind of can be complicated to use everything...maybe if you have a bunch of biters and you're in a small classroom. If you can't keep everybody in the same group, maybe you sitting down and not being able to get up quickly might not be the best. -Imani

Other participants reported not having challenges with implementing DAP:

Yes, I do. I think there's different stages and different understandings, but I think every I think it's appropriate for every single child. -Christina

It can be some challenges. I do believe that it is for every child. Your "high-flyers", you're in-between, your "low-flyers" I believe every child can benefit from it [DAP]...yes. -Cia

No [there are no challenges with DAP]. Is that an answer- can I say no? I haven't read anything in DAP that I'm like oh I don't know about that or... I would say no to that. -  
Miranda

### **Themes for Research Question 3: Students' Experiences**

Finally, participants were asked specific questions about childhood, cultural, work, and teacher preparation program influences on their knowledge of DAP. This section captures the experiences across these different areas that participants reported to be influential to their knowledge of DAP. Overall, childhood home experiences, the teacher preparation program (courses and readings), and COVID were reported frequently. It is important to know that although childhood home experiences were frequently reported, it is unclear if or how these are related to DAP.

#### **Deductive Themes**

##### ***Childhood Experiences***

**Home.** Students reported their memories of childhood home experiences and reflect on how they may have influenced their understanding of DAP. Overall, the childhood home experience was reported frequently across interviews, however it is unclear if these reports are specific to DAP or to interactions.

Tyla's response highlights her feelings about students and their families' circumstances because of her own childhood home experiences. She acknowledges the need to "not be so rough on the words we use with children." Tyla stated:

I was raised by a single mother up until I was 13 and we were always very low-income. I don't want to say I didn't have a healthy family environment; I just had a different kind of environment. So, one thing specifically in working in Head Start and now in NC Pre-K,



focusing on having a healthy family environment. But I think my childhood- it helps me understand where other children are.

Christina acknowledges the differences in her parents' demeanors that have shaped who she is as an individual and as a teacher. These recollections of her childhood bring light to how her home childhood experiences have shaped not only her learning about DAP, but who she is as a teacher:

So my dad is super goofy super fun super hilarious. My mom was a strict one, so I have like a balance, where the kids are like don't mess with Ms. \*\*\*\* but oh my gosh she can be so fun, like the kids call me the big kid in the classroom. But when you lay down the law, you lay down the law, so I have that kinda that... where you can be silly but they know don't push it. Don't you dare do it because I'm gonna tell you something about yourself that you probably won't like [laughs].

Imani acknowledges fear to speak up when she was a child, and how that impacts her passion for helping children to know they have a voice:

I think back to childhood and I was scared of everything growing up. Needing something, wanting something, and being scared to ask for or wait until my mom was somebody was around to kind of go ask, I mean I just was always scared of everything for no reason, you know? And so like I don't want children to be afraid, like, just say what, you know? Speak! and that's okay, and if we don't like it I'll tell you it was like it was still speak, you know.

**School.** Students reported recollections of their childhood school experiences as being influential in how they understand DAP. Amber stated:

I still remember kindergarten because I wanted to be a teacher when I was in kindergarten. We had centers. I remember having centers. Remember the block center and different areas, and I would come home and make my stuffed animals into centers and I would teach them. And so you know I still use that aspect of learning, even at my home and my children, learning through different domains. You know you can teach at science, you can teach social studies, through books and different aspects, and so I think that's really important.

Christina reflected on her memories of first grade:

I mean really the most impactful was first grade and so first grade is the new kindergarten now where they're all learning to read. So that was the most stressful year of my life, I think, because it was very harsh- the teacher was very harsh- and everything like that, too, but now I understand more of that change of developmentally appropriate [practice]... I connect it now to my childhood of, "oh yeah first grade that makes sense."

### ***Teacher Preparation Program***

It is evident that students' learning about DAP has been influenced by the overall teacher preparation program. Because the participants' courses and practica/student teaching experiences were shifted significantly by COVID-19, this shift in their learning is also captured. The areas (i.e., courses and coursework, etc.) below focus on four areas that emerged from interviews related to learning about DAP: coursework, support from the course instructor and cooperating teacher, and COVID-19.

One student mentioned her work experience and the teacher preparation program as influential, however it is unclear if this is directly related to DAP:

So I had to understand and change and adapt and... When I had to do that, UNCG added ideas, so I got to use ideas that UNCG helped guide me as a teacher and I don't think personally a teacher ever stops learning, because I feel like this field is constantly- you constantly have to learn, constantly adapt because you can get really stagnant and never want change anything and that's never going to help you at all. I think UNCG has added to my understanding, but again I've been a teacher for at least eight years in a center so those experiences [practica experiences] are something that- no offense to UNCG- are something that UNCG can't teach because it's experience, its knowledge, it's living it every single day... -Christina

**Courses and Coursework.** It is clear that students' development in their knowledge about DAP was influenced by courses and coursework offered throughout the teacher preparation program. Amber acknowledged:

All of the courses in the program have helped to some degree, because obviously as educated in the college, they know about DAP, you know, is best practice.

Amber acknowledged the influence specific courses and coursework throughout the teacher preparation program. She reported:

Every course for early childhood to some degree, had helped with that, but there was I believe a course that was all about developmentally appropriate practice I believe more-so with toddlers. And there was one way, where we had to do lesson plans for every domain, you know science, social studies, math and how would we make it developmentally appropriate practice. We had a teacher where we learned about kindergarten approaches - how can you teach this without doing ditto sheets, without doing worksheets, kind of like what I saw in the classroom you know, using playdoh for

numbers instead of a pencil and paper. Obviously, that's important but then you really need both aspects and so all that yes, my coursework did help me learn developmentally appropriate practice.

Christina, who demonstrated confidence in her knowledge of DAP, explained:

So I had to understand and change and adapt and...When I had to do that, UNCG added ideas, so I got to use ideas that UNCG helped guide me as a teacher and I don't think personally a teacher ever stops learning, because I feel like this field is constantly- you constantly have to learn, constantly adapt because you can get really stagnant and never want change anything and that's never going to help you at all.

Christina's comment sheds light on the UNCG teacher preparation courses providing her additional information as a teacher. She continued on to acknowledge readings that related to children with autism being the most meaningful to her:

Especially with children with autism because there's so many children with autism. So those are probably the most meaningful articles or whatever it is, in the textbooks, to be able to say, "Okay, let me look at this a little differently as a student and as a teacher, at the same time, too."

Tyla, having received education before entering the current program, acknowledges the influence of all of her college career. She stated:

A lot of educational readings that have come through in my entire college career - community college or university college. I'm able to take those skills back into the classroom and say, "Oh well, I do see this!" Like scaffolding, I had no idea about it. I mean a lot of it [courses and coursework], because a lot of it is you know, learning like going through Foundations and learning, you know, some of those things there and

learning about Approaches to Play, and you know some of this stuff you knew bits and pieces of it, but you didn't know all of it and the steps... and moving along those steps, and you know finding that child in these steps, instead of saying, "Okay well I'm gonna start at, you know, L when you should be at B. -Briana

Miranda emphasized her appreciation of the Copple and Bredekamp reading:

I just loved the book and I think it's the longer I've been in early childhood, the more I think it's just so vital for a child, education and it's so vital for how they learn and how they grow and it's just a great recommend- or a great reference for children... it was really important for me to incorporate what I was reading in that book and bringing that into my lesson plans... I really referred back to it [Copple and Bredekamp], especially this semester when um doing my lesson plans and seeing what was appropriate... I'm trying to think, there was another book that we had...because I read it front to back... I'm going to realize what it was after I've already hung up with you...

