## The Whole Child – Developmental Domains/Areas

When thinking about children, what comes to your mind? Is it the way they engage with you? Is it their sense of adventure? Is it watching them try to climb a ladder? Is it trying to figure out what they may be thinking about when they have a certain look on their faces that they are not yet able to articulate? Is it their obvious curiosity and imagination? This is how we begin to think of the child as a whole, complex being. An integrated, interrelated series of parts that become the "whole."

Early Childhood Educators have a wealth of resources to draw from as they plan ways to meet the developmental needs of each of the children in their care. NAEYC defines developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) as "methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play- based approach to joyful, engaged learning". It is the job of teachers to make sure that our practice meets children's developmental needs. For example, there has been an unfortunate trend for modern preschools to include formal academic content taught at a level meant for older children. These practices are not developmentally appropriate. Developmentally appropriate practice dictates that any academic content should meet children's developmental needs first. That means that children are given opportunities to learn academic content that are in keeping with their developmental level – such as learning through play.

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## Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Identifying the developmental ages and stages of children is the basis of everything that we do and can't be overemphasized. All aspects of our practice should be grounded in:

- What is known about child development and learning – referring to knowledge of age-related characteristics across **developmental domains** that permits general predictions about what experiences are likely to best promote children's learning and development.

- What is known about each child as an individual – referring to what practitioners learn about each child that has implications for how best to adapt and be responsive to that individual variation.
- What is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live – referring to the values, expectations, and behavioral and linguistic conventions that shape children's lives at home and in their communities that practitioners must strive to understand in order to ensure that learning experiences in the program or school are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for each child and family (NAEYC, 2009).

For a practice to be developmentally appropriate, it must consider developmental domains and a child's age, individual needs, and individual culture.

**Adaptations: Typical and Atypical Development**

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Most children develop in a similar way. Even when cultural backgrounds, geographic locations, and personal characteristics vary, child development is generalizable. That does not mean, however, that all children are the same. Some children develop more quickly in cognitive areas, but more slowly in social areas. Some children develop more quickly in general than others, some more slowly. Children are living, breathing beings, and some variation is normal.

When a child develops in the way that we expect, we refer to this as **typical development.** There is room for a good deal of variance in typical development. For instance, babies can speak their first words anywhere from 9 to 13 months, and children can write their own names anywhere from 3 to 5 years. This variance is healthy and normal.

Some variance is unusual, and that is referred to as **atypical development**. Atypical development can slow down growth in other areas of a child's life. If a child cannot speak any words by 15 or 16 months, it

is considered atypical development. The ways and speed in which children grow is measured by tools called developmental assessments. The caring adults in a child's life benefit from knowing how the child is developing, where they are struggling, and what to expect next. Despite the name, developmental assessments are not complicated standardized tests that a child must complete. Instead, they are carried out by the teacher through observing the child at play or by playing small games and activities with the child. The teacher records the child's developmental milestones on the assessment and later shares it with the parents. If development is not on track, teachers should speak with parents and connect them with specialists who can help. Specialists will administer another type of assessment that is specially designed to diagnose developmental disabilities. Atypically developing children may benefit from early intervention programs that can help them get back on track.

**Child Development and Learning**

For instance, we know that young children are concrete thinkers who learn best by using real, tangible items rather than representations of items. If we want a group of 3-year-old children to learn about apples, we will give them real apples to smell, touch, see, and taste. In this way, they can develop a long lasting, deep concept about apples. This is developmentally appropriate. Offering them a book about apples is a useful support and vital for language development, but the book alone will never give them the conceptual understanding about apples. Likewise, well-meaning families often expect early childhood teachers to have children complete worksheets in preschool. From what we know about child development, young children do not have the executive function to allow them to sit in a chair for long periods of time to learn from worksheets. Further, their bodies are designed to wiggle and move. Sitting at a desk will not help preschoolers learn. That is why many high-quality early childhood programs focus on play-based learning.

**Individual Needs**

Considering an individual child's needs means knowing what is appropriate for a given child. The way this is determined is through developmental assessments. Curriculum should be tailored to each child's different developmental needs.

Perhaps there is an art activity in the classroom in which children cut paper with scissors and glue it onto a larger sheet. If some children do not have strong scissor skills, they may rip paper instead and use glue sticks to glue it down. In this way, children's individual developmental needs are met. They still are able to practice fine motor skills with art, but the activity is not designed to limit children by ability level. This type of planning is the one of the hallmarks of early childhood educators – the thoughtful practice of tailoring activities to meet children's individual needs. This practice is also referred to as differentiation, where the teacher understands and implements the idea that "one size does not fit all".

**Social and Cultural Contexts**

To consider culture in developmentally appropriate practice is to keep in mind the context in which the child is raised. Each family's set of rules, way of communicating, neighborhood, history, status, and environment is unique.

While there are some universals, what is considered developmentally appropriate for one culture may not be for another culture. For instance, the ways adults talk with children can vary widely depending on the culture. Some cultures rely heavily on verbal communication while others rely more on non- verbal

communication. Cultures can also vary on their norms around children's freedoms to move freely around a space. Some cultures allow children to move freely while others expect that children ask permission from an adult.

Differences in these norms may mistakenly be seen as behavior issues by teachers. **Culturally relevant pedagogy** is the practice of including ideas and artifacts that refer to a child's individual culture. This concept also extends to assessments.

## Developmental Domains

In the field of Early Childhood Education, we identify these areas of development as **domains**. These domains (areas) are as follows:

### Physical Development

Physical or physical motor development includes their large or gross motor development, their fine motor development, and their perceptual-motor development. The large or gross motor development of children consists of their large motor groups – running, jumping, skipping, swinging with their arms – in other words, the muscle groups that are closer to the body. The fine motor development of children consists of the small motor groups, like writing with their hands, squishing sand in-between their toes – muscle groups that are further away from the body. The last area of physical development is the perceptual-motor – their ability to catch a ball, to use a paintbrush and paint to create something from their memory – in other words, it refers to a child's developing ability to interact with their environment by combining the use of the senses and motor skills.

