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# UNIT 11 DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

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## 11.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Units 7 and 8, you have read about the importance of play in children’s development and the need to adopt a play-based pedagogy while teaching young children. You have read that prominent educational thinkers have underlined the importance of children’s play. However, many preschools use formal direct teaching to impart skills of reading, writing and arithmetic to

young children, which is not the best course for their development and learning. In this Unit, you will read about the features of a formal academic curriculum and pedagogy and why such an approach is not desirable. You will read about an alternative to an academic curriculum — this is developmentally appropriate practice. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) includes the use of play-based pedagogy. You will read why the framework of DAP is highly suitable for planning educational experiences for young children.

## Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- describe the features of traditional/ academic curriculum and pedagogy;
- explain the context which led to the emergence of developmentally appropriate practice framework;
- state the principles on which the DAP framework is based;
- describe the features of the DAP curriculum and pedagogy;
- differentiate between features of traditional preschools and DAP preschools;
- explain the impact of developmentally appropriate and non-developmentally appropriate practices on children's education;
- understand that a variety of different teaching approaches may be developmentally appropriate depending upon the context; and
- examine whether the Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia approaches are developmentally appropriate.

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## 11.2 TRADITIONAL/ ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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In Unit 4 of Block 1, you have read how many early childhood education centres in our country function as downward extensions of Class 1 and introduce the child to formal studies. These preschools follow a traditional or an academic curriculum. Let us read in some detail about the features of the traditional, academic curriculum.

- a) The focus of the academic curriculum is to impart the basics of the skills of reading, writing and numeracy to children relevant for the next grade in the present preschool years.

The curriculum relevant for older children is pushed down to the earlier age group and for this reason, the curriculum is called a '**pushed-down curriculum**'.

- b) In terms of the curriculum content, it is teacher-directed, i.e. the teacher decides what is to be learnt. The teacher, in turn, often receives the curriculum as fixed by the authorities. There is no room for children's views, opinions, interests and choices to be incorporated into the curriculum. Generally, even the teacher has no freedom to modify or adapt the content according to the needs of her group of children.

- c) In terms of the teaching strategy, the teacher uses the strategy of direct instruction to the class as a whole. Learning is seen to take place by repetition of correct responses, through drill and practice. The teaching strategy is didactic/instructive and so for this reason, it is called the **‘didactic curriculum’**. Children hardly get opportunities to explore, investigate, try out things for themselves or make discoveries.

When using direct instruction, the teacher divides the learning tasks into smaller sequential steps. Children are taught the steps turn by turn – as they learn the first step, the teacher adds the next step, and so on. This breaking up of the task often makes the task meaningless for children. So, for example, to teach the children to write letters, the teacher may first get children to practice ‘standing’ lines for some days, followed by ‘sleeping’ lines for the next few days, then practice the letter by joining the dots, and then, write the letter. In this whole process, which takes place over a few months, many children lose interest in the process of writing as they do not understand what it is leading to. This is particularly true for children who are first-generation learners and whose homes do not have exposure or a ‘culture of literacy’.

In the teaching strategy of direct instruction, there is a lot of emphasis on written work where children copy letters, simple words and numerals in their workbooks and worksheets. However, many children may not have understood the concepts. So while they can write number names up to 20, they may not be able to count five objects correctly. In other words, they have not developed number sense and the concept of number. Similarly, they may write three or four-letter words but may not be able to tell what they mean or they may not be able to associate the sound of the letter with the name of the letter.

Children’s correct responses are reinforced immediately. The teacher usually uses marks or other symbols (such as stars) for reinforcing and motivating the child. The belief is that children learn by external (teacher’s) reinforcement and not due to their internal motivation and interest. The teacher usually uses marks or other symbols (such as stars) for reinforcing and motivating the child.

- d) The purpose of assessment is to test what the child knows whatever has been taught to her and this leads to a ranking of children as ‘first’, ‘second’, ‘third’, and so on. Assessment is usually in the form of paper and pencil tests where children answer questions set by the teacher. When children give incorrect answers, these are seen as errors and a problem. The strategy is of correcting errors immediately so that children do not acquire incorrect information.

So a didactic/academic curriculum is a teacher-led, teacher-centred method of education. It is based on the behaviouristic theories of learning. You know from the reading of MCD-001 that behaviouristic theories state that learning is an effect of responses to stimuli and that children are not innately motivated to learn. Rather, children are seen as ‘empty vessels’ into whom knowledge has to be poured by an adult. So concerning the classroom, it means that it is the teacher who will produce

the stimuli (which means the content to be learnt). When children have difficulty in coping with the curriculum, then the children, their background, or the teachers are blamed, rather than the inappropriate curriculum. Children who get restless with such teaching strategies or those who find themselves unchallenged, bored, and frustrated by doing writing and workbook activities for long periods are wrongly labelled as ‘immature’, ‘disruptive’ and ‘mischief-makers’.

The pushed-down academic curriculum is unfortunately practiced in many countries, including the USA and our own country. Specifically, during the 1970s and 1980s, a trend of formal academic instruction began in America in early childhood programmes. The perception of the U.S. public was that their children were lagging behind the rest of the world in learning. So, to impart basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy, the early childhood programmes became downward extensions of the primary school with formal didactic teaching. They began to practice a pushed-down/ didactic/ academic curriculum for children. The framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) emerged as a result of the criticism of the academic/ traditional curriculum. You will read about DAP in the next section.

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### **11.3 EMERGENCE OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE**

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In the 70s and 80s, many educators in the US, who were influenced by the works of Piaget and Vygotsky (whose theories you have read in BCD-001, and views on play in Unit 7 of this Block), proposed the view that children construct their own knowledge by interacting in an open and active environment that challenges their thinking.