Obviously, that's important but then you really need both aspects and so all that yes, my coursework did help me learn developmentally appropriate practice. -Amber

**Support.** It was clear that the course instructor and the cooperating teacher were support systems for some participants in their student teaching experiences, however it is unclear if this support is specific to DAP.

**Course Instructor.** One participant mentioned the impact of her course instructor:

It was great I truly- I love \*\*\*\* I think she was the right fit for me, so it kind of made sense um I mean I really wasn't that stressed out most of the semester because of her, so... And when I went inside that role as lead [teacher], it was a lot the first week, the first few weeks and \*\*\* supported me and was there, it was just a lot change. -Christina

Balancing her roles as student teacher and lead teacher, Christina also mentioned:

So, it was just a lot more on my plate where like I went to \*\*\*\* and I was like I don't want to do this, I really don't want to do this, I am burnt out, I'm exhausted, I'm not student teaching, I am lead teaching, my supervisors off-site so there's no like someone's coming in and stepping in while I take videos.

***The Cooperating Teacher.*** It was also evident that the cooperating teacher in participants' student teaching placements were influential:

I noticed in kindergarten even though it's harder to make some of the practices all the time, I still saw my CT implement DAP practices such as you know, like in a math lesson she would have them in a group in a circle and she would use objects when she was teaching shapes...I was able to know okay it's still possible. -Amber

## **Inductive Themes**

### ***COVID-19 Context***

The pandemic has impacted the teaching experience as a whole. COVID-19 was mentioned frequently across the interviews and was defined from inductive analysis. COVID has impacted students' experiences in the teacher preparation program, however it is unclear if or how COVID is specifically related to DAP. Reports of COVID are mentioned below:

I think, sadly, COVID has changed a lot of DAP at this point in life.... It completely changed the kindergarten environment; I think for teachers and for students. Students went from preschool, which is a play environment, completely to you're sitting in desks all day... You have assigned seating where this is where everyone has to sit because of you know COVID. That's not developmentally appropriate because it should be free

choice, and you know everything like that, but sadly that's not happening because of COVID right now. -Christina

Mentioning staff shortages due to COVID, Christina's response highlighted how COVID-related challenges may have limited knowledge or skills related to DAP:

I wish I had the entire semester with her it just didn't work out because of you know, because of COVID, because of the staffing shortage because of, you know, different jobs giving better benefits than our job so a lot had changed, so I had to pick up you know lead teacher and all that stuff too on top of student teaching. So, what happened is that I had a cooperating teacher and then she quit and I became lead, so they moved me from lead to assistant to do student teaching. And then, when she quit, I automatically became lead, while I was student teaching and then my supervisor, who is off-site, became my cooperating teacher. So, student teaching for me personally wasn't as impactful because of that circumstance.

***Practica.*** It was evident that COVID had specifically impacted students' previous practica experiences. Amber mentioned use of videos for her first practica experience and the absence of hands-on learning:

For 420 we didn't get to go into the classroom because that's when COVID first began, so we had to only use videos. So, though the videos were in classrooms and were developmentally appropriate, obviously there wasn't any hands-on learning for me as a student so that wasn't... and then my 440 practicum was with the same teacher, so it was it was different group of students obviously being in the spring...

She also mentioned:

It [COVID] affected the other two classes previous [420 and 440] but it did not affect my student teaching. Unfortunately, I just- I was going to go back next week to say goodbye to my kids and they are now virtual because 45% of the school now has COVID.

Overall, participants reported variations in influences on their learning and understanding of DAP. Influences included the teacher preparation program, specifically coursework and classes. There were also reports of cooperating teacher and instructor supports in participants' learning, work experiences, childhood home and school experiences, and COVID-19. With all of the influences, it is unclear from participants' responses how they are directly related to DAP.

Overall, variability exists in students' definitions and discussions of DAP and connections to the NAEYC definition and recommended practices. Many students defined DAP around concepts of play, individualization, age-appropriateness, and engaged learning. When it comes to recommendations for educators, participants' reports also varied. Establishing individual goals for children and understanding individual developmental needs seemed to be mentioned across several students. Regarding influences on students' knowledge of DAP, the teacher preparation program seems to hold the most influence. Participants reported that course readings and support from course instructors related to DAP and cooperating teachers was influential; and also reported COVID-19 as an influence to previous practica experiences.



## CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION

Developmentally Appropriate Practice refers to a research-based framework that outlines principles and guidelines that promote optimal education for young children and frames educators' use of intentional decision making (NAEYC, 2020) and is widely used in the field by ECE professionals. Contributing to current knowledge in this area, the current study used a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. Research questions included: 1) How do student teachers define DAP and how do their definitions reflect the NAEYC definition of DAP? 2) How do student teachers' discussions of DAP (i.e., their beliefs and plans for implementing DAP in their own classrooms) reflect NAEYC Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators? 3) What kinds of experiences have contributed to students' understanding of DAP? Overall, the majority of students referred to DAP as a broad framework, though there was variability in participants' discussions about DAP. Participants used terms in their discussions of DAP related to individualization, ability-appropriateness, community of learners, planning and implementing engaging curriculum, and the assessment component of observing, documenting and assessing children. Although other DAP-related concepts from NAEYC were mentioned by some participants (e.g., building on strengths, reciprocal relationships with families, professionalism), these concepts were not reported frequently. When asked about influences on knowledge of DAP, participants shared examples of both childhood experiences and coursework in their teacher prep program as supporting influences. It was evident that COVID-19 was a theme across the interview conversations, however it is not clear how the pandemic is connected to students' beliefs about DAP.

Below, I discuss the overall findings of the study. It is important to understand that while interviews were focused on DAP, additional topics that related to student's experiences with student teaching emerged throughout and across conversations. Below, I discuss the frequency of each theme across interviews and provide possible explanations.

### **Research Question 1: Students' Definitions/Descriptions of DAP and NAEYC**

The first research question pertained to how student teachers define DAP and how their definitions reflect the NAEYC definition. During interviews, participants used terms throughout their definitions and descriptions of DAP that related to the individualization key component of NAEYC's definition of DAP. For example, one participant mentioned use of the "individual approach," "what's appropriate for them [children] and their needs," and "not putting them [children] in a box." She also used phrases like "understand each child where they are developmentally." Another participant specifically stated the word "individualization" when she recognized it as the "key," and that "you have to look at DAP on an individual basis." Other terms mentioned that relate to the individualization component include "what's best for the individual child," "individual goals," and "developmentally appropriate for that individual." Early childhood teachers who participated in interviews in the Kim (2011) study also mentioned individualization when discussing DAP. Terms used included: "what's important for children as an individual," and "it's all about looking at each child individually and seeing where their strengths are." Moreover, NAEYC highlights that DAP recognizes and supports children as unique individuals (NAEYC, 2020), basing teaching decisions on children's individual strengths and skills.

Although cultural-, linguistic-, and ability-appropriateness collectively represent recommended practices (NAEYC, 2020), participants used terms that related solely to ability-

appropriateness. Specifically, participants referenced children's age. Age is a part ability-appropriateness because it considers the physical and/or developmental age of children. When describing DAP, participants used phrases that specifically included the word *age*: "understanding exactly what is appropriate for age," "age differences," the acknowledgement of "age-appropriateness is not necessarily a numerical age... it's a developmental age." Others' responses of ability-appropriateness that related to age described examples of children of different ages. "I wouldn't expect a three-year-old to be writing... [they need] writing materials that are developmentally appropriate for them." Additionally, "you want to meet them where they are at their age, instead of trying to put them at an older age..." was also reported. Taken together, these phrases relate to the ability-appropriateness component of cultural-, linguistic-, and ability-appropriateness, with specific acknowledgement of children's age. It has been found that teachers also report terms that relate to children's age when defining and/or describing DAP (Kim, 2011). Moreover, the NAEYC definition highlights that DAP encompasses teacher practices that teaching practices must be culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate for each child (NAEYC, 2020).