The first few years of life is dedicated to the heightened development of these skills. In the first year of life, they go from barely being able to hold their head up to walking upright. As many of you taking this course have varied experiences with children, this may be a refresher, but for some of you, this may be new information. It is crucial to the development of children, that they have many opportunities to use their bodies as their body is developing new pathways for success. In an early learning environment serving children from 0 – 5, there should be ample space and materials for children to explore and practice their emerging physical skills. This includes allowing them to take risks with their bodies allowing them to explore the possibilities. These risks afford children opportunities to feel that they are capable as well as gives them a sense of agency.

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**Cognitive-Language Development**

Cognitive or brain development speaks to how we process information, our curiosity/imagination, long and short-term memory, problem-solving, critical thinking, language both receptive and expressive, beginning reading, computing skills, creativity, etc. In other words, how our brain develops to help us to think about and understand the world around us.

We often place much emphasis on this area of development to the detriment of the other areas of development. They all work in concert. When thinking about developing the "whole child" we need to be mindful of providing experiences that promote all of their development, not just their cognitive development.

As with the other areas/domains of development, the first 5 years of life are important in establishing the foundation for learning. This includes providing lots of rich experiences for exploration, curiosity, imagination, use of materials and equipment (that also fosters physical development), opportunities for talking (even with preverbal babies), etc.

**Social-Emotional Development**

Social-emotional development is the relationships that children have with themselves and others, the way they feel about themselves or their self-concept, the way they value themselves or their self-esteem, and the ability to express their feelings to themselves and others.

One of the important dispositions of being an early childhood professional is supporting children's well-being. It is both a moral and ethical responsibility. By nature, children trust and look to the adults in their world to provide them with the necessary skills to be successful in their life's journey. We can either elevate or diminish a child.

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**Spiritual Development**

Spiritual development, or considering the "spirit" of the child, is something that is a more recent addition to thinking about "whole child" development. In a recent article entitled Supporting Spiritual Development in the Early Childhood Classroom by Amelia Richardson Dress, she cites emerging research that indicates the importance of considering this element of a child. "Spirit is the thing that makes us us. Spirituality is the way we connect our 'inner us' to everything else, including other people's inner 'usness." Our spiritual development is a part of our social-emotional development; however, we find it important to call this out specifically to guide our practice of supporting and elevating children's uniqueness.

## Developmental Ages and Stages

What do you know about the various ages and stages of child development? What interests you in working with children? Do you have a particular age group that brings you more joy? What do you know about that age group? Identification of the common characteristics of children at various developmental ages has been around for quite some time. Gesell and Ilg conducted research to identify some of these

common characteristics of each developmental age. They published a series of books that provide a comprehensive look at those developmental ages. Parents as well as early childhood professionals have found these helpful to understand how to relate to and interact with children as we socialize and educate them in our homes and our schools

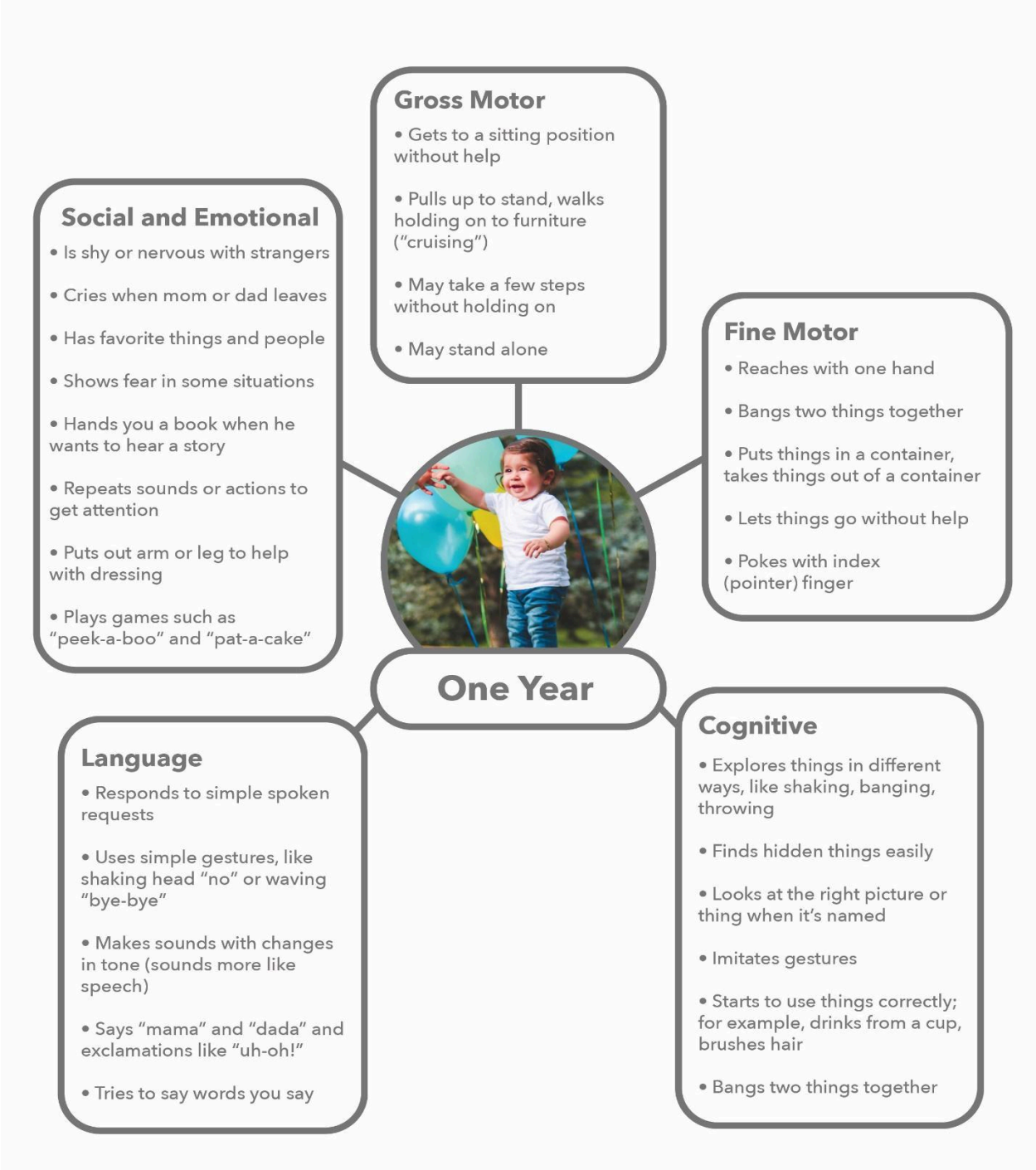
Other theories have used these to define how to interact with children, what to expect from children, and how a child's brain develops (Refer back to Chapter 2 Theories of Early Childhood Education). For early childhood professionals, theories help us to set up our curriculum, our environments, our expectations, and build meaningful and engaging relationships with children to support the "whole child."

