Early in 2009, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) released the third edition of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8 (Copple and Bredekamp). Within the pages of this book, the NAEYC makes a clear and strong commitment to the “increased communication and collaboration” (p. 5, ¶2) “across the whole preschool-primary spectrum” (p. 5, ¶1).

According to NAEYC, “[t]he point of bringing the two worlds [early childhood and elementary] together is not for children to learn primary grade skills at an earlier age” but to promote the improvement of educational experiences for all young children and to make “those experiences more coherent” (p. 5, ¶2).

Both early childhood and elementary teachers have “perspectives and strengths” (p. 5, ¶1) when it comes to curriculum development. For example: When early childhood professionals write curriculum, the focus is on the development of the whole child using integrated, learning activities that are meaningful and relevant but might lack progressive content (p. xiii, ¶3). When elementary teachers write curriculum, the focus is on content and progressive learning goals. Applied to the early childhood classroom, these often translate into the “downward mapping” (p. 4, ¶5) of standards with lessons for older children simplified for the younger ones (p. xii, ¶4).

Both early childhood and elementary teachers believe in developmentally appropriate practice in teaching children, but its implementation may not be consistent in both spheres. The number one question that needs to be answered is: What is developmentally appropriate practice? Likewise, what does developmentally appropriate practice look like? According to NAEYC’s position statement there are four specific components. The first being:

Developmentally appropriate practice requires both meeting children where they are – which means that teachers must get to know them well – and enabling them to reach goals that are both challenging and achievable (p. xii, ¶2).

True developmentally appropriate practice is a daily evaluation and re-evaluation process. Young children develop and change at such alarming rates, therefore an early childhood teacher cannot allow her classroom, program or curriculum to become stagnant. The early childhood teacher must be able to recognize the stage of development of each child, know what direction in which the child should move to reach the next level of development and then plan successive lessons and activities that are both challenging and achievable for each child. The “interests and abilities” of the children should drive the adaptation of curriculum in order “to promote optimal learning and development” (p. xiii, ¶8).

All teaching practices should be appropriate to children’s age and developmental status, attuned to them as unique individuals, and responsive to the social and cultural contexts in which they live (p. xii, ¶3).

True developmentally appropriate practice ensures that all units of study are meaningful and relevant to the young
Recently In The News

From the Feds...

Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released the newest edition of their Child Abuse and Neglect User Manual Series: The Role of Professional Child Care Providers in Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect. This manual provides information on the roles and responsibilities of child care providers in preventing, recognizing, and reporting child abuse and neglect within and outside early childhood programs. It also presents an overview of prevention efforts, reporting laws, caring for maltreated children, and ways to support parents and professionals who work with families.

This is the third edition of the User Manual Series reflecting the increased knowledge and the evolving state of practice. It addresses trends and concerns relevant to today's professionals working within early childhood education. There are several books in the User Manual Series; the entire list is available at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanual.cfm.

A Move Toward Standardization

Last week, forty-six states and the District of Columbia announced their readiness to sign on to the development of a national body of curricular standards in reading and math for students in grades kindergarten through twelve. The initiative, spearheaded by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers aspires to create a common set of learning benchmarks which, if attained, would ensure that high school graduates are "internationally competitive." California is among the states pledging to participate. The only states not currently on-board are Texas, Alaska, Missouri and South Carolina.

U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, hailed the development, calling it"...a huge step in a direction that would have been unimaginable just a year or two ago." The Secretary criticized the current system, describing it as one that permits "...lying to children and their parents, because states have dumbed down their standards." The reference is, apparently, to states in which students achieve high scores on assessments of state standards, but earn considerably less impressive marks on national assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The project will begin by identifying high school graduate "readiness standards" in English and Math, and will then work down, grade level by grade level, to identify an integrated chain of learning expectations that will collectively enable the attainment of the 12th grade benchmarks. A group of thus-far unidentified experts is reported to already be engaged in drafting 12th grade readiness standards. According to a Washington Post article, "...a separate national 'validation' panel, made up of experts nominated by the states, will review the proposal."