There were additional key components of the NAEYC definition of DAP that were not discussed as frequently as *individualization* and *ability-appropriateness*. For *building on children's strengths*, only two participants discussed this key component. One participant acknowledged the importance of scaffolding children "to the next level." This suggests that the student was aware of children's individual skills and abilities and that scaffolding their learning is important. Another participant discussed, "Let's get the foundations first... instead of 'you need to write your whole name.'" Both of these participants in some ways acknowledged

building on children's strengths, however this component was not discussed frequently across interviews.

*Play* is a key component of the definition of DAP; however, it was not discussed frequently across interviews. One student talked a lot about play- she mentioned: "I love play, I love play, I love to offer opportunities for play." She also shared that play is "everything. They [children] learned so much through play..." Another participant agreed that "teaching through play is important." Additionally, two participants discussed the use of centers: "You have your different centers..." and "They started [a kitchen] on their own...they built this huge kitchen and they did a drive-thru." Although these few participants acknowledged play somehow, it was not a common theme across interviews. Moreover, play was not mentioned at the beginning of any of the interviews when participants were initially asked questions about DAP. When participants did mention play, it was discussed later during the interview. This suggests that play may not be an initial idea that participants think about when discussing DAP. This pattern of responses is in contrary to NAEYC because "play-based approaches" is mentioned in the definition of DAP, and play is a big part of a DAP-based curriculum (NAEYC, 2020). On a larger scale, play was mentioned passively by participants- the idea sort of came up in conversation but when talking about the "big components" of DAP, play was not mentioned. The lack of mention of play across interviews and the timing of when play was mentioned during interviews both suggest that play may not be as important as *individuation* or *ability-appropriateness* for participants. This idea of play deprivation in early childhood has long-term impacts including reduced self-control, poor resilience, etc. (Brown, 2018; Lauer, 2011). Students' responses also suggest that students may not have established the connection between DAP and play, or the role play serves within a DAP-oriented classroom.

Aside from play, *joyful, engaged learning* was not discussed frequently across interviews and there was variability in participants' reports. While some participants discussed *joyful, engaged learning* in terms of children's social/emotional well-being, others discussed it in terms of conversing with children and providing them with activities based on their interests in hopes to increase engagement. One participant focused on the emotional well-being of children, stating: "I want them to be happy." One student in particular shared a lot of information about having conversations with children and promoting hands-on learning as a means of promoting *joyful, engaged learning*. "I'm all about 'let's [children and teacher] talk about it!'" One participant acknowledged her desire for children to talk, teach, and engage not only with her as their teacher but with one another. Another participant acknowledged that children should "lead the way" and that this "yields the best results- they [children] are more intrigued, they tend to participate for longer periods of time..." Although there were many examples that could be connected to *joyful, engaged learning*, it is not considered a common theme that was discussed because there is such variability in participants' answers. Additionally, simply engaging children in various ways was not explicitly discussed in many of the interviews, yet engagement has implications for children's learning processes, attention and focus, social/emotional well-being, and meaningful learning experiences (Sutton, 2021; Child Care Services, 2022).

Participants did not frequently discuss *valuing children a valued member of the learning community*. One participant acknowledged respect for children's boundaries. She mentioned that she has taught students in her classroom to develop an understanding for their student with special needs, which indicates this participant values her students as individuals. Another participant acknowledged valuing children through treating the classroom as a community where each individual has a special part. In a classroom setting when children have special jobs to

uphold, it not only creates a sense of community, but it also makes children feel valued. A third participant acknowledged respect for children's boundaries by sharing that she did not force a child to write his/her name. Although these examples suggest that some participants value students in different ways, it is not considered a common theme across the interviews.

While some participants acknowledged the *child's social and cultural context*, it also was not frequently discussed. Phrases included were: "You have to look at their [children's] culture, family background, their experiences...", "understanding where they [children] come from...", and "children coming from various backgrounds." Although these phrases were mentioned by three different participants, participants did not provide further conversation around the child's social and cultural context as to why it's important for these to be considered. This lack of information and lack of mention of the social and cultural context suggests that this is a piece of DAP that these participants were missing.

Another key component of the definition of DAP that was not discussed frequently was *acknowledgement of multiple domains of development*. Just two participants acknowledged multiple domains of development. One participant stated "...to learn in all areas of all their domains...cognitively, socially, so there would be different materials like that." She continued on to provide examples of centers: "housekeeping, manipulatives, things like that..." It seems that this participant was only mentioning these different domains of development to explain the use of different centers in the classroom, not mentioning the domains because they are a larger part of DAP. Another participant mentioned "The different domains of child development, that's what we want to be highlighting." The lack of acknowledgment of multiple domains of development indicates that this key component may not be viewed as important by the participants and/or that they do not make the connection between this component and DAP.

Surprisingly, *family and community engagement* was a component that was mentioned but not frequently discussed. Specifically, only the *family* piece of this key component was acknowledged. No participants mentioned the community engagement piece of this component. Regarding the family engagement piece that only two participants discussed, one shared, “engaging [with parents/families] in those conversations and expanding to understand...just understanding where they come from.” A second participant mentioned frequent family nights at school where families would come into the classroom to interact with teachers and participate in activities with children: “The parents were able to meet the teachers, interact with them, we gave them manipulatives and different things like that so working with... just... for me having that parent involvement meant a lot.” This same participant also discussed the importance of honoring beliefs and culture as a means of establishing a connection between families and teachers. Although these two participants clearly understand the value of family engagement, it was not mentioned frequently across interviews and it there was no mention of engagement with the community. This suggests that participants may not understand the importance of *family and community engagement*, which is a part of the definition of DAP (NAEYC, 2020). Forming links within the community enhances children’s learning, supports families, and provides children with quality care (*Community Engagement in ECE Services*, 2019; Head Start, Community Engagement, 2022).

### **Research Question 2: Students’ Discussions about DAP, and Alignment with NAEYC**

The second research question pertained to how student teachers’ discussions of DAP reflect NAEYC’s Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators. Participants used terms that related to the recommendation known as *create a caring, equitable community of learners*. There were frequent scenarios reported that seemed to describe community, closeness, unity, and well-

being of relationships in the classroom. Participants reported phrases like “We say I love you,” “set expectations in the classroom,” “we refer to our classroom as a little community,” and “I want them talking... teaching... engaging... with each other.” In teacher interviews highlighted in the study by Kim (2011), it was discussed that one teacher’s discussions related to this same component of DAP. This participant described classroom activities that foster community and “interactive where kids are communicating and teachers communicating back to them.”

Additionally, participants’ reports also related to *planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals*. Specifically, participants frequently discussed the value of engagement and meeting children’s goals. Examples of phrases that relate to children’s goals and engagement include: “DAP looks like children are engaged,” “engaged through hands-on learning,” “meeting children where they are to scaffold their learning and meet their goals,” “it [DAP] should more be suited towards developmental goals,” etc. Taken together, it was frequently reported that student teachers value engagement and meeting children’s goals, which is in alignment with *planning and implementing an engaging curriculum*. There, however, was no frequent mention of the engaging curriculum.