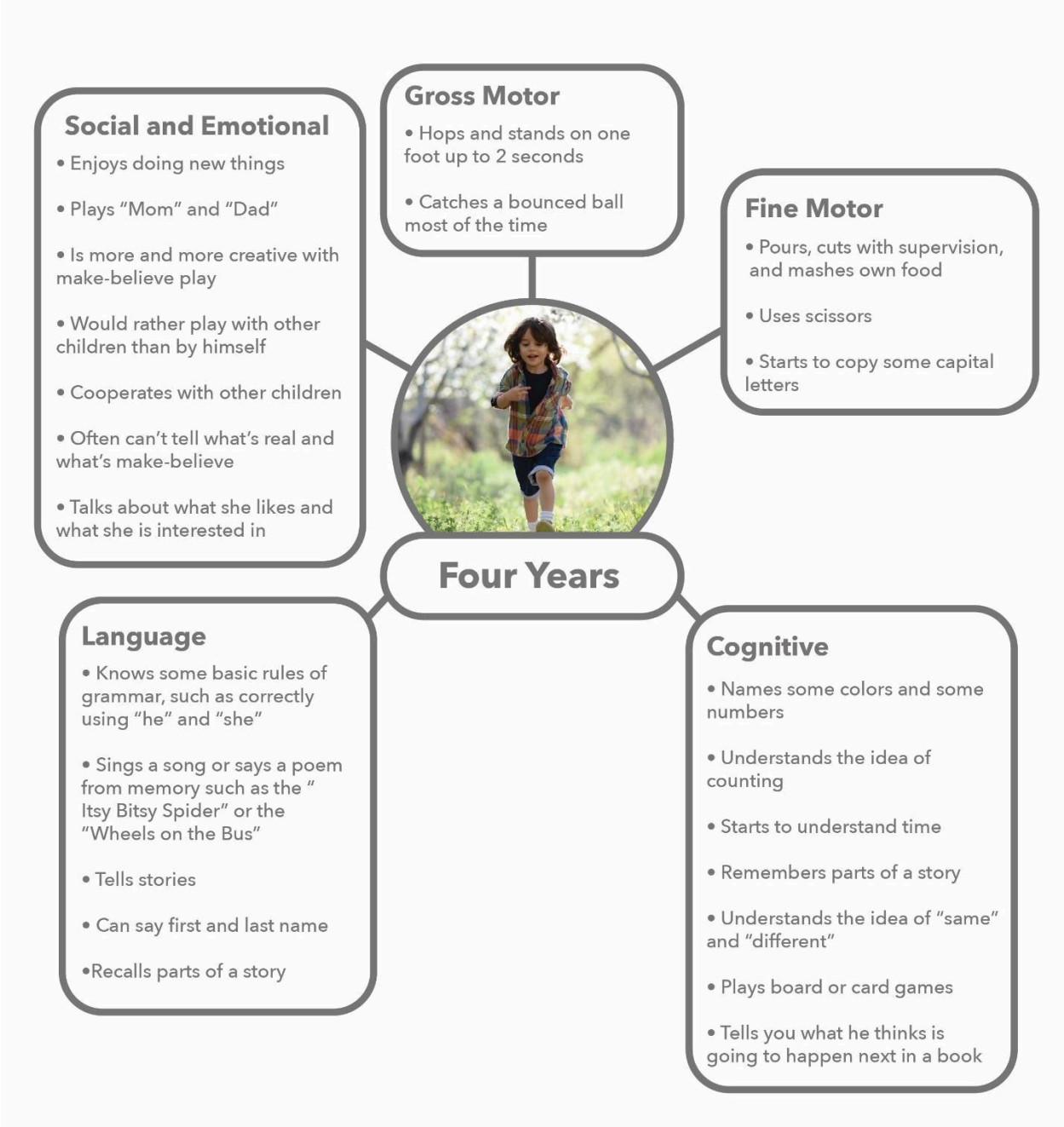
The following graphics provide an overview of these developmental ages and stages (aka milestones). It is important to note that using these age-level charts requires discretion. While they help to define "typical" development, children also are unique in their developmental progress. We use them as guidelines to help inform our practice with young children.

We must always remember:

- The milestones to gain a deeper understanding of the age group as a whole
- That each child, within that developmental age group, is a unique individual
- That children exhibit a range of developmental norms over time
- To resist the tendency to categorize or stereotype children
- To observe each child and assess where they are developmentally
- That each child goes through most of the stages describes, but how they do is the individual nature of who they are
- To focus on what children can do, to build on their strengths, and to find ways to support areas that need to be more developed
- That these milestones refer to typically developing children and are not meant in any way to represent a picture of any "one" child

Note: You may notice that the following charts do not mention spiritual development as one of the domains. There is no specific age nor specific expectations of a child's spiritual development. This development is ongoing as it is supported by the interactions the child has with the world around them.