These educators held the view that children are not empty vessels into whom knowledge has to be poured by an adult. Rather, they stated that the developmental theories of Piaget and Vygotsky provide an understanding of the child who is an active learner. They stated that knowledge about child development and learning, which had emerged from research can be practically used for creating the curriculum and identifying pedagogic practices appropriate for early childhood classrooms. So, several professional organizations developed recommendations for teachers to help them in implementing non-didactic curricula. The most widely known of these recommendations is the Developmentally Appropriate Practice Framework developed by the National Association for the Education of the Young Children (NAEYC) which is a professional organization of early childhood educators in the United States of America. The Developmentally Appropriate Practice is a framework for planning learning experiences that are based on the vision that:

- the child is an active learner;
- learning is the process of construction of knowledge by the child; and
- the child’s play is the chief means of constructing this knowledge.

**Thus, Developmentally Appropriate Practice is a child-centred philosophy of education based on the theories of constructivism, including the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky.**

Developmentally Appropriate Practice was first defined, described, and adopted in 1987 by NAEYC. The description of Developmentally Appropriate Practice given in the NAEYC position statement has been reviewed and updated twice after 1987 (in 1997 & 2008) to keep up with the new research in the early childhood development field. The most recent NAEYC position statement on DAP was published in 2008 by Bredenkamp & Copple. The framework is a guideline or a set of principles for planning the curriculum — it is not the actual curriculum or the syllabus or the content to be transacted with the child. The curriculum has to be evolved and developed by the teacher or the concerned authority. In Block 6 of this Course, we have discussed various ways in which you can plan the curriculum. The central idea of DAP is that teachers, to be able to design curricula and transact learning experiences, should know about three aspects regarding children.

This knowledge must be based on what research tells us about children's development and learning. The three core aspects about children regarding the teacher must know are the following:

- a) **How Children Develop and Learn:** Teachers must know what children of a particular age are like, and what they can and cannot do - in other words, teachers need to know about age-related characteristics. They also need to know how children learn and which strategies and approaches will foster children's optimal development.
- b) **Individual Differences among Children:** You know that while sequences of development are universal, children vary in their rate of development. So, children of the same age will have different abilities. Also, children differ in terms of their personality, preferences, learning style, interests and prior experiences. Some may have special learning needs and may be living in challenging circumstances, like poverty or frequent migration. While planning the learning experiences, the teacher needs to ensure that the needs of all children are addressed. Responding to each child as an individual is fundamental to DAP. Therefore, the learning environment and curriculum must be inclusive and needs to take into account individual difference in children.
- c) **Socio-Cultural Contexts of Children:** Teachers must know about each child's family background, culture, community values, familial expectations, and language used at home. Only then will the teacher be able to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful of each child and the family.

## 11.4 PRINCIPLES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING THAT INFORM DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

We have said that Developmentally Appropriate Practice is guided by knowledge about child development and learning that has emerged from research over the years. In the Table 11a below, we have listed the principles of child development and learning that guide Developmentally Appropriate Practice. With each principle, we explain its implication for designing a curriculum and selecting pedagogy (teaching method).

**Table 11a: Some Principles of Child Development and Learning and their Implications for Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

Sr. No.	Principles of Child Development and Learning	Some Implications for Planning Learning Experiences
1)	The early years are a critical period for development and learning to occur. Learning begins right from birth. Early experiences have profound cumulative effects on children's development. These effects can be immediate or delayed.	It is important to have organized learning experiences for the child in the early years, along with physical care, love, and nurturance to maximize the child's developmental potential. This means that learning cannot be left to chance. Adults have to be clear about the type of learning experiences to be provided to children for their all-round development.
2)	Development and learning are a result of a continuous interaction of biological maturation and experiences.	While biology cannot be influenced, positive experiences can be ensured by providing good quality ECCE. This will enable all children to achieve their highest potential.
3)	Development takes place in all domains (areas); all domains are important; development in one domain influences development in the other domains.	The learning environment must offer opportunities for learning and development in all domains (areas) of development, i.e. physical, motor, social, emotional, cognitive and language development. Often, a single play activity or learning experience promotes learning and development in more than one domain.
4)	Children's development and learning follow a predictable sequence in which new abilities, skills and concepts build upon what children have already acquired.	The learning experiences need to be built upon what children already know and can do. When the child's prior knowledge and learning are acknowledged, the child feels valued, and the learning experience becomes meaningful as she can draw linkages between new and old knowledge. The educator must know the sequence in which children acquire concepts, skills and abilities.

5)	<p>There are individual variations in children in terms of :</p> <p>a) rate of development and learning;</p> <p>b) strategies, interests, learning styles and personality characteristics;</p> <p>c) what they learn in their family and their socio-cultural context, leading to differences in children’s prior knowledge.</p>	<p>a) Children of the same age may show a wide range of abilities, knowledge and interests. Do not rigidly adhere to a particular set of expectations from children at a particular age. Nevertheless, you must have high expectations of all children and use strategies and resources to help them optimize their potential.</p> <p>b) Curriculum, teaching and interactions with children need to be individualized and not be rigid and inflexible.</p> <p>c) The learning environment should be such that it caters to the different types of intelligence, learning styles, and individual differences in children.</p>
6)	<p>a) Development and learning are influenced by the social and cultural context of the children.</p> <p>b) Children learn to function in more than one social and cultural context and to make linguistic and behavioural shifts with adult support.</p>	<p>a) The learning environment should be sensitive and respectful of the social and cultural context of the children. This also means that children’s mother tongue should be the medium of learning in the early years if possible. Learning will be meaningful for the child when it incorporates the child’s culture. As far as possible’ teachers should take steps to incorporate the child’s mother tongue in situations where the home language and school language are different.</p> <p>b) Helping the children to acquire a new language or the ability to operate in a new culture should be an additive process, rather than causing displacement of the child’s first language and culture.</p>
7)	<p>Play promotes learning, cognition, language, social competence and self-regulation. It is the chief vehicle for constructing knowledge.</p>	<p>Children’s play activities should be the foundation for planning the curriculum. Adults must provide opportunities for both child-initiated and adult- initiated play.</p>
8)	<p>Children are active learners; they have curiosity and a desire to explore which leads to learning.</p> <p>Children learn in a variety of ways through observation, exploration, constructing and doing, specific instructions, reinforcement, collaborative and joint activities. In other words, they learn through play (child initiated) and structured activities (activities planned and initiated by the teacher).</p>	<p>The learning environment should provide opportunities for exploration by creating an active classroom where children are involved in ‘learning by doing’ and have agency in constructing their own knowledge. Teachers must use a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions effective in supporting all these kinds of learning, they must acknowledge and encourage children’s efforts, model and demonstrate desirable behaviours and approaches to learning, create challenges and opportunities for discovery, provide specific directions.</p>