The assessment component of observing, documenting and assessing was also mentioned frequently. Participants described their plans to continue to honor assessment: “I plan to keep assessing each student...” and “I assess them at the beginning of every year.” It was frequently acknowledged that assessment was important to “meet children where they are” and to “build on children’s learning” and “to come up with materials, assignments, and lessons...” Overall, participants frequently mentioned DAP in terms of assessment and meeting children’s individual goals. Assessment has been found to be valued, embraced, and useful in supporting students in the classroom (Yuankun, 2015; William, 2010).



There were additional recommendations that were not discussed frequently. *Reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections* was not a common theme across interviews. This is not very surprising because, as discussed previously, there was a lack of mention of *family and community engagement*. These two components do overlap and are similar, however there is a difference based on my own interpretation: *family and community engagement* is focused on involving families and community members in different ways in the day-to-day school activities; *reciprocal partnerships* signifies the back-and-forth, bidirectional relationship where the teacher can express themselves to the family, and the family can express themselves to the teacher. So, a teacher can engage with a family, but to have a reciprocal relationship requires constant communication and trust. Continuing to findings, only one participant acknowledged this component, stating the need for “a healthy family environment in the classroom,” however, it is unclear if she was referring to the community classroom or the families of children.

Of the *observing, documenting, and assessing children’s development and learning* recommendation, two of the three components of this recommendation were not reflected in participants’ discussions. No participants discussed the value of observing children or documenting their growth, although these three components work together.

*Teaching to Enhance Each Child’s Development and Learning* to create meaningful experiences was not mentioned frequently. No participants used the words “teach to enhance,” “enhance children’s learning,” or “create meaningful learning experiences,” etc., however there were some reports that could be connected to this recommendation. One participant discussed the use of modeling as an instructional strategy for children in an EC Pre-K classroom, another discussed focusing on children’s need and interests, and another participant shared her thoughts

on helping children to develop socially/emotionally first before academics. These same participants acknowledged scaffolding children's learning and being "intentional with the type of opportunities [you provide for children]." In a way, these phrases can connect to teaching to enhance or grow children's development, however there is variability in responses and this recommendation was not frequently mentioned.

The final recommendation was *demonstrating professionalism as an early childhood educator*. No participants reported the use of professionalism in the classroom. This does not indicate that participants have little knowledge or practice of professionalism; it does, however, indicate that there may be a disconnection between professionalism and DAP. Participants do think about assessing, and creating a community of learners, however it is clear that they do not relate DAP to professionalism. Professionalism is a part of the early childhood education field; NAEYC (2022) states that fully achieving the recommendations and promoting children's learning and development is dependent upon the establishment of a strong profession. Although professionalism is important across the field of early childhood, it is unclear how it specifically relates to DAP and how professionalism is a recommendation or practice for teachers compared to the aforementioned recommendations.

Overall, there were many components of the definition of DAP and recommendations that were not mentioned in participants' conversations about DAP. The lack of mention of this vital information could be a result of the disconnect between course content and student teaching experiences. Additionally, course syllabi contain limited information and course instructors are not able to teach everything about DAP in one course, or even throughout the duration of the teacher preparation program.

### **Research Question 3: Influences on Knowledge of DAP**

The third research question pertained to experiences that have contributed to participants' understanding of DAP. Students were asked questions specifically related to influences of their childhood, culture, work experiences, and experiences in the teacher preparation program on their knowledge of DAP. Although students frequently acknowledged childhood experiences and course readings as contributions to their knowledge of DAP, it is unclear if these influences are specifically related to DAP, or to their general knowledge of early childhood education.

It is evident that participants believed that their childhood experiences have influenced their knowledge of and practices related to DAP. Students reported childhood home experiences more-so than childhood school experiences; participants' parents were acknowledged frequently (e.g., "I was raised by a single mother," "my dad was super goofy...my mom was strict," etc.). This suggests that the home environment and role of parents during their upbringing may have strong implications for how students come to learn and understand processes related to early childhood education, however it is unclear if participants' reports are directly related to DAP. There has been a lot of research conducted on the role of teachers' childhood experiences and DAP, however Rath (2001) acknowledges that it is unclear if teacher beliefs could be a product of their upbringing and life experiences. Childhood experiences could have implications for specific components of DAP. For example, nurturing relationships with parents and other family members could result in the value of reciprocal relationships with families, which is a part of DAP.

When asked about the influence of the teacher preparation program on their knowledge of DAP, students frequently acknowledged course readings. While some students did acknowledge support from the cooperating teacher and course instructors, course readings were

often discussed. Specifically, the Bredekamp and Copple DAP book, readings that focused on inclusion, “a lot of educational readings,” and NC Foundations (2013) were mentioned as meaningful readings that helps students in their learning of DAP. These responses suggests that preservice teachers may value and benefit from a diverse range of readings that allow them to explore various DAP-related concepts. On a larger scale, their responses provide insight into how impactful college courses in the teacher preparation program are for students. Students clearly indicated that courses in the teacher preparation program have impacted their learning through course readings. Caswell (2016) found that teachers “new” to the field (i.e., they had 3 years or less of experience) rated their classroom management course as beneficial while they were completing student teaching. Other teachers rated education methodology courses (i.e., working with students with disabilities, planning lessons, accommodations/modifications, and learning how to understand students in order to teach them and hold them accountable) as beneficial. Isikoglu (2007) supports this idea; they found that upon completion of an educational methods course, preservice teachers’ instructional beliefs changed from a behaviorist approach (i.e., teacher-directed) to a more constructivist approach (i.e., child-initiated). These studies, taken together, suggest that after exposure to some courses and course readings, the teacher preparation program can serve as a contribution to student teachers’ knowledge of various concepts including DAP.

It is important to acknowledge that the applicability of DAP across different settings, as well as during COVID-19, were also reported by participants. Participants were specifically asked about potential challenges or drawbacks with DAP. The implementation of DAP in kindergarten and DAP being flexible enough to be “for” every child were often reported by participants. Ahonen (2019) and Hedge and Cassidy (2009) discuss many of the challenges of

DAP, specifically in kindergarten. One of those challenges includes environmental constraints that teachers face: the inability to practice DAP (i.e., hands-on learning, etc.) due to curriculum and budget constraints. Additionally, academic standards that kindergarten teachers follow posed a challenge to implement DAP (Pyle & DeLuca, 2017). In general, public school kindergarten teachers implement a rigorous curriculum where they are required to conduct benchmark testing and fast-paced schedule leaves little-to-no room for practices that reflect DAP (Brown & Feger, 2010). For example, children often complete worksheets as opposed to play in centers.

In addition to the many challenges of DAP in kindergarten, it was clear from interviews that COVID-19 had exacerbated the challenges of DAP, according to participants. Specifically, students acknowledged how COVID-19 impacted their previous practica in the teacher preparation program as well the shift COVID has created in being able to uphold DAP in the classroom. For example, one student acknowledged the impact of COVID on DAP in kindergarten. She reported that students must sit in assigned seats and restricted from moving around to eliminate the spread of germs, which is not developmentally appropriate. Staff shortages that happened because of COVID impacted classroom dynamics- during student teaching, some students had many different substitutes in and out of their classrooms, and teacher assistants were choosing to not return to the classroom. Reportedly, this had a large impact on how teachers were able to effectively teach their students and implement DAP recommended practices. Although DAP is a document intended to be used as a framework, differing contexts can present challenges to implementation. Taken together, participants reported frequently about DAP across various settings and mentioned the impact of COVID-19.