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**Developmental Factors by Age**

Here is an additional chart to provide more context. While each child develops at their own rate and in their own time and may not match every listed item, here are some general descriptions of children by age.

**Factors Influencing Behaviors by Age**

| Age | General Descriptors |
|---|---|
| **1-2 Years** | ● Like to explore their environment<br>● Like to open and take things apart<br>● Like to dump things over<br>● Can play alone for short periods of time<br>● Still in the oral stage, may use biting, or hitting to express their feelings or ideas |
| **2-3 Years** | ● Need to run, climb, push and pull<br>● Are not capable of sharing, waiting, or taking turns<br>● Want to do things on their own<br>● Work well with routine<br>● Like to follow adults around<br>● Prolong bedtime<br>● Say “no”<br>● Understand more than he/she can say |
| **3-4 Years** | ● Like to run, jump, climb<br>● May grow out of naps<br>● Want approval from adults<br>● Want to be included “me too”<br>● Are curious about everything<br>● May have new fears and anxieties<br>● Have little patience, but can wait their turn<br>● Can take some responsibility<br>● Can clean up after themselves |
| **4-5 Years** | ● Are very active<br>● Start things but don’t necessarily finish them<br>● Are bossy and boastful<br>● Tell stories, exaggerate<br>● Use “toilet” words in a “silly” way<br>● Have active imaginations |
| **5-6 Years** | ● Want everything to be fair<br>● Able to understand responsibility<br>● Able to solve problems on their own |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Try to negotiate |



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## Reflect

Has reading over the developmental milestones of different developmental ages changed your ideas about children? What age group may you be most interested in working with? What age group may present more challenges for you?

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## Program Approaches and Equity Dispositions

When we understand how young children develop and learn, we can begin to shape our program approach. Simply put, a "program approach" is the way that we do things. Regardless of the program approach, high quality programs develop their practices through a lens of inclusivity, cultural relevance, anti-bias, anti-racism, and equity. Keep in mind that these concepts are not curriculums in and of themselves. They are a way of thinking and making decisions about every aspect of our teaching practice. We can look at them as dispositions or habits of thinking.

**Inclusivity**

The study of inclusion involves how we can intentionally create equitable learning opportunities into our teaching, curriculum, and programs with a commitment to continuous learning. Inclusive teaching strategies engage each child to feel like they belong and help them to participate in the learning experiences with the rest of the group.

NAEYC Advancing Equity defines inclusion as “the embodiment of the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and their family regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and context as full members of their families, communities and society” (NAEYC, 2019, p. 18). To be inclusive means to include everyone, and full inclusion seeks to promote justice by ensuring equitable participation of all children. To be inclusive we also need to know who we may be unconsciously excluding.

When early childhood educators take the time to truly get to know children, and their abilities, they can design learning environments that are welcoming to all children. It is important to consider aspects that include the children’s culture, linguistic background, and developmental ability when setting up an inclusive classroom. Effective and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies for inclusion involve building nurturing relationships, authentic observations, scaffolding learning experiences, adjusting support, and collaboration.

**Cultural Relevance**

When we integrate culturally responsive teaching into practice we are moving to another level of critical reflection. We not only see how our social identities influence our decision-making we also acknowledge and find ways to teach using the cultural context of the children in our classroom. Culture is increasingly understood as inseparable from development (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, it is important to ensure cultural continuity, where the child's home culture is reflected in the classroom and is not invisible. Many marginalized social identity groups are invisible in our classrooms and teaching materials.

Zaretta Hammond (2015) writes about the pliability of young children's brains. Her focus was mostly on older children, but it is a reminder again that we set the stage for how children see and feel about themselves and where they fit into the classroom environment. There are strategies that are simple that can get us started.

- Make learning fun with ple as making learning fun with interactive games that focus on social and verbal interactions, instead of just sitting and listening (Hammond, 2015). For example, facilitate a group activity where children work together to create a story or a mural. Invite them to include something from home in the mural or write part of the story in their home language.
- Make it a social (Hammond, 2015). Allow children to share and talk during our reading of a story or teaching a lesson. Ask them to share something about the story that relates to home. For example, a favorite smell or activity or food or music.
- Add more stories! (Hammond, 2015). Invite families to share or make up stories with their children. Ask elders to come and tell stories in the classroom during circle. Instead of reading a book, listen to stories families have recorded.

Ultimately, culturally responsive teaching occurs when we integrate teaching strategies that are centered from the children and their family's culture. This does not mean we have to know about all the cultures of our families and how they live outside of the classroom. As the fifth NAEYC Advancing Equity (2019) recommendation mentions, we just need to be willing to be open to learning and commit to learn based on our experiences with children and their families. When we're open to learning more about children and families, we build connections and partnerships that support children's development. These connections demonstrate that we welcome all families and strive to incorporate children's cultures into the learning experiences.

**Anti-Bias**

That children notice differences is a clear developmental task. Think about all  of the sorting activities that we encourage. Children begin noticing differences from birth, sorting, and categorizing information. Among many other things, they also notice differences in skin color, hair, eyes, language, abilities, and more.

- three month old babies prefer to look at pictures of faces from their own race
- babies aged six to nine months associate happy music with members of their own race
- babies from six months of age show a preference for people who speak their native language

These preferences most likely develop from familiarity, but these and many other studies show that children notice differences from infancy. What the problem is, is when we begin to assign values to differences - believing that some identities are better than others - and this happens when children are very young. Because of the systems that we live under (racism, sexism, classism, heteronormativity, and more), children begin to ascribe value to the differences, internalizing ideas about some differences being better than others.

- many children develop basic gender stereotypes by age three
- race impacts young children's beliefs about job opportunities

The few examples above are supported by a large body of research showing that young children begin to internalize ideas about our identities between birth and age 8. As teachers, we're positioned to support them in developing healthy self concepts about their own groups, comfortable and positive attitudes about differences, critical thinking about bias, prejudices, and unfairness, and skills in working together to create equity.