9)	Development proceeds towards greater complexity, self-regulation and symbolic or representational capacities.	The play materials and the activities in the curriculum should be arranged so that the child acquires the simple skills first before moving on to more complex tasks. Learning proceeds from concrete experiences to abstract.
10)	Children develop a sense of self-worth and confidence, which is critical to learning and development when they have secure consistent relationships with adults and positive relationships with peers.	Adults must be responsive, providing unconditional acceptance, which will help the child to feel emotionally secure. Children should also have opportunities to learn from their peers and be involved in group activities.
11)	Children develop and learn when they are engaged in tasks just beyond their current mastery and when they have the opportunity to practice a newly learnt skill beyond their existing level of learning.	Plan learning experiences that are neither too challenging nor too easy for the children, because if they are very difficult children will get frustrated and give up, if they are too simple, children will lose interest.
12)	Children's experiences shape their motivation and dispositions/ approaches to learning. In turn, these dispositions and behaviours affect learning and development.	The learning environment should be such that it arouses children's interest and pleasure in learning, helps them to develop positive dispositions (approaches) towards learning including attention, persistence, flexibility and self-regulation.

It is important to remember that while this list of principles is quite comprehensive, there is still room for the educator to add more considerations based on her own knowledge. Furthermore, you would find that just as the domains of development are interrelated, so are these principles.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

- 1) Identify the correct statements concerning Developmentally Appropriate Practice?
  - a) It promotes a pushed-down curriculum.
  - b) It emphasizes the acknowledgment of individual differences amongst children.
  - c) It is a child-centred philosophy of education.
  - d) It views the child as an active learner.



2) Match the principles of DAP with the corresponding implications.

Principle	Implication
a) Children's development and learning follow a predictable sequence.	i) Organized learning experiences for the child in the early years, along with physical care, love, and nurturance need to be provided.
b) Play promotes learning, cognition, language, social competence and self-regulation.	ii) The learning environment should be such that it caters to the different types of intelligence, learning styles, and individual differences in children.
c) There are individual variations in children.	iii) Plan learning experiences that are neither too challenging nor too easy for the children.
d) The early years are a critical period for development and learning to occur.	iv) Adults must provide opportunities for both child-initiated and adult-initiated play.
e) Children develop and learn when they are engaged in tasks just beyond their current mastery.	v) The learning experiences need to be built upon what children already know and can do.

## 11.5 FEATURES OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

Bredenkamp & Copple (2008) describe Developmentally Appropriate Practice as one which:

- a) creates a *community of learners* by focusing on the relationships between adults and children, among children, among teachers, and between teachers and families.
- b) employs *developmentally appropriate teaching practices*
- c) plans *developmentally appropriate curriculum*
- d) uses *developmentally appropriate assessment strategies* to assess children's learning and development, and
- e) creates *collaboration between family members and teachers* to work together as members of the children's learning community.

For each of the above features, they have described the aspects which would help us to know whether or not an early childhood programme can be called Developmentally Appropriate Practice. In the following pages, we have described some aspects of each of these five features in detail.

### 11.5.1 Creating a Community of Learners

The members of the community of learners in a DAP are the children, the teachers, the other adults in the centre, the child's family and the community. The foundation of a Developmentally Appropriate Practice community is consistent, positive and caring relationships between teachers and children, among children, among teachers and between teachers and families so that the members feel psychologically safe. Creating such relationships requires active efforts on the part of early childhood educators. Such relationships develop when:

- a) Teachers respect differences and each member is valued.
- b) Children get opportunities to collaborate on investigations and projects, play together, interact in small and large groups.
- c) Educators help children to build accountability and self-regulation.
- d) Educators set clear and reasonable limits on children's behavior and apply the limits consistently.
- e) Teachers demonstrate high levels of responsibility and self-regulation in their interactions with other adults and children.
- f) Teachers listen to and acknowledge children's feelings, guide children to solve conflicts and model (demonstrate in their own behaviour) skills that help children to solve their own problems.
- g) Teachers foster children's enjoyment and engagement in learning.
- h) Children's home language and culture are reflected in daily activities and interactions in the classroom.

### 11.5.2 Planning Developmentally Appropriate Practice Curriculum

As you read the features of a DAP curriculum, try to compare how it is different from the academic curriculum you have read about in section 11.2. For some points, we have stated the differences. For others, you reflect. Section 11.6 and 11.7 will give you further clarity on this aspect.

- a) Curricula based on Developmentally Appropriate Practice focus on the whole child and aim to foster development in all domains – social, emotional, language, cognitive, aesthetic, moral and physical (health, gross motor and fine motor). The bases of developing the curriculum are the evidence regarding what is known about child development and learning. The curricula are not limited to teaching skills of reading, writing and numeracy, as happens in the academic curriculum.
- b) Developmentally Appropriate Practice curriculum does not consider the domains of development and subjects areas/ disciplines (Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Science) as independent of each other, discrete and unrelated. Rather, it is acknowledged that the child experiences situations and phenomena as a whole, and the learning environment and learning processes must reflect this holistic nature of the child's experience and approach to phenomena. Therefore, DAP

curricula integrate ideas and learning across multiple domains and multiple subjects, through holistic unified meaningful activities. A single activity that has meaning for children provides opportunities for fostering development in multiple domains, and for gaining knowledge and abilities across many areas of subjects. You will read about what an integrated curriculum means and how it can be developed in Unit 27.