## Connection to Theory

Proximal processes occur between two people or between a person and an object (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). With respect to time, it seems as though the proximal processes that occurred between the student teacher and objects (i.e., course readings) over the course of the teacher preparation program, and between the student teacher and people during childhood (i.e., parents) were prominent. Perhaps these two microsystems (the college classroom with readings and discussions serving as foundations for proximal processes, and childhood home or school experiences) support one another in the development of the student teacher, however this connection is unclear in this study. Additionally, the interactions among the student teachers, instructors, and cooperating teachers probably have an even greater impact on students' knowledge and practices related to DAP.

Furthermore, I thought that person characteristics of the participants (i.e., age, years of experience, race/ethnicity, etc.), and the context of the student teaching placement (i.e., Pre-K versus kindergarten) would make a difference in how students define DAP. There were students who acknowledged certain components of DAP that differed from others- for example, the student who reported support from the cooperating teacher as influential. It does not seem, however, that this difference is linked to person characteristics. However, the age of the participants could play a role in terms of the timing of education- the average age of participants was about 40 years. For example, teachers' differences in years of experience may account for their different views of DAP- those with less years may recall the most up-to-date information about DAP or be less familiar with how to implement DAP practices. Moreover, perhaps if I had strategically sampled for students from different teacher preparation programs, and/or had a larger sample size, these differences in person characteristics and proximal processes may have

surfaced. This lack of differentiation may also indicate that the teacher preparation program and department has efficiently taught information to students. Additionally, the context of COVID has greatly impacted students during their teacher preparation experience. COVID serves as an example of a macrosystem influence. For example, participants may not have recalled *reciprocal relationships and community connections* frequently in their conversations about DAP due to COVID regulations. Families and outsiders may not be allowed as frequently inside early childhood classrooms due to COVID-19, which limits interactions that teachers and student teachers have with families. Therefore, we see how the context of COVID could have played a role in participants' responses. Additionally, when thinking about play, this concept has also changed in the context of COVID. With teachers and children required to wear masks, socially distance, and limit the number of materials in centers, I imagine this greatly impacts children's play experiences. Perhaps this change in play led participants to discuss play less frequently in their conversations about DAP. Bronfenbrenner's theory helps us to understand that these historical changes have taken place and impact how children explore in the classroom and what DAP-related practices [student] teachers recognize frequently or not as frequently because of these changes.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Analyzing the current study, strengths and limitations are both apparent. Although this study included a small sample size and provided less opportunities for generalizability, engaging in conversations with these students allowed for understanding of how they have come to know and understand DAP, what they think the most important components of DAP are, and what they report as influential to their knowledge of DAP. Interviews allowed for gaining perspective of students who were finishing the teacher preparation program and results helped present strengths

and areas of growth for the teacher preparation program with respect to teaching and facilitating student's understanding of DAP. Although in-depth interviews serve a strength, asking participants to recall information is a method that is not very reliable, being that this is solely based on participants' memory. Furthermore, there is also the chance that participants may feel uncomfortable or nervous, which could lead to a poor performance during the interview. Moreover, although there were additional DAP-related questions that were not asked during interviews, the current study provides the opportunity for follow-up questions and/or a lead into questions for faculty in their course content. The syllabi review process allowed for consideration of what the participants have learned related to DAP throughout the program. This process was also surface level and did not fully capture the depth of teaching that instructors provide when it comes to DAP topics.

### **Implications**

The majority of implications from the current study are for teacher preparation programs. As discussed, there were key components of DAP missing from participants' conversations about DAP. These missing areas were across both the definition of DAP and the Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators. This lack of mention suggests that participants may not initially recall specific key components when discussing DAP, that there could be a disconnect between how these components relate to DAP, and that course instructors should be more intentional with teaching this information. I think it's worth teacher preparation programs evaluating how and what information students are being taught across the program and think critically about the main areas that students need to learn more about. For example, if students are not mentioning reciprocal relationships with families when they discuss DAP, this indicates that courses should be more intentional with providing opportunities for students to



learn about reciprocal relationships and what that means and explicitly connect this component of early childhood education to DAP. Furthermore, it was clear that one participant conceptualized DAP as a book rather than a framework: she continuously mentioned that she would reference the use of DAP to others by saying, “read DAP.” This suggests that there may be a disconnect between how this student has learned to conceptualize DAP and how DAP is intended to be conceptualized according to NAEYC.

It seems important that course instructors pay special attention to their assignments and think of how to intentionally teach various components of DAP and revisit those areas to ensure students are learning and understanding. Additionally, perhaps providing students with open conversations about DAP as means to share ideas and assess their learning (and to hopefully guide them in the right direction). In thinking about the participant from the current study who conceptualizes DAP as a book, this suggests a need for intentional support in this area to help reiterate that DAP is a framework.

Participants reported childhood experiences and course readings as being helpful in their learning about DAP, however it is unclear if the responses are specific to DAP or to general knowledge of early childhood. Future research could further explore connections between childhood experiences and teaching, as well as what specific reading content and what types of readings are most helpful to pre-service teachers and why. It could also involve investigating any connections between preservice teachers’ childhood experiences and specific components of DAP.

Additionally, when information across courses overlaps, it is important that course instructors use similar terminology and definitions and wording from NAEYC. For example, if one instructor teaches the definition of DAP as, “individually-, age-, and socio-culturally-

appropriate,” this could create confusion if students are taught updated terminology under a different instructor: “culturally, linguistically, and ability-appropriate.” Although the terms are close in meaning, the consistency between what students are learning in courses could allow for a better, deeper understanding of concepts like DAP. Also, perhaps if students were able to complete course assignments that focused on how to implement DAP while completing student teaching, it could help to bridge the gap between course content and the student teaching experience (Caswell, 2016). It is important to mention that it is unclear if definitions of concepts, like DAP, are significant in students’ learning. Do definitions matter and to what degree would the knowledge of a definition impact educators’ instruction and children’s learning and development?

This research provides great opportunity for UNCG’s teacher preparation program and additional teacher preparation programs to critically think about how students are being taught components of DAP and how instructors can ensure they are teaching consistent information. Teacher preparation programs can use this information to consider when creating syllabi, to have discussions about in faculty meetings, and to examine if and to what extent all components of DAP are being covered, along with the application of DAP, and in which courses. Also, students reported DAP in kindergarten is challenging. Perhaps teacher preparation programs can address this issue by including discussion topics specifically related to the application of DAP in kindergarten.

Because participants were missing many of the components and recommendations related to DAP, this posits a question about the information from the perspective of NAEYC. Aside from course instructors teaching the information differently, perhaps the definition itself is not easily digestible for college students. People may benefit from a more concise definition as

opposed to a long definition of DAP where only certain key phrases are remembered.

Additionally, it is important for NAEYC to consider if a broad framework like DAP can be defined.

Participants' responses did not differ based on person and context characteristics, which has implications for future research. Perhaps strategic sampling from various teacher preparation programs and longitudinal studies should be conducted to investigate any differences in participants' responses based on these microsystems. Because participants reported influences on their learning about DAP (i.e., childhood experiences), perhaps these conversations should take place in courses to allow students to explore connections between their personal backgrounds and course content. These conversations could help students to connect on a deeper level with course content and allow them to even examine their own biases. One student reported the influence of her cooperating teacher, and one reported the influence of the course instructor. Both of these reports imply that learning takes place through proximal processes between the student and course instructor and/or cooperating teacher. Courses could allow for open conversations about these different influences. Additionally, because course readings and childhood experiences were apparent in influencing knowledge of DAP, future studies could investigate the potential connection between childhood experiences and course materials. This could possibly help students to better connect with course topics and learn about others' connections to course topics. This sharing of information could help to shape students' individual understanding of certain topics.