Ultimately the goal of anti-bias education is to be conscious of and actively fight against biases we have about others and that exist in the institutions we work and live in. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2020) explain the anti-bias approach as an approach in early childhood education that explicitly works to end all forms of bias and discrimination towards children by those who care, teach, and guide them.

Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2020) outline four goals of anti-bias education that will nurture the development of the whole child so they can:

- demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities
- express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences and form deep, caring human connections across diverse backgrounds
- increasingly recognize and have language to describe unfairness (injustice) and understand that unfairness hurts
- and have the will and the skills to act, with others or along against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions

For us to meet these goals of identity, diversity, justice, and activism, we need to learn about the social, cultural, economic context of the child, their family and of ourselves. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, we all have biases that we learned through the cycle of socialization. We also have our own social, cultural, and economic context that influences how we work and teach. Becoming more conscious of our biases through critical reflective work will help us determine how we learned to know what we know and do what we do.

To get started, look around your classroom and reflect on the materials you use to teach children. What social identities are represented in your books and dramatic play area? What kind of pictures are up in your classroom? Who is visible and who do we not see?

- **Books for Children:** Assess your books for bias. One way is to use this Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books.

- **Self-Assessments:** Consider completing self-assessment about your own social identity groups. Reflect on how you were socialized into those identities. What did you learn about groups that you belonged to and what did you learn about groups you did not belong to? Reflect on where you may have experienced privilege and/or discrimination (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).

- **Books for Teachers:** Read more! Start with NAEYC's Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement. Specifically look over the recommendations for early childhood educators. Derman- Sparks & Edwards, Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves (2020) provides a thorough introduction to anti-bias education in early childhood education.

- **Self-Education:** Take classes on Anti-Bias Education, Diversity & Equity, Inclusion to continue to learn and build your knowledge and awareness. Another thing to consider is finding ways to expand your knowledge of diverse experiences and perspectives without generalizing or stereotyping about others who are different from you (NAEYC, 2019). Ted Talks are an excellent way to hear powerful and empowering authentic stories about systemic oppressions and bias. There are some suggestions in the website to review following the references at the end of this chapter.

- **Intent vs Impact:** Remember good intent does not always lead to positive impact. When you commit a biased act, be ready and willing to be accountable and to take that opportunity to learn rather than being defensive (NAEYC, 2019).

- **Book Clubs:** Think about starting a book club focusing on diversity and equity with your co-workers or with your friends and families. Or even with the children!

This is a journey and requires continuous learning for all of us. Take time to regularly reflect and revisit the aspects listed above, so you can create an equitable and inclusive early learning setting for children to thrive in. Invite your co-teachers to examine and discuss aspects with you. This type of collaborative work supports raising awareness of issues and developing an anti-bias approach.

Read this chapter on Anti-Bias Curriculum | 15 pages.

**Anti-Racism**

If the stories we are learning from and teaching with are from the dominant white culture perspective, then we have to move beyond the anti-bias approach and also be **anti-racist**. Children are constantly internalizing the messages conveyed in their environments. As we previously discussed, BIPOC children are being disproportionately impacted by our education systems. A recent study found that children as young as 5 rated images of black boys less favorably than images of white boys and girls, with images of black girls falling in the middle (Perszyk et al, 2019). As teachers we are also socializing children into the dominant cultural norms and values. It is critical that we reflect on what we are teaching children that may not be visible to us.

Furthermore, Dr. Shulman (2020), President of the American Psychological Association, stated that we are living in a racism pandemic. This racism "pandemic" leads to a number of psychological, physical

issues and historical trauma (Shulman, 2020). The impact of racism emphasizes the urgent need for each early childhood educator to engage in anti-racist work. This work will require us to examine our own racial biases we may have based on our own socialization process. Anti-racist work will look different for each person and teachers in each of our classrooms, and our teaching approaches. We all can actively fight against racism. Some educators might say that they do not see color, however we want to avoid this color-blind approach. When we see color, we truly see children, and welcome the diversity that each child brings.


We will have to actively engage in learning more about what it means to be an anti-racist as well. Dr. Kendi (2019) points out that the opposite of being a racist is not just being not racist, it is being an anti-racist, where we are actively fighting for racial equity. It means examining our own beliefs about what racial equity is. Through evaluation and reflection, we can dig deeper in our own socialization process and check for beliefs and ideas of others based on our and their race.

## Why Strengthen Your Equity Disposition

The U.S. has always had diverse social and cultural groups. This wonderful and rich growth in diversity continues today. According to the Children's Defense Fund's "The State of America's Children®" 2020 report, 73.4 million children lived in the U.S. in 2018. 50 percent were children of color: 14 percent were Black; 26 percent were Hispanic; 5 percent were Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander; and <1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native.

However, the statistics below provide a glimpse into what structural inequity looks like for children in our country.

- 16 % of America's children were poor in 2018–a total of 11.9 million children–and children of color were disproportionately poor (Children's Defense Fund, 2020).
- Poverty is one of the biggest threats to children's healthy development. There are 11,752,892 children in the U.S. between the ages of 3 and 5.9% of them in deep poverty where families of these children have incomes below 50 percent of the federal poverty line, or less than $10,289 for a family of one parent and two children (National Center for Children in Poverty, n.d.)
- $88,200 was the median income for white families with children compared with $40,100 for Black and $46,400 for Hispanic families in 2017 (Children's Defense Fund, 2020).
- Children from families with higher socioeconomic status (economic status, education, occupation) were likely to enroll in higher education institutions then those from lower SES families (Long, 2007).

To help us better understand equity, we will specifically examine race and what racism looks like in early childhood education. NAEYC's Advancing Equity (2019) defines race as a social-political construct that categorizes and ranks groups of human beings on the basis of skin color and other physical features.