- c) The curriculum draws on children's interests and introduces children to things likely to interest them. This means children's choices and views are considered, something that does not happen in an academic curriculum.
- d) The concepts and skills introduced to children are related to something they already know and care about. Thus, meaningful connections are made between what children already know about their prior learning and the new learning.
- e) The curriculum allows for depth and focus. So instead of planning experiences that briefly touch upon many content areas, the curriculum allows children to spend sustained time with a few critical concepts and skills and go deep into these for more effective learning.
- f) The curriculum takes into account the universal sequences of development as well as individual variation in children, thus, making adaptations wherever necessary for individual children.
- g) Developmentally Appropriate Practice curricula focus on the process of learning and gathering knowledge. Learning to learn (in other words, developing a disposition for life-long learning) is considered a priority. Therefore, Developmentally Appropriate Practice curricula encourage problem-solving, critical thinking, and intellectual risk-taking. Memorizing factual knowledge and giving correct responses is not the goal.
- h) Teachers collaborate with those who are teaching in the preceding and subsequent grade levels. In this way, continuity and coherence in curriculum across ages/ grades are maintained and appropriate practices are followed at each level.
- i) The curriculum is available in written form with daily and weekly schedules.
- j) The curriculum includes both child-initiated and adult-guided experiences. The adult-guided experiences emerge from the goals the teacher has in mind for children. However, these experiences are flexible and the teacher modifies them, based on children's active engagement. Child-initiated experiences are based on children's interests and emerge from children's actions, but the teacher supports the children in achieving relevant goals through the experience.

To summarize, Developmentally Appropriate Practice curricula are learner-generated and learner-centered, yet teacher framed. This means that children's choices and opinions are central in deciding curricular content but

it is the teacher who judges what is needed to meet the development and learning needs of children. The teacher prepares the environment and develops the curriculum accordingly.

### 11.5.3 Implementing Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Practice

- a) In DAP, the educator selects teaching strategies keeping in mind the vision of the child as an active learner who constructs knowledge. Teachers use such teaching strategies that:
  - i) Develop children's initiative by allowing them to choose and plan their own learning experiences.
  - ii) Stimulate children's thinking and extend their learning by posing problems, asking questions, making comments and suggestions.
  - iii) Challenge children and also help them to be successful to develop the feelings of competence, confidence and willingness to take risks in them.
  - iv) Encourage children to talk about, reflect on and revisit their experiences which helps in developing their conceptual understanding.
  - v) Encourage play, investigation, exploration and activities that stretch the imagination.
  - vi) Encourage interaction with adults and peers.
- b) There is an optimal balance of child-initiated and adult-guided experiences. Whether child-initiated or teacher-guided experiences, the teacher takes responsibility for stimulating, directing, and supporting children's development and learning, by providing the experiences that each child needs.
- c) Errors are not seen as a problem with the child's learning. These are viewed positively, as an integral step in the process of learning when children construct knowledge for themselves. Can you see how the approach to errors is different from that in an academic or traditional curriculum? Errors are seen to reflect children's ways of thinking, giving an insight to the teacher as to how the children are thinking so that she can adapt her teaching strategy accordingly. These are a way of knowing about the child's development.
- d) Teachers are alert to signs of undue stress in a child's life and employ strategies to reduce stress and support the development of resilience.
- e) Teachers know how and when to scaffold (support) children's learning by giving hints, modelling (demonstrating) the skill they want the children to develop, or by adapting materials and activities.
- f) Teachers use various learning formats/ contexts as required such as large group work, small group work, learning areas/interest centres, and routines such as eating time — depending upon which learning format is best suited for helping children achieve the desired goal. They are aware that each format has its own characteristics, functions and value. Whole

group teaching may be carried out sometimes. Do you recall that in a traditional curriculum, whole group teaching is the only format that is followed?

- g) Teachers meet the special needs of individual children, including those with disabilities, either by themselves or by seeking the support of specialists and the family, making adaptations or providing specialized services as required.

#### 11.5.4 Assessing Children's Development and Learning

- a) In Developmentally Appropriate Practice, the purpose of assessing what children have learnt and how they are developing is not to label or rank the child, as this would be developmentally inappropriate. The intention is not to compare the children with one another.

The purpose of assessment is two-fold:

- i) To use information gained through assessment to evaluate the curriculum and teaching strategy and make changes to improve these.
  - ii) To compare the child's present learning outcomes with her own earlier outcomes to find out whether the child is making progress towards goals that are developmentally and educationally significant.
- b) This means that curriculum and assessment are interlinked. The curricular experiences are aimed at developing what is assessed and vice-versa, (i.e., what is desired to be assessed is provided through the curriculum experiences). In turn, both experiences and assessments are aligned with the programme's goals for children. This means there is a good fit among the goals set for children's learning, the curriculum experiences that are provided to children to help them reach the goals, the content of the assessment, and the methods of assessing children's learning.
  - c) Assessment is not a one-time activity, rather, it is an ongoing process carried out by using methods appropriate to the child's development level and experiences. A variety of methods of assessment are used so that children can show their competence in different ways. Observations of children in different contexts, discussions with children and probing to know their thinking, collection of children's work samples, and their performance on age-appropriate meaningful activities, children's own evaluation of their work, and information from the child's family are ways of assessment.
  - d) Teachers are aware of each child's level with respect to the learning goals established for the programme.
  - e) Assessment takes into consideration children's cultural and linguistic context. For example, whether the child's school and home language are the same; the emphasis on oral expression in the home language as compared to the school language.

- f) Assessment not only includes what children can do independently but also what they can do when helped (by scaffolding). So, assessing children when they participate in groups is also important.

Can you reflect upon how assessment in DAP is different from assessment in the traditional academic curriculum?

### 11.5.5 Establishing Relationships with Families

The child's family is a crucial source of information about the child. The younger the child, the more important it is to have a relationship with the family to know the child fully. If the parents' involvement in the early childhood programme is restricted to some specific events like parents' or grandparents' day, or if the intention of the practice is only to educate the parents, then it is not DAP. Parents have to be seen as equal partners in the learning community and not as a person lacking in specialized knowledge that the teachers have. In DAP, there are:

- a) Regular frequent two-way communication between educators and family about various aspects of the child's learning, curriculum, teaching strategies and assessment methods. Family members are welcome in the setting and there are multiple opportunities for family participation, through day-to-day informal contact and planned formal communication.
- b) There is mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility and resolution of conflict towards shared goals.
- c) Family members participate in discussions about the goals of learning and learning strategies. Teachers respect family preferences and concerns, but also have the responsibility to enhance parents' awareness about practices that may be developmentally inappropriate.
- d) Teachers involve families as a source of information about the child at the time of entering the programme regularly and engage them in planning for the child.
- e) The programme links families with a range of services depending upon their needs.

#### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Fill in the blanks mentioning the features of a DAP classroom.
  - a) It plans developmentally appropriate .....
  - b) It creates a .....by focusing on the relationships between adults and children, among children, among children, among teachers, and between teachers and families.
  - c) It uses developmentally appropriate .....to assess children's learning and development.
  - d) It creates ..... between family members and teachers to work together as members of the children's learning community.
  - e) It employs developmentally appropriate ..... practices.

2) What is the purpose of assessment in a DAP curriculum?

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## **11.6 DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE CLASSROOMS VERSUS TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC CLASSROOMS**

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Do this description of features of traditional academic classrooms and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (which you have read in section 11.2) help you to imagine what these classrooms may look like? Does it give you some idea about how teaching-learning may be occurring in these classrooms? In this section, we have elaborated upon these features just so that you can picture these classrooms.

### **11.6.1 Seating**

Usually, children in traditional classrooms would be seated for a large part of the day on chairs, arranged in rows and columns, facing the teacher. The assumption behind such a seating arrangement is that it is the teacher who is the authority in the classroom and who has all the knowledge.

In a developmentally appropriate practice classroom, children are usually seated in an arrangement where each one can see the other. Usually, this would be on a mat on the floor where children sit in a semi-circle. The teacher too would be sitting along with the children. Such a seating arrangement emerges from the belief that the teacher and children together construct knowledge. Tables and chairs may be arranged as a group so that a group of 4-5 children gets opportunities to work together.

### **11.6.2 Approach to Learning Across Domains/Disciplines and Scheduling of the Day**

In the traditional academic curriculum, usually, the day would be divided into periods and each period would be devoted to a specific academic discipline/subject. Typically, children will have separate periods devoted to learning to recognize the alphabet, write the alphabet, recognize numbers, and write them. There may or may not be time for outdoor play, rhymes and storytelling since the emphasis is on acquiring abilities for reading, writing, and number work which will speed up children’s learning in the next grade.

In most Developmentally Appropriate Practice classrooms, the day would not be divided into different domains or subjects with a period for mathematics, language/ science language/ social/ physical development separately. Rather, the learning experience would be the focus and the teacher would integrate the subjects/ domains into the learning experience. So, if the children are on a

nature walk exploring the school garden, the teacher would plan activities involving observation (science/cognitive development), classification, matching and counting (science and maths/ cognitive development), discussion and reporting of observations (language) and importance of trees (environmental education) as part of this experience. Children may even spend some time playing outdoors (physical development) or singing a rhyme (language development) relevant to the experience. Thus, learning across disciplines and domains would be integrated through a single learning experience - in this case, through a nature walk. Of course, sometimes a teacher may organize a learning activity with a specific focus on a domain/subject, but this will not be the norm.

### 11.6.3 Literacy Experiences

In an academic/traditional classroom, learning to read and write typically begins with an introduction to the alphabet. Children spend many months identifying and writing individual letters of the alphabet. Some teachers may introduce them to letter sounds while some may only use letter names. After many repetitions of writing individual letters, children progress to writing three-letter words, such as 'cat', 'bat', 'mat', (in English) or 'kalam' 'Madan' and 'Batan' in Hindi. Much of this writing work involves copying from the blackboard what the teacher has written. There is a lot of emphasis on neat handwriting, correct formation and correct spellings. Reading may involve repeating after the teacher what she reads from the textbook; often children may not understand the meaning of what they are reading and writing; they may not even be able to identify individual words as they have simply memorized the whole text, having listened to the teacher reading it many times. Interesting and age-appropriate story books for children are usually not available in traditional classrooms as they are not seen as contributing to the development of literacy. Such an approach to reading and writing makes the experience mechanical for children. Many children do not find it meaningful and they lose interest.

In a Developmentally Appropriate Practice classroom, learning to read and write usually begins by immersing children in a rich oral and print environment. The use of age-appropriate story books, accompanied by read-aloud and shared reading, orients the children to print and provides holistic language experiences in a meaningful way so that the motivation for learning to read and write is nurtured. Alongside, children are made aware of letter names and corresponding letter sounds because without understanding this code relationship, reading is impossible. Writing is seen as a means of self-expression and is seen as emerging from children's other forms of representation, such as symbolic play and drawings. There is a lot of emphasis on the activity of drawing and children are encouraged to express the various experiences they have had in the form of drawing. For example, they are encouraged to draw after a storytelling session or an outdoor experience. The teacher focus on helping the children to understand the linkage between spoken and written forms of language in various ways, such as writing down children's oral expressions or narrating a story orally and then reading it aloud from the book. As children are exposed to appropriate children's books and reading activities in class, letter forms may



spontaneously appear in children's drawings as they aim to write words that appear meaningful to them. Incorrect spelling of words is not seen as an error but as the emerging ability of the child to connect letter sounds with letter shapes. For example, if a child spells his name 'Karan' as 'KRN', rather than seeing this as an error that should be immediately corrected as happens in a traditional academic classroom, this is seen as a sign of the child's developing knowledge of letter sounds. The teacher gives time to the child to make the connection and spell his name correctly.

#### 11.6.4 Learning about the Environment

This may not be much in focus in traditional classrooms. When it is included as part of the curriculum, the themes and content about the environment are pre-decided with precise content being laid out regarding what children should learn. A lot of this learning is information-oriented where the teacher provides facts to children.