Lastly, one of the bigger questions is, "do educators' ability to recall definitions of concepts have implications for their classroom instruction and/or interactions with children?" I found that student teachers do not recall many of the components of DAP- does this have

implications for their teaching practices? Several studies support the idea that there is a connection between teacher knowledge and teaching practices (Charlambous, 2008; Shechtman et al., 2010). Aforementioned research conducted by Betawi and Jabbar (2019) as well as Akin (2013) suggest that student teachers value DAP, however they may struggle with understanding the definition of DAP, how it is used as a framework, and the Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators.

I think that future studies could investigate if differences in educators' knowledge of DAP impacts practices. Perhaps researchers could assess educators' recollection of the definition of DAP, similar to a way in the current study, but create two distinct groups: participants who recall many components of the definition and participants who do not recall many components of the definition. Researchers could then observe educator classroom practices and interactions with children to determine if there are any observed differences.

### **Conclusion**

Although there are many studies that focus on preservice or student teacher perspectives on various topics, there are very limited studies that focus on the alignment of their perspectives of DAP with NAEYC. When asked about their definition of DAP, participants frequently discussed *individualization, ability-appropriateness, creating a caring community of learners, planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals, and assessment*. Participants' discussions did not include specific information from NAEYC's definition of DAP and Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators. These findings from this study invites future investigation of how students understand DAP with a larger sample size that could collectively have stronger implications for more teacher preparation programs. Additionally, to better understand how students are understanding DAP as they navigate the

teacher preparation program, longitudinal studies with students could be conducted to provide information about how students' knowledge of DAP changes, and to potentially develop strategies to help students who may not fully understand DAP.

## REFERENCES

- Ahonen, L. (2019). Challenges to the Implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Education (Thesis, Concordia University, St. Paul). Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education\\_masters/17](https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education_masters/17)
- Akin, E. Z. (2013). Examining the beliefs of Turkish preservice early childhood teachers regarding early childhood curriculum. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 27*(3), 302–318. doi:10.1080/02568543.2013.796331
- Allen, K. P. 2010. Classroom management, bullying and teacher practices. *The Professional Educator 34*(1): 1–15.
- Ansari, A., & Gershoff, E. (2016). Parent involvement in head start and children's development: indirect effects through parenting. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 78*(2), 562–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12266>
- Barlow, J., & Coe, C. (2013). Integrating partner professionals. the early explorers project: peers early education partnership and the health visiting service. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 39*(1), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2011.01341.x>
- Baumgartner, J., DiCarlo, C., & Casbergue Renée. (2020). Service learning and early childhood education: intersection of developmentally appropriate practice and p.a.r.e. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 41*(2), 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2019.1570400>

- Betawi, A., & Jabbar, S. (2019). Developmentally appropriate or developmentally inappropriate, that's the question: perception of early childhood pre-service teachers at the university of Jordan. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 24(1), 40–50.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2018.1458633>
- Booher-Jennings, J. (2005). Below the bubble: "educational triage" and the Texas accountability system. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 231–268.
- Borko, H., & Mayfield, V. (1995). The roles of the cooperating teacher and university supervisor in learning to teach. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(5), 501-5 18.
- Braidt, C. (2014). Professionalism in child care. Retrieved from [professionalism.pdf](http://professionalism.pdf)  
[familyofwoodstockinc.org](http://familyofwoodstockinc.org)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology: Vol. 2. Research Designs*, H. Cooper (Editor-in-Chief). Copyright 2012 by the American Psychological Association. All rights reserved.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & R. M. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793-828). New York: John Wiley.
- Brown, S. (2018). Play deprivation can damage early child development. Retrieved from [Play deprivation has long term impacts on early child development \(childandfamilyblog.com\)](http://childandfamilyblog.com)

Brosh, J. (2020, July 6). NC Pre-K: The Carolina demography guide. UNC Carolina Population Center. <https://www.ncdemography.org/2020/07/06/nc-pre-k-the-carolina-demography-guide/>

Buchanon, T. K., Burts, D. C., Bidner, J., White, V. F. and Charlesworth, R. 1998. Predictors of the developmental appropriateness of the beliefs and practices of first, second, and third grade teachers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 13(3): 459–483.

Burts, D. C., Hart, C. H., Charlesworth, R., Fleege, P. O., Mosley, I. and Thomasson, R. H. 1992. Observed activities and stress behaviors of children in developmentally appropriate and inappropriate kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 7(2): 297–318.

Cannella, G. (1997). *Deconstructing early childhood education: Social justice and revolution*. New York: Peter Lang.

Caswell, K. (2016). The impact of preparation programs on pre-service teachers. *Education Masters*. Retrieved from [https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1337&context=education\\_ETD\\_masters](https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1337&context=education_ETD_masters)

Charlambous, C. Y. (2008). PRESERVICE TEACHERS' MATHEMATICAL KNOWLEDGE FOR TEACHING AND THEIR PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED TEACHING PRACTICES: EXPLORING A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP. Dissertations Publishing. [Preservice teachers' mathematical knowledge for teaching and their performance in selected teaching practices: Exploring a complex relationship - ProQuest](#)



Charlesworth, R., Hart, C. H., Burts, D. C., Thomasson, R. H., Mosley, J., & Fleege, P.

O. (1993). Measuring the developmentally appropriateness of kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 8, 255–276.10.1016/S0885-2006(05)80067-5

Clark, C. M. 1988. “Teachers as designers in self-directed professional development”.

In *Understanding teacher development*, Edited by: Hargreaves, A. and Fullan, M. G. 75–84. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Coady, M.R., & Ankeny, R. (2019). Engaging multilingual families in the US: Research and practice for educators. *Journal of Research and Practice*, 55-69.

Coleman, H. M., Goodwin Traylor, T., You, L., & Xu, Y. (2020). Examining the quality of a personnel preparation program in ei/ecse through systematic syllabi review. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 41(1), 29–50.

[Community Engagement in ECE Services | Petit ELJ \(petitjourney.com.au\)](#) (2019)

Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Copyright © 2020 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. All rights reserved.

Early Learning Network (2020). Bridging the gap: Easing the transition from Pre-K to kindergarten. Retrieved from <https://earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/201105-Policy-Brief-PreK-K-Transition.pdf>

Edens, K. M. (2000). Promoting communication, inquiry, and reflection in an early practicum experience via an on-line discussion group. *Action in Teacher Education*, 22(2a), 14–23.

[Engaging Community Partners to Strengthen Family Services | ECLKC \(hhs.gov\)](#) (2022)

Graziano, P. A., Garb, L. R., Ros, R., Hart, K., & Garcia, A. (2016). Executive functioning and school readiness among preschoolers with externalizing problems: the moderating role of the student-teacher relationship. *Early Education and Development*, 27(5), 573–573.

Fang, Z. 1996. A review of research on teacher beliefs and practices. *Educational Research*, 38(1): 47–65.

Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1).

Feuer, M. J., Floden, R. E., Chudowsky, N., & Ahn, J. (2013). *Evaluation of teacher preparation programs: Purposes, methods, and policy options*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Education.

French, M. (2004). Can you really say no? Standards and good practices can work together. *Southern Early Childhood Association*.

Friedman, S., Wright, B. L., Masterson, M. L., Willer, B., & Bredekamp, S. (2021).

Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8, fourth edition (fully revised and updated) (4th ed., Ser. Naeyc, #1156). National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved January 27, 2022.