As we learned earlier from the definition of diversity and from the cycle of socialization, race is a social identity that confers privilege to one group and discriminates against another. Racism is defined as a belief that some races are superior or inferior to others and it operates at a systemic level through deeply embedded structural and institutional policies that have favored Whiteness at the expense of other groups (NAEYC, 2019).

Throughout history of public and early childhood education children have been discriminated against because of their race. Children of slaves were not allowed to attend schools and indigenous children were removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools. Not all children are starting with the same resources or supports because of historical and current bias and oppression in our institutions. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) children and families are part of our classrooms and programs. Earlier we reflected on bias, privilege and oppression. Looking at data about preschool expulsion and suspension rates we can see how our implicit biases about a child's race are contributing to systemic oppression:

- Gilliam (2005) in his initial Yale study found that expulsion and suspension rates are higher in preschool programs then in K-12 schools.
- The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2016 a, b.) confirmed that these rates were disproportionately high for Black children where Black children make up 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of preschool children suspended more than once.
- Gilliam (2016) and Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2019) found that race and implicit bias seem to be contributing factors to the higher expulsion and suspension rates for black and brown children specifically boys.

Furthermore, here in Washington State, the Department of Children, Youth and Families found children of color are underrepresented in the percentage of children entering kindergarten with the skills they need to be successful.

Children and youth of color enter and remain in the child welfare system at greater rates. Youth of color are also disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system (DCYF, n.d.). Teachers are a part of creating this data. We have to consistently be considering children's diverse identities and how our own biases may be contributing to these systemic issues.

## Achievement and Opportunity

All children can achieve. All children have the capacity to learn and develop to their fullest potential when they have the opportunities to do so. But due to bias that exists in individual teachers, in our programming and educational system, not all children are set up for success. Milner (2012) identified this as an **opportunity gap**. It is important for us to understand this distinction. Structural inequities adversely impact BIPOC children; however, it is not something inherently in them or related to their ability and capacity to learn. Again, all children will achieve if the opportunity to do so exists. As teachers we have to be creating those opportunities.

**Advancing Equity Recommendation for Everyone**

There are several recommendations that can support our ability and capacity to work towards inclusion where all children feel like they belong. The second NAEYC Advancing Equity recommendation for everyone tells us that we need to recognize the power and benefit of diversity and inclusivity and recommendation three asks us to take responsibility for biased actions, even if unintended, and actively work to repair harm (NAEYC, 2019, p. 6). In our classrooms, children are learning about the world around them. Developmental theories and brain research tell us that the first 8 years of a child's life is one of exponential growth. Children are curious and engaged in what we share during circle time. They are active and excited when they participate in our planned or spontaneous table activities. During this time of active cognitive learning, children are also learning about themselves and others as well. Children in our classrooms are not only working towards meeting developmental milestones but they are also being socialized by their families, teachers, and the communities they live in. They are beginning to learn about the cultural norms of their family as well as the social norms that we have in our classrooms and those of society. We are an intimate and integral part of a child's social and cultural growth and development. Whether we know it or not, we may be contributing to the deep inequities that exist for children and their families because of their social identities. It is imperative and necessary for us to consider ways that we can be more inclusive in our work.

**Acknowledge, Discuss and Plan**

Creating welcoming and inclusive classrooms requires educators to put forth an ongoing effort. When we become more comfortable with social diversity, we will become more comfortable talking to children about differences that children will notice. If we don't acknowledge a child's observation in a positive way, then it gives them the impression that the difference is a problem or something negative.

Think about taking the following steps when a child sees something that is different in another child or their families.

- **Don't ignore it.** Our initial acknowledgement can be a simple positive affirming statement. For example, a child may ask why their friend has two dad's and no mom's. A simple positive acknowledgment of this observation is to affirm that the child does have two dads and that there are so many different kinds of families.
- **Continue the discussion.** We should continue the discussion depending on our comfort level by using open ended questions and examples to share about affirming the differences and normalizing them to the child. If we are uncomfortable continuing anymore discussions, then we can revisit it at another time when we feel more prepared.
- **Plan for integration.** This leads us to the third step where we can plan for a purposeful introduction or integration into our lesson planning and materials we have in our classroom.

Reflective practices that involve consideration about children's abilities, languages, culture, and temperaments will guide teachers to adjust their teaching approaches to create inclusive learning environments. This type of reflective approach focuses on the uniqueness of each child, and their individual needs and social diversity. Following are brief descriptions of inclusive practices and approaches you can apply to your teaching.

**Critical Reflection**

Critical reflection is required to help us assess our thinking, judgements, and actions in the classroom. Self-reflection is a strategy that teachers should use to stop, step back, pause and think about their work and assess to make changes or affirm what is working well. Sometimes self-reflection happens in the moment in the classroom after a planned activity or it may happen at a time when you are not in the classroom. Critical self-reflection is a process where we stop and consider why we did what we did, how we did and specifically ask if there were any biases in our decision making.

Culturally and socially, many of the developmental theories we have relied on were researched by white men with children and families who spoke the same language, lived in similar homes and with similar traditional family structures, who were part of the dominant (white) culture at that time. Having the ability to reflect on information that is current and culturally responsive will help us engage with diversity, equity, and inclusion in your work with children.

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## Reflect

Who are the children in your classroom? What social identity groups do they belong to? If you don't work with children yet, think about your child's classroom or your own classroom growing up.

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## Program Approaches

Hint: As you learn about the models below, open the program model chart to help organize what you're learning about different approaches. Trust me, this will help you in a later assignment. You don't have to fill it all out from this module, but you can start it.

**High Scope**

High scope is a program model that is child-centered and provides children with hands-on experiences. Its roots are unique – it originated from a research-based preschool program in Michigan in the 1960s called the **Perry Preschool Project**.