In a Developmentally Appropriate Practice classroom, topics regarding what to study about the environment emerge from the children's interests. They have a voice in deciding what aspect of the environment they would like to know more about. The objective of providing environment-based learning experiences is not limited to knowing facts about the environment. Rather, the emphasis is to use the environment as a resource for the following three objectives:

- a) Developing in the children the abilities and processes which will enable them to learn across various disciplines – such as the skills of observation, classification, seriation, measurement, prediction, inference and reasoning.
- b) Developing appropriate values regarding appreciation and protection of the environment.
- c) Developing concepts and acquiring facts about the environment.

#### 11.6.5 Approaches to Academic Learning

Generally, academics is taken to mean formal skills of learning reading, writing and arithmetic. As we have discussed in the preceding sections, in traditional classrooms, reading, writing and arithmetic are usually taught like a drill mechanically without focusing on whether the child is finding purpose and meaning in the activity. When children fill pages writing letters, when they memorize letter names without understanding the relationship between the letter name and its sound, when they practice writing numerals without understanding what quantity is denoted by a particular number — then children are not actually learning, they are simply memorizing information which is not likely to help them to learn to read, write or develop number concepts.

The belief in a traditional classroom is that learning happens only when the teacher is speaking, directing, and controlling all learning in the classroom. So, usually, there is a single teaching strategy – the teacher gives direct instruction to the whole class. Most of us have experienced such a teaching

method – the teacher gives a lecture or reads out from a book and the children listen, or she writes on the board and all children copy it down.

But when we believe in the centrality of the child in her own learning, then we realize that a teacher does not have to be centre-stage for children to learn.

In the Developmentally Appropriate Practice classroom, reading, writing and arithmetic activities are part of the curriculum, but the methods of teaching these to the children are different.

The emphasis in DAP classrooms is on the creation of curious active learners because this is a prerequisite to acquiring specific information. When we focus on filling children with particular information and pressurize them to acquire skills for which they are not ready, we run the risk of permanently destroying their curiosity, desire to learn, and enjoyment of the process of learning. So the developmentally appropriate perspective is that of nurturing curious, active learners who must precede the acquisition of particular information.

Academics is a part of DAP. The difference is that it is not taught as a separate isolated activity but is integrated with other classroom learning experiences. So, for example, when children compare the number of sweets each one gets after the celebration of a birthday in class, and find that they get equal, more or less than others, they are developing number sense. When the teacher reads out a story to the children from a book and then children are eager to explore the storybook by themselves, even though they cannot read and may only pretend to read, they are developing lifelong attitudes towards reading. When as part of the theme on ‘Plants’, children observe what happens to a plant that is not watered as compared to the one which is, they are developing skills of observations and inference (science and social science skills) and the attitude of scientific exploration.

In a DAP classroom, the teacher uses many other teaching strategies and only rarely uses direct instruction. Her first objective is to plan and organize the learning activity so that children are actively involved in the activity. She may use the pedagogy of play and play-based learning, (refer to Unit 7 and 8), or inquiry-based learning (you will read about this in Unit 28) where children learn by direct involvement in the task. This is also called activity-based learning or experiential learning. When children are involved in the learning activity she makes comments, asks questions, and suggests a solution. In this way, she teaches by providing support as required by scaffolding their learning. When engaged in activities children may either be doing them individually and the teacher interacts with them on a one-to-one basis or they may work in small groups and sometimes in large groups. So instead of a single teaching strategy of direct instruction, the teacher uses many direct and indirect strategies to support children’s active learning.

One may tend to think that when the teacher is not in direct control of all instruction and learning activities when children are engaged in play-based and inquiry-based learning, the classroom environment will be chaotic. That is not true. A structure does not mean a rigid discipline, with the teacher directing every action of the children. A structure refers to an instructional

plan made by the teacher which meets the learning, developmental, and instructional goal of the programme and it includes the management of space, time and materials. In DAP, there is a well-thought-out and well-planned balance between child-initiated and teacher-led activities, including the use of play-based learning and inquiry-based learning. Since the teacher is usually not the central figure in the activity, this may give the appearance of a lack of structure. However, in reality, at every moment, the teacher is aware of what needs to be done. How to elicit children's participation in the planning of activities and how to incorporate their choice in the day's activities is well-thought-out by the teacher and incorporated into her plan. It is not as if things happen by chance in the classroom. The teacher is very clear about how she will help children learn through their own active involvement. So while there is movement, conversation, play and activity in the DAP classroom, this is not chaotic or aimless. The teacher has carefully planned the activities, their implementation and assessment.

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## 11.7 IMPACT OF THE TWO MODELS

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Reading the features of a traditional academic curriculum and comparing it with the features of DAP would have brought out that a traditional curriculum has many features which are inappropriate for young children. In this section, we will read about the impact of Developmentally Appropriate and Developmentally Inappropriate Practice on children's development.

### 11.7.1 Self-Esteem

You have read about self-esteem in MCD-001. Can you recall how self-esteem develops? When a child can do something successfully, master a new challenge, she feels good about herself and this helps her to develop positive self-esteem.

In a traditional classroom, many children often experience failure, because they are asked to carry out activities beyond their developmental level. Colouring within a given boundary, cutting along a straight line, writing complex letter formations (which are typical in academic classrooms) are not maturationally appropriate for young children. They are not going to be able to do them but we expect them to. When children are not able to do the given task, they do not say that the task was difficult; they blame their own skills — they feel that they are incompetent. Other activities that children do carry out successfully are not valued in traditional classrooms. For example, the child showing an interest in reading a picture book when the teacher expects her to identify the letter 'P' in the book, is likely to be scolded for being distracted, rather than being praised for her interest in books. So the child feels more incompetent than competent and develops low self-esteem. This low self-esteem influences how she approaches other tasks.

### 11.7.2 Self-Control

In a traditional classroom, the teacher is the authority figure who is always controlling children's behaviour so that they do not 'make noise', 'do mischief', 'become inattentive'. Since the learning tasks are beyond

children's developmental level and often boring, children need to be constantly monitored by the teacher for doing the activity or scolded by the teacher when they do not do so. So the net result is that it is the teacher who controls children's behaviour, usually using power-oriented disciplining techniques (do you remember the features of such disciplining techniques from your reading of MCD-001?). Such techniques only temporarily change the child's behaviour, they do not help the child to change her own behaviour and develop self-regulation. The child finds the task boring, indulges in an alternate more pleasurable task (for example, focusing on people moving outside the classroom), knowing in her mind that the teacher will bring her back to the activity with her scolding, and so why not enjoy it while it lasts.