Once the process has been completed, it will remain for each state to make an individual adoption decision. That's when the proverbial rubber will hit the road.

This is an important development to watch unfold. Once the K-12 standards are in place, the federal government will provide national standards for early childhood programs. Currently, over 45 states have written such standards, all of which will be measured against those of the federal government. ACCN encourages every Adventist early childhood director and teacher to become knowledgeable of their local state standards. Doing so will help us all be ready to provide an accountability for the how and why of Adventist early childhood education and care.

On the Legal Front...

This past February, an important court ruling in a case that raised the question of whether, and under what circumstances the law regards private religious schools as "business enterprises" subject to the anti-discrimination provisions of the state's Unruh Civil Rights Act (Sections 51 through 51.3 of the California Civil Code). To read the article, visit www.capso.org, Midweek E-MAILer Volume 3, Number 20 or, view the court's decision in Doe v. California Lutheran High School Assn.

As expected, the plaintiffs petitioned the California Supreme Court for review of the case and requested the depublication of its decision. Last week, those requests were denied. Thus, for the time being, the Appellate Court's decision stands.

The court's ruling appears to suggest that those private schools that are careful to document their religious nature and purposes, and which conduct themselves in concert with their religious orientations are not to be considered "business establishments" for purposes of Unruh.

This is important because Adventist early childhood programs have a mission; a mission to actively participate in the gospel commission of Matthew 28:19.

As demonstrated in this court case, it is imperative for each of our Adventist early childhood programs to put a mission and philosophy statement in writing and post these in our centers, handbooks and marketing materials.

In addition, each Adventist early childhood program must intentionally conduct themselves in such a manner as to be consistent with the stated mission...
ACCN to Present at NAEYC

This November, 20,000 early childhood professionals from around the world will gather in Washington, D.C., for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Annual Conference & Expo.

There they will discuss the everyday issues of working with young children and families.

The Adventist Child Care Network will be hosting a session on the “Spiritual Development of the Young Child: How the integration of beliefs, values, meaning and self-worth are formed.” This session, which is a continuation of last year’s worship topics, will delve into the specifics of how children develop spiritually and how early childhood teachers can encourage and support that development.

The workshop will provide a definition for “spiritual development” based on research which differentiates spirituality from religiosity. Presenters will examine the various stages of spiritual development and provide distinct instructions for the early childhood teacher’s pedagogical practices.

Attendees will learn the difference between spirituality and spiritualism, which are often very subtle and are appearing more frequently in children's literature. It is especially important for Adventist early childhood professionals and parents to be knowledgeable about the infiltration of spiritualistic tenets, symbols and terminology.

Presenters for “Spiritual Development of the Young Child” seminar will be Christine Gillan Byrne, coordinator of Early Childhood Education and Care for the Pacific Union Conference and Dr. Rose Gamblin, educational specialist and child advocate.

The workshop will be part of the Learning Galleria and will provide the opportunity to meet with conference attendees in a small group setting, allowing for more interaction. For complete information, be sure to consult the NAEYC Conference & Expo program or conference website.

Marketing Tips

Building Signage

All too often, early childhood programs miss one of the easiest marketing avenues: Signage! Sometimes the signs are too small, not in a prominent area, not well maintained (faded colors, missing letters, numbers), provide no obvious street number, or just do not exist.

Make your signage as large as possible, clear, and well maintained in a prominent area. Remember to consult local officials for signage regulations.

Phone Book Listings

Be sure your center is accurately listed in several areas of the local phone book: child care, preschool, day care as well as schools.

Remember, potential clientele must see the center’s name many, many times before they will remember and consider your services.