- Goldstein, L. S. (1997). Between a rock and a hard place in the primary grades: The challenge of providing developmentally appropriate early childhood education in an elementary school setting. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 3-27.
- Gorski, P. (2009). What we're teaching teachers: An analysis of multicultural teacher education coursework syllabi. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 309–318.  
doi:10.1016/j.tate.2008.07.008
- Hegde, A. V., & Cassidy, D. J. (2009). Kindergarten teachers' perspectives on developmentally appropriate practices (dap): A study conducted in Mumbai (India). *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 23(3), 367–381.
- Hogben, D., & Lawson, M. (1983). Attitudes of secondary school teacher trainees and their practice teaching supervisors. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 9(3), 249-263.
- Holmes, R., Gardner, B., Kohm, K., Bant, C., Ciminello, A., Moedt, K., & Romeo, L. (2017). The relationship between young children's language abilities, creativity, play, and storytelling. *Early Child Development and Care*.  
doi:10.1080/03004430.2017.1314274
- Hyson, M. (2000). Growing teachers for a growing profession: NAEYC revises its guidelines for early childhood professional preparation. *Young Children*, 55(3), 60–61.
- Hyson, M. C., Hirsh-Pasek, K. and Rescorla, L. 1990. The classroom practices inventory: An observation instrument based on NAEYC's guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices for 4- and 5-year-old children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 5(4): 475–494.

- Isikoglu, N. (2008). The effects of a teaching methods course on early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 29(3), 190–203.
- Jabareen, Y. (2009). Building a conceptual framework: philosophy, definitions, and procedure. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(4).
- Jambunathan, S., Burts, D. C. and Pierce, S. H. 1999. Developmentally appropriate practices as predictors of self-competence among preschoolers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 13(2): 167–174.
- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: a synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311.
- Kim, H. K. (2011). Developmentally appropriate practice (dap) as defined and interpreted by early childhood preservice teachers: Beliefs about dap and influences of teacher education and field experience. *State Journal*, 20(2), 12–22.
- La Paro, K. M., Siepak, K., & Scott-Little, C. (2009). Assessing beliefs of preservice early childhood education teachers using q-sort methodology. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 30(1), 22–36.
- Lauer, L. M. (2011). Play deprivation: Is it happening in your school setting? Retrieved from [ED524739.pdf](#)
- Lubeck, S. (1998). Is DAP for everyone? *Childhood Education*, 74, 283–292.
- Maynard, C., La Paro, K. M., & Johnson, A. V. (2014). Before student teaching: how undergraduate students in early childhood teacher preparation programs describe their early

classroom-based experience. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 35(3), 244–244.

McMullen, M. B. 1998. The beliefs and practices of early childhood educators in the U.S.: Does specialized preparation make a difference in adoptive of best practices?

Mohamed, A. H. H. (2018). Gender as a moderator of the association between teacher-child relationship and social skills in preschool. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(12), 1711–1725. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1278371>

Moffat, T.K., Laureta, B., & Rana, L. (2016). *Kairaranga*, 17(1), 44-49. Retrieved from [EJ1240305.pdf \(ed.gov\)](#)

NAEYC (2009). Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8. A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved from [PSDAP.pdf \(naeyc.org\)](#)

NAEYC (2020). Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved from [dap-statement\\_0.pdf \(naeyc.org\)](#)

NAEYC Position Statement: A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development. (1994). *Young Children*, 49(3), 68-77. Retrieved August 11, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42725571>

NAEYC. (n.d.). Advancing equity in early childhood education position statement. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved June 12, 2021, from [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement | NAEYC](#)

NAEYC. (n.d.). Advancing equity: Purpose. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved June 12, 2021, from [Advancing Equity: Purpose | NAEYC](#)

NAEYC. (n.d.). Evidence for the advancing equity position statement. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved June 12, 2021, from [Evidence for the Advancing Equity Position Statement | NAEYC](#)

NAEYC. (2009). Position statements on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, 1-31. [PSDAP.pdf \(naeyc.org\)](#)

NAEYC. (n.d.). Principles of child development and learning. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved June 12, 2021, from [Principles of Child Development and Learning | NAEYC](#)

NAEYC. *Professional Development*. Retrieved from [Professional Development | NAEYC](#)

NAEYC. (n.d.). Recommendations for early childhood educators. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved June 12, 2021, from [Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators | NAEYC](#)

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. (C. Copple

& S. Bredekamp, Eds.) (3rd ed., Ser. NAEYC, #375). National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Navarro, J., Stephens, C., Rodrigues, B. C., Walker, I. A., Cooke, O., O'Toole, L., Hayes, N., & Tudge, J. R. H. (under review). Bored of the Rings: Methodological and analytic approaches to operationalizing Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model.

Nell, M., Drew, W., & Bush, D. (2013). *From play to practice: Connecting teachers' play to children's learning*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Nelson, R. F., & Smith, A. B. (2004). Changes in teachers' perceptions of developmentally appropriate practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 25(1), 75–78.

North Carolina Foundations Task Force. (2013). *North Carolina foundations for early learning and development*. Raleigh: Author.

Pyle, A., & DeLuca, C. (2017). Assessment in play-based kindergarten classrooms: An empirical study of teacher perspectives and practices. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 110(5), 457-466. doi:10.1080/00220671.2015.1118005

Phillips, E. C., Scrinzi, A., & National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2013). *Basics of developmentally appropriate practice: An introduction for teachers of kindergartners* (Ser. NAEYC, #327). National Association for the Education of Young Children.

- Phillips, K. (2015, May 22). Filling the need for quality teachers. *Daily News*  
<https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/filling-need-quality-teachers/docview/1682802133/se-2?accountid=14604>
- PLASP Child Care Services. Engagement. Retrieved from [Engagement - PLASP](#)
- Public Schools First NC (n.d.). The facts on pre-k. Retrieved July 10, 2021, from  
<https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/fact-sheets/the-facts-on-pre-k/>
- Raftery, B. (2016). *Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): An examination of preservice teachers* (Master's Thesis). Middle Tennessee State University. Retrieved from  
[https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/bitstream/handle/mtsu/4914/Raftery\\_mtsu\\_0170N\\_10583.pdf?sequence=1](https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/bitstream/handle/mtsu/4914/Raftery_mtsu_0170N_10583.pdf?sequence=1)
- Russ, S., & Wallace, C. (2013). Pretend play and creative processes. *American Journal of Play*, 6, 136–148.
- Schachter, R. E., Gerde, H. K., & Hatton-Bowers, H. (2019). Guidelines for selecting professional development for early childhood teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(4), 395–408. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00942-8>
- Scott-Little, C., La Paro, K. M., & Weisner, A. (2006). Examining differences in students' beliefs and attitudes: an important element of performance-based assessment systems for teacher preparation programs. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 27(4), 379–390.
- Shechtman, N., Roschelle, J., Haertel, G., & Knudsen, J. (2010) Investigating links from teacher knowledge, to classroom practice, to student learning in the instructional system of the



middle-school mathematics classroom, *cognition and instruction*, 28:3, 317-359, DOI: [10.1080/07370008.2010.487961](https://doi.org/10.1080/07370008.2010.487961)

Stanny, C., Gonzalez, M., & McGowan, B. (2015). Assessing the culture of teaching and learning through a syllabus review. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 40(7), 898–913. doi:10.1080/02602938.2014.956684

Stipek, D., & Byler, P. (1997). Early childhood teachers: Do they practice what they preach? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 305-325.