The child may not be conscious that she is thinking this way, but that is how it turns out to be. In DAP classrooms, teachers discipline keeping in mind how young children think at different ages and what their abilities are with respect to reasoning, judgment and verbal expression. For example, they will not scold three-year-olds when they do not want to share their toys. They understand that children, at this age, will find it difficult to share. Instead, they will try to help them understand the situation, and explain and reason with them why certain ways of behaving are better than others.

### **11.7.3 Stress**

When children are forced to carry out age-inappropriate tasks, this causes stress to them. The repetitive nature of academic tasks and the lack of enjoyable age-appropriate tasks in traditional classrooms is a source of stress for the child. Making five-year-olds sit in their chairs for 2-3 hours together to read and write, when their natural interest is to explore and play, causes stress. Making children learn content in a language that they do not understand is a source of stress as they do not find it meaningful.

### **11.7.4 Later Academic Patterns**

If the children from traditional early childhood classrooms should benefit in later grades in academics, then, perhaps one could justify the stress they go through in the early years. But the finding is that when children are asked to learn through methods unsuited to their stage of development during the early years, they get turned off education. When we insist, young children will learn to form letters and write numbers, but long hours of repetition and practice, the learning of content that makes no meaning to children, eventually puts them off learning. The net result of mechanically teaching skills of formal reading, writing and numeracy early to children is to damage their disposition for future learning. Researchers have shown no positive effects of early formal instruction when the child does not find it meaningful.

In fact, children who experience developmentally inappropriate practice learn helplessness — they become dependent on learning by adults and do not learn to take initiative, ask questions and solve their own problems. In fact, studies have shown many academic benefits to children in DAP classrooms in the long run.

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## 11.8 MULTIPLE TEACHING APPROACHES IN DAP

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It is important to understand that the framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice does not state that there is only one right way of curriculum development of learning methodology. Different situations and children require teachers to select different curricula and pedagogic strategies. Let us understand this through an example.

*A teacher took children for a nature walk and decided to let them explore on their own and be guided by what children showed an interest in. When children had spent about 20 minutes outdoors, the teacher allowed them to run around in the newly made garden for some time and then gently drew their attention to the insects – ants, worms, and butterflies and spoke about how they help the plants, as this nature walk was part of their thematic work on “Creepy-Crawlies” (Insects. In this way, she combined the strategy of giving freedom to children to explore with a structure given by the teacher.*

Similarly, some children will need more classroom structure than others. When children come from backgrounds where they are always directed about what they should do, they may find it difficult to make choices in an open-ended learning situation in the classroom. When left free to choose a play activity, they may find it difficult to make a choice. The educator may need to provide more direct guidance to them about what to play with than to children who come from environments where their opinions and views are encouraged, and where children’s choice is respected. So more direction by the adult in the case of children in the first case is a developmentally appropriate practice for them. Gradually, as these children get more experiences in a positive classroom environment, they learn to exercise their choice, and adult direction may be reduced.

The statements in Table 11b state opposing ideas, BOTH of which are developmentally appropriate given the right context. This list is not exhaustive. There are many other examples of ideas that seem opposite but are all appropriate for children.

Of course, one should note that some things have been universally accepted as being completely inappropriate for the child, such as corporal punishment, discrimination against children based on caste, sex or religion, and neglecting children. These practices should never be part of the early childhood learning centres.

**Table 11b: Multiple Approaches in Developmentally Appropriate Practice  
Opposing/ different practices can BOTH be developmentally  
appropriate**

Children construct their own knowledge.	AND	Children benefit from instruction by teachers and more competent peers.
Children learn through an integrated curriculum where they have opportunities to see connections between different disciplines.	AND	Children learn from an in-depth study in a particular subject area.
Children like to have structure and routine in daily activities.	AND	Children like to have flexible schedules which allow them opportunities for spontaneous learning.
Children benefit when they make choices regarding what and how they learn.	AND	Children benefit when teachers help them understand what choices are allowed and what are not.
Children learn when they are involved in activities that are challenging and slightly higher than their current level of learning.	AND	Children like repetition when they have newly learnt skills as repetition gives them an opportunity to their learning when they have opportunities to practice their newly learned skills.
Children learn through team activities when they work with peers.	AND	Children learn through activities that allow them to work on their own.
Children need to develop a positive sense of self.	AND	Children need to learn to respect other people- their culture, ideas and experiences.
Children are always curious and seem to have a limitless capacity to learn.	AND	Children have certain age-related limitations in what they can understand or do.
Children learn through structured teacher-planned learning experiences.	AND	Children learn through opportunities for self-initiated spontaneous play.

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## 11.9 SOME MODELS OF EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

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In Units 9 and 10, you learned about various approaches to providing ECCE. Do you think these approaches were developmentally appropriate? Write your thoughts in the space given below.

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Let us consider three ECCE approaches that are followed today in many preschools – Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf Model and examine whether they are developmentally appropriate.

### 11.9.1 Montessori and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Recall reading about Montessori in Section 9.7 of Unit 9. Many aspects of Montessori's philosophy overlap with concepts in the DAP framework. For instance, Montessori's philosophy sees the child as an active learner who learns from her environment through hands-on activity and sensory experiences. Thus, in Montessori preschools, the teacher puts significant effort into creating the learning environment and the children learn concepts by manipulating specially constructed educational materials. This idea of the 'active child' is an integral principle of DAP. Other principles and features of DAP reflected in Montessori's approach are: understanding the child, emphasis on the child's individuality by letting the child set her own pace of learning, and showing respect to children.

However, there are some features of the Montessori approach, which are not in line with the DAP framework.