The goal of the Perry Preschool Project was to enroll low-income children in high quality preschool experiences to see if it would improve their life outcomes. The researcher David Weikart followed the children's progress for decades to measure the results. Weikart chose to include low-income children because, in comparison to middle-income children, children in low-income households are at greater risk for lowered academic achievement, have lower rates of high school graduation, higher rates of crime, and a higher likelihood of poverty later in life. The goal of the Perry Preschool project was to counter the effects of poverty early in life. This was one of the first and most published pieces of scientific research to investigate how economic investments in early childhood education could have long-term benefits to the child, the family, and to society. The idea was that if you give a child a strong start early on, it will pay off when they become adolescents and adults. What the researchers hoped for came true. Children who

participated in the Perry Preschool Project had greater academic achievement, greater high school graduation rates, lower rates of crime, and higher adult earnings than their low-income peers who were not in the preschool project. This study showed that access to high-quality preschool programs in the first few years of life can have long-term benefits for the child.

This research highlighted the importance of the early years of a child's life in influencing the course of their future.

So, what was the magic formula of the Perry Preschool Project? There were several components, but two main pieces stand out. The classroom system of **plan-do-review** and family involvement. Plan-Do-Review is a system that helps children organize their play activities. Children gather in a circle and the teacher asks them what activity center they plan to play in during the morning free play time. The choices range from blocks and art to dramatic play or puzzles. Children make their choice to the group, such as "I plan to play with Jakeem in the blocks area. We are going to build a really big bridge!". After the children make their plans, they go and do the activity of their choice. It is okay if kids switch activities or change their plans during this time. After free play, the children return to the circle and report back on how their plans went. Did Jakeem and his friend build a successful bridge? What went well? Did anything unexpected happen? The teacher will ask these types of probing questions to get the children to think about their activities. This method supports cognitive development because it involves planning. Children are able to explore their world and engage in hands-on activities. The plan-do-review helps to support their memory development and helps them to develop concentration, attention, and focus, all skills which are related to the academics they will engage in when they enter elementary school.

The second main component of the Perry Preschool Project was family involvement. Families were visited in their homes by teachers to create connections between what was happening in the classroom and at home. When a child learns a concept in class, it should not stay in class. Having families participate in learning at home can help create layers of learning for the child. It also provides an opportunity for parent support and education. This approach aligns with the ecological model in that the family and community are integrated into a child's early childhood education setting, supporting development using the multiple contexts involved in a child's life.

The High Scope model follows the findings from the Perry Preschool Project. It has taken those evidence-based strategies and created a program model to serve children in early learning settings. It is the embodiment of the philosophy that family income need not be the sole determining factor in children's academic and life outcomes.

A similar program to the Perry Preschool Project is Head Start. Head Start is a preschool program which also has its roots in researching ways to improve the lives of children in poverty. Head Start research has found similar results to the Perry Preschool, and with comparable methods. Head Start has become a long-term, nationwide program that still exists today. Indeed, many Head Start programs even follow the High Scope method. These programs demonstrate the need and effectiveness of high-quality preschool programs.

**Developmental Interaction**

The **Developmental Interaction** approach was founded by **Lucy Sprague Mitchell**, an education reformer who developed innovate ideas for educating children and helped to professionalize teaching for women.

Mitchell also founded the Bank Street College of Education in New York. The developmental interaction approach, sometimes called the Bank Street approach, focuses on developing the child in all areas – physical, intellectual, social, and emotional.

Teachers in the Developmental Interaction approach see learning as a holistic process and consider developmental domains (physical, intellectual, social, and emotional) as inherently interconnected. It emphasizes meeting children where they are and providing opportunities for making choices. It is play-based, so children have lots of free time to explore on their own terms. It also emphasizes the child's role in society – another nod to the ecological model of child development.

**Montessori**

The Montessori approach to education was developed by **Maria Montessori**, an Italian physician and educator who was interested in reforming the way children learn in group settings. The Montessori method has distinct key features that make it stand out from other approaches. One such feature is mixed-age groups in a single class. Children in Montessori classrooms can range from 2.5 to 5 years old. This means that there is a great deal of peer learning happening. Older children can model behavior for younger children, which can help facilitate learning better than direct instruction from a teacher.

Another feature of Montessori classroom is the concept of constructivism. Montessori classrooms rely on a carefully structured classroom with materials that children can use to discover new concepts on their own using real life materials. Items are often made from natural materials to give the child a realistic concept of the weight of an object based on its size. In order to deeply engage with materials, children are given a large block of free play time – usually about 2.5 to 3 hours. During this time, teachers will help children on an individual or small group level with materials. The materials have an emphasis on child development. Some may involve fine motor skills, like threading beads on a string, and some may promote problem solving, a part of cognitive development, such ordering pegs into holes by size and shape. Many activities are related to practical life: washing dishes, placing flowers in a vase, and cleaning up after oneself. Materials for practical life are always child-sized so that the child can feel that she can master the activity without unnecessary impediments. There is a strong emphasis on completion. Children will not be interrupted by a teacher when they are in the middle of a task, as this is thought to disrupt learning. Independence is also emphasized. Children are encouraged to learn how to use buttons and zippers in order to dress themselves at an early age. Teachers without a Montessori background are often surprised to see the abilities of a two-and-a-half-year-old getting a jacket on and zipping it alone.

Mealtimes in Montessori centers can often differ from those of traditional classrooms. When a meal is served, children will be invited to the table and asked to join when they are ready. There is no large-scale, formal transition from playtime to lunchtime. If a child is still working on an activity, then he may complete it in as much time as he wishes. Typically, children gather around the table more or less at the same time, but it happens organically. Children are drawn to the smell of food and a chance to visit with playmates at the table.

Children serve themselves and pour their own milk using child-sized utensils and milk pitchers. At the end of the meal, children clear their own dishes and place them on a cart after removing unfinished food.

With such a free environment, how do teachers encourage classroom harmony in a Montessori classroom? Teachers use guidance strategies that are similar to other approaches, but children often learn from observing older peers. If a 3- year-old is approaching the art easel for the first time, she may watch a 5-year- old first. She may observe her peer carefully dipping the brush into the cup, keeping paint on the paper, and wiping up any spills with a cloth. Sometimes, this way of learning how to use and respect classroom materials can resonate more with a young child than when a teacher outlines strict rules for how to properly use paint.