Sumrall, T. C., Scott-little, C., La Paro, K.,M., Pianta, R. C., Burchinal, M., Hamre, B., Downer, J., & Howes, C. (2017). Student Teaching Within Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs: An Examination of Key Features Across 2- and 4-Year Institutions. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(6), 821-830. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10643-016-0830-x>

Sutton, E. (2021). Student engagement: Why it's important and how to promote it. Branching Minds. [Student Engagement: Why it's Important and How to Promote it \(branchingminds.com\)](https://branchingminds.com)

Teachers Who Support Teacher Candidates. EdTPA. Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity. see [res\\_get.php \(aacte.org\)](https://aacte.org/res_get.php)

Tudge, J. R. H., Merçon-Vargas, E. A., Liang, Y., & Payir, A. (2017). The importance of Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory for early childhood educators and early childhood education. In L. Cohen & S. Stupiansky (Eds.), *Theories of early childhood education: Developmental, behaviorist, and critical* (45–57). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315641560>

- Tudge, J. R. H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 1(4), 198–210.
- UKEssays. (November 2018). Individual Needs of a Child. Retrieved from <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/childcare/individual-child-2724.php?vref=1>
- Vartuli, S. 1999. How early childhood teachers' beliefs vary across grade level. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14(4): 489–514.
- Walsh, D. J. (1991). Extending the discourse on developmental appropriateness. *Early Education and Development*, 2, 109–119.
- Wechsler et al. (2016). Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from [The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs \(learningpolicyinstitute.org\)](http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/publications/the-building-blocks-of-high-quality-early-childhood-education-programs)
- Wheatley, K. (2003). Promoting the Use of Content Standards: Recommendations for Teacher Educators. *YC Young Children*, 58(2), 96-102. Retrieved August 21, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42729948>
- White, M. (2010). Poverty and education: A teacher's perspective. Retrieved from [2012-EI-01%20Poverty%20and%20education%20-%20A%20teachers\\_%20perspective\[1\].pdf](http://www.learningpolicyinstitute.org/publications/2012-EI-01%20Poverty%20and%20education%20-%20A%20teachers_%20perspective[1].pdf)
- William, D., & Leahy, S. (2010). A theoretical foundation for formative assessment. In J. H. McMillan (Ed.), *Formative classroom assessment* (pp. 29-42). New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University

- Yoleri, S. (2016). Teacher-child relationships in preschool period: the roles of child temperament and language skills. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 9(1), 210–224.
- Yuankun, Y. (2015). Teacher Perceptions of Classroom Assessment: A Focus Group Interview. *SRATE Journal*, 2, 24(51-58).
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 89–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671>
- Zepeda, M. 1993. An exploratory study of demographic characteristics, retention, and developmentally appropriate practice in kindergarten. *Child Study Journal*, 23(1): 57–79.

## APPENDIX A: INITIAL VISIT TO HDF 461 SCRIPT

“Hello everyone,

My name is Mauri Mckoy, and I am a graduate student here in HDFS. I graduated from the B-K licensure program here at UNCG and I was a Pre-K teacher for 6 years. I am really interested in working with student teachers and helping them to prepare to enter the field. I wanted to introduce myself today to give you guys an overview of a study that I am planning. This study involves me asking questions to learn more about your thoughts on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). I would really appreciate your participation. I will return later this semester to ask if you would like to participate. If you consent and are selected, you will be entered into a drawing and 3 students will be randomly chosen to receive a gift card for participation. Thank you everyone, I look forward to returning soon!”

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT VISIT SCRIPT

“Hello everyone,

I want to remind you about the study that I am conducting. I will be conducting interviews to gather information about your thoughts about developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). As a reminder, if you consent to participate and are selected, you will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$20 gift card. Three drawings will take place. With that being said, I am now going to email you all the consent form for my study. The consent form contains more information about my study, and if you give your consent, you should send me an email and let me know that you would like to participate. Choosing to participate or not to participate will not impact your grade in this course. As a reminder, you will be asked to complete a one-time interview and address any follow-up questions via email; however, the study will last until May, 2022 and you could be asked questions until that time. Please reach out to me if you have any questions. I would really appreciate your participation.

Thank you!”

## APPENDIX C: EMAIL REMINDER SCRIPT

“Hello everyone,

I am still recruiting students for the study that I am conducting that focuses on your understanding of and beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). I am in need of (n) more participants for this study. As a reminder, you will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$20 gift card for your participation- three student names will be drawn. I have attached the consent form to this email. If you are interested, please read the consent form and send me an email as soon as possible to let me know that you would like to participate. As a reminder, you will be asked to complete a one-time interview and address any follow-up questions via email; however, the study will last until May, 2022 and you could be asked questions until that time.

Thank you,  
Mauri Mckoy”

## APPENDIX D: EMAIL TO SELECTED PARTICIPANTS

“Thank you, (name).

We are confirmed for (date and time). I will send you a reminder 48 hours prior to our interview.

Best,

Mauri Mckoy”

## APPENDIX E: EMAIL TO INDIVIDUAL STUDENT TEACHERS

“Hi (name),

I am still recruiting participants for my thesis study on student teachers' understanding of DAP. Would you be interested in participating? I would greatly appreciate your perspective, especially being that your student teaching was in [Pre-K/Kindergarten]. Please let me know if we could schedule a Zoom interview.

Thank you,  
Mauri M”



## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Zoom will be set up to autosave the transcript and recording.

I will email each participant 48 hours prior to their scheduled interview. Below is a draft of the email I will send:

“Hello (name),

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me on (date and time). I am looking forward to discussing your student teaching experience this past semester. The Zoom link for the interview is provided below. Please ensure that you have a quiet and private location for the interview. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Mauri Mckoy”

### **Opening of Interview:**

- Hi (name)! How are you?
- Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I want you to be aware that I am recording our interview so that the interview can be transcribed.
- Do you give your consent to participate in this study?
- Please know that the information you share will be kept confidential among the research team.
- During this interview, I would like to ask you some questions about your student teaching experience and your beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice (DAP).
- Do you have any questions before we get started?

### **Interview:**

-First, I'm going to ask you some questions about yourself. If you don't feel comfortable answering something, just know that you don't have to.

- How do you identify your gender?
- How do you identify your race/ethnicity?
- What is your age?
- What are your professional/career goals related to early childhood care and education?
- How many years of formal (paid) work experiences do you have (infants, toddlers, preschool, kindergarten)?

- We know that COVID-19 impacted teaching as a whole- were you able to complete student teaching in-person, virtually, or was it a mixture?

-Next, I'm going to ask you questions related to DAP.

- How do you define developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)? Or When you are thinking about DAP, what comes to mind? Or How would you describe DAP to others?
- What do you think DAP looks like in a classroom?
- Why do you think DAP is important for young children?
- Why is it important for teachers to understand and know how to implement DAP?
- What strategies do you think teachers should implement to provide a classroom that reflects DAP?
- What are your thoughts on child-centered vs. teacher-centeredness with DAP?

-This next set of questions pertain to experiences that you feel have contributed to your knowledge of DAP.

- What are some meaningful experiences that you feel have contributed to your understanding of DAP (i.e., work-related, program-related)?
- What courses and/or coursework have you completed that you think have contributed to your understanding of DAP? What was specifically helpful in your learning about DAP?
- How do you think your childhood experiences have influenced the way you teach or think about DAP?
- How do you think your cultural background has influenced or contributed to your knowledge or understanding of DAP?

-These last questions are just general questions related to DAP.

- Do you think there are any challenges with DAP?
- *For those in kindergarten placements:* What are your thoughts about DAP in kindergarten?
- How do you intend to implement DAP in your own classroom?

### **Conclusion**

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your beliefs about DAP?
- If any other questions come up or if I need clarification on something that you've shared, is it okay that I email you?
- If there's anything that you would like to share about your student teaching experience related to DAP that you think of at a later time, feel free to send me an email.
- Thank you so much for your time!