**Firstly**, Montessori's ideas did not follow the Principle 10 of the DAP framework which talks about the role of different kinds of play, including make-believe play in the development of a child. Montessori was against any activity which had any fantasy element – she did not include forms of play like make-believe play and role-play; stories with fantasy elements like fairy tales, and other activities which encouraged creative expression. While art activities were included, these were not included to foster creative expression. In fact, Montessori used the word 'work' to refer to children's play activities rather than the word 'play'.

**Secondly**, in Montessori schools, while the children have the freedom to select the materials they want to work with, they can use materials provided to them only in the manner specified by the teacher. They do not have the freedom to experiment with the materials or play with them in a new way. The materials have to be used exactly as stated. The teacher too has to teach only through the didactic apparatus/ instructive manner. Thus, the free expression of the child, as well as the work of the teacher, gets limited. This strict control on how the child uses the materials, and also tight control of the child's space and time is against the philosophy of DAP. Also, many educators wonder if such tight control on the child's activities in the Montessori method fosters independent thinking and problem-solving.

**Thirdly**, DAP sees the child's learning happening in an environment that has many rich social interactions. This is not a strong component of Montessori classrooms which follow a very individualized curriculum and children largely work on their own, with limited social interaction. However, despite these limitations, as we have said earlier as well, many preschools use many aspects of the Montessori approach but have made modifications in other aspects.

### 11.9.2 Waldorf Method and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

You read about the Waldorf method, which was introduced by Rudolf Steiner in Section 9.7 of Unit 9. Steiner holistically envisioned the child and developed a curriculum that was sensitive to the developmental stage the child was in. As you know from your reading about DAP, making decisions regarding children based on knowledge about ‘child development’ is a core consideration of DAP. Furthermore, Waldorf early childhood classrooms follow an integrated and thematic curriculum, with an emphasis on play and activities. The curriculum also gives significant individual attention to the child and does not put much academic pressure on her. So you can see that many aspects of the Waldorf method are similar to the DAP framework.

There are also aspects of the Waldorf method which are slightly different from DAP. One such point is that Waldorf places high importance on including celebrations of religious festivals. Another point is that the teacher’s role is not one of a facilitator who co-constructs knowledge with children, but one of a figure of authority who leads the class in a variety of teacher-directed activities, even though this is done lovingly. As you have read, the DAP framework places an equal emphasis on child-initiated and adult-guided activities and sees the teacher’s role as a collaborator rather than one who is an unquestioned authority.

### 11.9.3 Reggio Emilia Method and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In contrast to the Montessori or the Waldorf methods, the Reggio Emilia method is completely in line with DAP. In fact, according to Sue Bredekamp, who is an author of many books on DAP, the Reggio Emilia practices “*have gone even beyond DAP*”, especially with respect to how children construct knowledge in Reggio Emilia preschools, as well as how the teacher works as a collaborator with children in co-constructing knowledge. Children learn through an emergent curriculum that is based on their interests and uses the project method and art as chief pedagogic strategies. The community and parents of the children of these schools are actively involved in children’s learning experiences. You can refresh your understanding of the Reggio Emilia Method by reading Section 9.14 in Unit 9.



**Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

- 1) Fill in the given table highlighting the difference between a traditional and a DAP classroom.

<b>Traditional Classroom</b>	<b>DAP Classroom</b>
Learning to read and write typically begins with an introduction to the alphabet.	
	The day is not divided into different domains or subjects, rather, an integrated learning experience is provided.
Children are made to sit for a large part of the day on chairs, arranged in rows and columns, facing the teacher.	
	Children feel encouraged and well-challenged as the activities are as per their developmental levels.

**11.10 SUMMING UP**

Developmentally Appropriate Practice is a framework for planning learning experiences that are based on the vision that the child is an active learner; learning is the process of construction of knowledge by the child; and the child's play is the chief means of constructing this knowledge. It is a child-centred philosophy of education based on the theories of constructivism, including the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky.

Several principles guide the Developmentally Appropriate Practice. These include principles such as:

- The early years are a critical period for development and learning to occur;
- Development and learning are a result of a continuous interaction of biological maturation and experiences;
- Development takes place in all domains (areas);
- Children's development and learning follow a predictable sequence;
- There are individual variations in children; and so on.

Features of Developmentally Appropriate Practice are the given: a) Creates a community of learners; b) Developmentally appropriate teaching practices; c) Plans developmentally appropriate curriculum; d) Uses developmentally appropriate assessment strategies; and e) Creates collaboration between family members and teachers.

Developmentally appropriate classrooms and traditional classrooms vary from each other in terms of seating, approach to learning across domains, discipline and scheduling of the day, literacy experiences, learning about the environment, and approach to academic learning. In addition, while the DAP has a positive impact on the child's self-esteem, later academic patterns, reduces her stress, and has a less controlling presence of the teacher; the traditional approach is in contrast to these aspects. The Reggio Emilia method is completely in line with DAP.

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## 11.11 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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## 11.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) a) Incorrect  
b) Correct  
c) Correct  
d) Correct
- 2) d) - i)  
a) - v)  
c) - ii)  
b) -iv)  
e) -iii)

**Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

- 1)
  - a) curriculum
  - b) community of learners
  - c) assessment strategies
  - d) collaboration
  - e) teaching
  
- 2) To use information gained through assessment to evaluate the curriculum and teaching strategy and make changes to improve these, and to compare the child's present learning outcomes with her own earlier outcomes to find out whether the child is making progress towards goals that are developmentally and educationally significant.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

1)

<b>Traditional Classroom</b>	<b>DAP Classroom</b>
Learning to read and write typically begins with an introduction to the alphabet.	Learning to read and write usually begins by immersing children in a rich oral and print environment.
The day is divided into periods and each period would be devoted to a specific academic discipline/ subject.	The day is not divided into different domains or subjects, rather, an integrated learning experience is provided.
Children are made to sit for a large part of the day on chairs, arranged in rows and columns, facing the teacher.	Children are usually seated in an arrangement where each one can see the other.
Many children often experience failure, because they are asked to carry out activities beyond their developmental level.	Children feel encouraged and well-challenged as the activities are as per their developmental levels.