The Purposes of ACCN:

1. To affirm, encourage and empower all engaged in the weekday ministry to children.
2. To provide opportunities for professional and spiritual growth.
3. To provide networking opportunities for Seventh-day Adventist Child Development Centers.
4. To set certification standards for child care providers.
5. To foster unity between all areas of child development within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
6. To encourage the incorporation of Early Childhood Education in the nurture and outreach programs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
7. To foster working relationships with the world church, unions, conferences, local churches, and schools.
8. To encourage surveys and research in the area of Child Development and Early Childhood Education in cooperation with the North American Division.
9. To counsel with the North American Division and General Conference in the development and review of programs and strategies for Child Development.
10. To provide guidance and resources to training organizations, colleges, and universities.
11. To advocate the hiring of Early Childhood specialists at all organizational levels of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
12. To develop working relationships with other Early Childhood Education organizations.
13. To encourage child care centers to obtain national accreditation.

Join ACCN

ACCN website address: paucearlychildhood.adventistfaith.org
Child as an individual. As Seventh-day Adventist early childhood professionals, the spiritual development of the young child is at the heart and center of our actions, interactions, curriculum planning and learning activities. From there, all other concepts are to be taught, always bringing the child to a realization that the God of heaven is a relevant God who is interested and involved in every aspect of our lives. Even with young infants, songs, visual aids and personal attention help to teach these concepts, preparing them for more in-depth learning during their toddler, preschool and pre-kindergarten years.

Developmentally appropriate practice does not mean making things easier for children. Rather, it means ensuring that goals and experiences are suited to their learning and development and challenging enough to promote their progress and interest (p. xii, ¶4).

To be true to developmentally appropriate practices, early childhood professionals do not promote the idea that infants and toddlers should be studying the same content as older children. When the curricular content is approached in a manner that is relevant and meaningful to infants and toddlers, continuity among the age/grade levels is increased (p. 4, ¶4). However, if the content is a simplified version of the curriculum for older children, it is often not relevant or meaningful to the infant or toddler; hence, it is not developmentally appropriate.

The same is true of standards and benchmarks. Rather than simplification or delineation via indicators, “developers of early learning standards should base them on what we know from research and practice about children from a variety of backgrounds at a given stage/age and about the processes, sequences, variations, and long-term consequences of early learning and development” (p. 4, ¶5). “Standards need to be not only comprehensive but also address what is important for children to know and be able to do; be aligned across developmental stages and age/grade levels; and be consistent with how children develop and learn” (p. 4, ¶4). Otherwise, the curriculum driven by these standards is unlikely to be comprehensive and will promote “fragmented teaching of discrete objectives” (p. 4, ¶3 & 7).

Best practices is based on knowledge – not on assumptions – of how children learn and develop. The research base yields major principles in human development and learning. Those principles, along with evidence about curriculum and teaching effectiveness, form a solid basis for decision making in early care and education (p. xii, ¶5).

True developmentally appropriate practice requires an intimate knowledge of how young children develop and learn and how to teach them at different developmental stages. If the teacher lacks this knowledge, the children will miss out on the rewards of “active, meaningful and connected learning” (p. 8, ¶2). As a result, “children are less likely to develop a love of learning and a sense of their own competence and ability to make choices, and they miss much of the joy and expansive learning of childhood” (p. 4, ¶7).

Summary

A strong, comprehensive and meaningful early childhood curriculum will merge the strengths of both the early childhood and elementary spheres (p. xiii). In doing so, the true intentions of developmental appropriate practices will be enhanced and realized. Collaboration between the two educational spheres requires that both elementary and early childhood professionals recognize the expertise of the other. It also requires a demonstrated and sincere respect for that expertise. Collaboration requires cooperation, listening as well as sharing. This collaboration will further promote true developmental appropriate practices that will create a “better connected education for preschool and elementary children” (p. 2, ¶3). The benefits will be more intentional teachers using more meaningful and relevant curriculum and training more learners for a life of service on this earth and in the world to come (White, E. G. 1903;2002. Education. Pacific Press Publishing Association).