Reflect: What are other ways in which a monolingual, English-speaking teacher can engage with DLLs to support their development in both English and their home languages?

1.3 Building Relationships

Ms. Davis knows that children learn best when they feel safe and comfortable. Of utmost importance to her is maintaining a warm, positive relationship with each child. Sometimes she adapts the curriculum or school requirements to accommodate relationship building. For example, the district mathematics curriculum relies on whole group direct instruction. Ms. Davis adapts it to help children acquire the same skills through active learning in small groups with hands-on materials. She considers how she can use the ideas behind worksheets to create more meaningful lessons, such as having the children learn math concepts as they play dominoes and board games instead of circling numbers on a worksheet, a rote activity that offers no exploratory or social learning. In a small group, Ms. Davis can more easily encourage each child with a smile or high five. She organizes the groups in various ways to ensure that children get to know each other and have the opportunity to develop friendships. As DLLs play together with native English speakers, their receptive and expressive language skills improve. In addition, Ms. Davis knows the children's personalities and which interactions are comfortable and motivating for them.

Reflect: How can group instruction be adapted to meet the needs of individual children?

1.4 Engaging with Families

Ms. Davis works hard to engage families by sending an e-newsletter at least every other week and inviting them to family–teacher meetings. Some families seem reluctant, while Ms. Davis feels that other families are almost overly involved at times. Ms. Davis is a leader in her regional NAEYC Affiliate and starts an online discussion forum about family involvement. Reading other educators' diverse experiences, she is forced to question her own perceptions about these families and reflect on how accurate they are. She comes to realize that many of the families she had labeled as reluctant simply do not have time for the types of engagement she plans, such as classroom observations during the day. Those whom she labeled as "overly involved" challenge the prevailing assumption in many schools that the teacher is always the expert. One father, for example, insisted on coming in to talk about his home country even though Ms. Davis gently cautioned him about the attention spans of 5-year-olds. He brought artifacts the children could explore—a map and pictures—and told engaging stories. Ms. Davis was amazed at the children's engagement and thoughtful questions, and she captured it all on video. They talked about his stories for days afterward. These experiences change her perception of family engagement possibilities and problems, and she resolves to better listen to and support families' ideas.

Reflect: What else can teachers learn by engaging more directly with families?

In these examples, the teacher is making decisions to adapt and change teaching strategies to create meaningful learning experiences for the children in her class while also considering learning goals and the administrative requirements of her position. A strong knowledge base helps teachers apply developmentally appropriate practice to their work and address the needs of each child.

Intentional Teaching and Decision Making: Core Considerations

The seemingly simple but highly complex answer to almost every question about developmentally appropriate practice is that it is the result of *intentional* decision making by well-qualified educators who are steeped in content knowledge, knowledge of child development, and sound pedagogical practice. Intentional teachers are prepared to challenge their own and others' biases that sustain systemic inequities, and they are attuned to the importance of culturally relevant and individually responsive curriculum and teaching practices.

Intentional teachers have a purpose for each of their actions, and they can explain that purpose to others, whether in the context of a carefully planned learning experience or a spontaneous response to an unanticipated event. Developmentally appropriate practice requires educators to be intentional by seeking out knowledge and understanding and using three core considerations: **commonality** in children's development and learning, **individuality** reflecting each child's unique characteristics and experiences, and the **context** in which development and learning occur. These core considerations apply to all aspects of educators' decision making in their work. While these considerations are listed separately and often discussed in a linear fashion, they are integrally connected.

Although the 1997 and 2009 position statements on developmentally appropriate practice similarly identified three core considerations, the 2020 position statement includes some fundamental changes in the meaning of each consideration.

The Three Core Considerations

1. **Commonality**—current research and understandings of processes of child development and learning that apply to all children, including the understanding that all development and learning occur within specific social, cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts. (NAEYC 2020a, 6)

NAEYC's prior definitions of developmentally appropriate practice have always emphasized knowledge of child development, hence the name. Such knowledge is still necessary, but the 2020 position statement emphasizes the fact that all human development and learning occurs in and is influenced by multiple contexts. This focus casts a new light on what teachers need to know about themselves, children, families, communities, and their program and why it is important to accentuate the identities, values, perspectives, and funds of knowledge of those who have been historically marginalized under universal norms. Early childhood educators—as well as teacher educators, professional learning providers, and coaches—must also evaluate the information they use.

General knowledge of children's development and learning continues to help educators predict what goals are achievable but also challenging for most children within a given age range and what kinds of experiences and environments are most likely to support the achievement of those goals. But it is essential to evaluate that knowledge—including understanding that it has historically and continues to marginalize some groups of children—and to understand how to apply it in various contexts, as described in the following example.