**Waldorf**

Waldorf schools originated in Germany and were developed by **Rudolf Steiner** in the 1920s. Waldorf programs have a strong emphasis on everyday practical activities and centers are designed to resemble a home in order to facilitate this. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, and building are all activities that children engage in in a Waldorf program. There is a strong emphasis on oral storytelling, creative arts, and music. Historically, Waldorf programs included mystical and religious elements, but most modern programs typically do not. Children are encouraged to engage in free play using toys and activities made of natural materials. Like in Montessori programs, the belief is that children are more connected to toys and tools that are made of wood rather than plastic, as it is more aesthetically pleasing and facilitates a connection to nature. In that spirit, Waldorf classrooms include organic materials such as acorns, shells and wool that are used for counting games, art, and storytelling. Academic subjects are integrated with one another – math is taught through storytelling, combining mathematical problem solving with language development. This helps promote cognitive development in a holistic way. Teachers facilitate early math activities using small wool dolls and other natural, tangible materials. However, formal learning of letters and numbers are not pushed upon young children in Waldorf schools. It is the belief that children will come around to letter and number identification when they are ready, and that is usually not until the age of 6 or 7 years, which is when it is formally introduced in Waldorf schools. Interestingly, this coincides with most modern European educational systems as well. Preschools in the United States on the other hand, typically begin letter and number identification well before age 5 (although this is beginning to change). This variation is a valuable lesson in cultural differences in developmentally appropriate practice.

Another key feature of Waldorf program is the daily rhythm. While many preschools follow a daily schedule with specific hour or minute intervals, Waldorf programs follow a rhythm instead. What matters here is the order of the day, not how long each activity takes. So daily activities always follow the same sequence but may not be at the same time every day. In the morning, for example, the teacher may invite the children to help bake bread or make soup for the lunch. Children gather around kneading dough or chopping vegetables (children are encouraged to learn knife safety at an early age), and as they finish, they may disperse into other activities like sewing, building with blocks, or dancing with scarves. Another teacher might gather a group of students to invite them to hear a story that she is telling using puppets and props to act out the plot. Children may naturally come and go from the story based on what they are interested in playing with at that time. When the lunch is ready, the teacher will invite children to the table with a song and, often times, by lighting a candle (children are also taught safety around the candle). There is no set time, but meals are typically served at about the same time each day. Children rely on the order of events to help them predict their environment. A difference of 15 or 20 minutes makes no difference to them, however. This focus on rhythm is also reflected in the practice of honoring

the changing of seasons. Waldorf programs also include rituals that celebrate the rhythms of nature. This gives the children a connection to the larger system of which they are a part.

**Reggio Emilia**

The Reggio Emilia approach takes its name from the Italian city where it originated. A constructivist approach, the Reggio method provides encouragement that children should explore their world using hands-on methods that are child-directed. The approach was developed by Loris Malaguzzi following WWII. It was his belief that children should be able to freely express themselves. In that vein, Reggio programs encourage arts and music. One core belief in the Reggio approach is the Hundred Languages of Children, or the ability of children to express their thoughts and feelings through arts such

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as painting, sculpting, and drawing. Indeed, Reggio programs are known for their emphasis on beautiful artwork. Children's art is displayed on the wall at the child's eye level, often with a description of the work written by the teacher in the child's own words. This honors the child's creative spirit and helps promote healthy emotional development. Another feature of the original Reggio school in Italy is the connection to community. The children there learn directly from members of the community, and the community members feel responsible for taking part in children's education. American programs emulate this goal with strong parental involvement. US programs are referred to as "Reggio inspired" because the true Reggio schools in Italy have the connection to community that is unique to that location. The Reggio approach believes that children learn from adults, peers, and the environment. The environment is thought to be the "third teacher" and is set up so that children can explore independently as their interests guide them. Spaces are set up with natural light, living plants, and materials that encourage creativity.

**Forest Schools**

Forest schools originated in Sweden and other European countries and their popularity has spread to the United States in recent years. The concept of forest schools is that children spend their whole day outdoors, in all weather. All activities take place outside – stories, art, construction, and even meals.

Children are dressed in appropriate clothing for all weather so that they are comfortable and safe while outside. Many of the same activities that take place in indoor preschools also happen in forest preschools. Children create art, often using natural materials, but also use paint, clay, and crayons.

Science activities are well-suited to a forest environment, as children can collect leaves and rocks to sort and categorize, or examine bugs using a microscope. An outdoor environment lends itself well to construction projects, which may include building a tower with blocks or building a giant fort out of sticks, branches, and rope. Forest schools often have a covered shelter or area where materials are kept in bins and teachers can take out the materials at the start of each day so that children have access to all the things they need for free play. Teachers do circle time, read books, and sing songs, the same as in a typical preschool. Mealtimes take place at outdoor tables and children wash hands using an outdoor hand washing station. Usually children do not sleep outdoors, so forest schools are typically either half-day programs or include only children who are old enough to not need naptime. Children in forest schools have a strong connection to nature and it is believed to provide many health and developmental benefits.

On a related note, in July 2021 Washington State became the first state to permanently license outdoor, nature-based childcare for preschool and school- age children under a new Senate Bill 5151. This comes after a four-year outdoor preschool pilot program and gave DCYF the ability to set the precedent as the first state in the nation to develop licensing requirements for outdoor education.

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## Reflect

Take a moment and consider each program approach. What are ways that each approach might incorporate inclusive practices? Anti-bias practices? Anti-racist practice?

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High-quality early childhood programs are informed by child development theory. There are a variety of approaches and philosophies in early childhood program models, each with its own unique benefits. All programs should build on a foundation of inclusivity and anti-bias to support children's optimal development.

### Attribution



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