1.5 Recognizing Differences as Variations in Strengths, Not Deficits

Elizabeth is a student in a child development course. As a child, she grew up in a family with low income, attended underresourced public schools, and worked at understanding the schools' expected forms of communication, values, and rules for behavior. Her current course assignment about language development and the research behind it raises many questions for her. In her readings she finds generalizations about children's language development that, based on her own experiences and her experiences with children ages birth to 3, don't seem accurate to her. She realizes that the children studied in the research she is reading about were all monolingual. Most concerning to her is that the widely distributed study about a large gap in vocabulary between children from families with low income and children from more affluent families (Hart & Risley 1995) is quite dated, is based on a small number of families, and uses a deficit lens to describe the development of children from households with low income and children of color. She wonders whether not taking into account various social, cultural, and linguistic contexts is likely to lead to the perception of differences between dominant culture groups and marginalized groups as deficits. To learn more, she searches for more recent research that she can reference in her own writings and also discuss with her professor.

It is important to note that at the time of the publication of the Hart and Risley study in 1995 and for many years after, the study was used to understand vocabulary development of children during the preschool years and how teachers could increase reading skills and school success as children get older. It was groundbreaking. But since then, recognition of cultural bias and new research being done to identify strengths within communities has

highlighted the need to explore the nuances of the initial findings and to reflect on the limitations of this and other studies, as well as the need for elaboration through a broader and more balanced lens of context and anti-bias thinking (e.g., Fernald & Weisleder 2015). The nature of research samples and assumptions made by researchers are important points to consider when evaluating research, both in current and historical contexts.

2. **Individuality**—the characteristics and experiences unique to each child, within the context of their family and community, that have implications for how best to support their development and learning. (NAEYC 2020a, 7)

Individual variation is a well-established premise of human development that must always be considered. Children's individuality is what makes educators' work so interesting and rewarding. Most important, knowing children as individuals is critical to every educator's ability to effectively meet children's academic, social, and emotional needs and give them the opportunities to learn and grow. To do so, educators are challenged to use their own talents and skills to the fullest, both employing the art of teaching—by individualizing their interactions based on the knowledge they have of each child—and applying their knowledge of evidence-based strategies for differentiating instruction and providing specialized supports. It is important for educators to systematically observe and assess each child's abilities and interests, which are always changing, so they can effectively support children's learning. Consider the following examples of a teacher individualizing her approach to each child.

1.6 Getting to Know Children as Individuals

Ms. Livni has taught second grade for many years. The children in the rural school where she teaches come from a wide geographic area and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Most live in small towns; a few are growing up on small farms. Although Ms. Livni has known some of the families for a long time, she takes the time to get to know each child and their family well through phone calls, emails, and a questionnaire about their interests and if they'd like to share their skills or traditions with the class in any way. From the knowledge she gains through connecting with families and by observing the children closely, Ms. Livni strives to identify the children's strengths and interests and adapt her teaching to support each one's development and learning.

Ms. Livni considers the individual differences and experiences with her current class:

- Alyssa is highly verbal and has a lot of friends, but her parents are involved in a custody dispute. Alyssa has confided in Ms. Livni that she feels scared and gets a stomachache when she hears her parents argue. At school, Alyssa becomes anxious when the routine varies. She becomes silent, tears up, and clings to her teacher. Ms. Livni remembers to prepare her in advance for any changes in schedule and to stay near her if unexpected events occur. To equip Alyssa to exercise self-control over her emotions, Ms. Livni teaches her mindfulness strategies, including a deep breathing technique for when she feels tense or nervous.
- Noah has always been a joyful, loving little boy. But his beloved grandfather recently and suddenly died. Previously, Noah would separate easily from his mom at drop-off and walked in smiling to school each day. Now, after the death of his grandfather, he often sits alone in the reading corner looking off into the distance. Knowing that he needs her emotional support to help build his resilience, Ms. Livni focuses her care and individual attention on Noah more than ever. She asks the volunteer grandparent in her classroom, who also is acquainted with Noah's family, to spend some additional time with Noah. Ms. Livni also helps him explore and engage in interesting learning experiences as he previously did. After several weeks, he decides to write a story about going fishing with his grandfather. Noah's story demonstrates his self-efficacy, which will help build his resilience.

3. **Context**—everything discernible about the social and cultural contexts for each child, each educator, and the program as a whole. (NAEYC 2020a, 7)

IN CONTEXT

The Importance of Inclusion

by Pamela Brillante

Including young children with disabilities—from those with the mildest disabilities to those with the most significant—in early childhood classrooms together with their peers without disabilities sets the expectation that every child has a right to a high-quality education and the understanding that every child is an important member of our community.

Inclusive programs hold high expectations for all children, and educators intentionally promote active participation in all learning and social activities. Inclusive programs use evidence-based practices as well as individualized and appropriate supports to help children develop academic skills, friendships with peers, and a sense of belonging.

The joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children and NAEYC on inclusion provides a definition of early childhood inclusion that identifies key components of high-quality inclusive settings:

> Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high-quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (DEC & NAEYC 2009, 2)

This position statement also identifies ways professionals can improve early childhood services for all children.

Of the three core considerations for intentional decision making, the third and last one has evolved and been expanded on the most. The 2020 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice calls for consideration of not only children's social and cultural contexts but also the contexts of every educator and the larger program. Each child is a member of family, community, and cultural groups that shape the child's development and learning from birth. Educators are responsible for finding out what they do not know or understand about children's and families' social and cultural contexts. Equally important, educators must recognize that their own experiences and cultural worldviews influence their decisions about valued goals and practices, usually unconsciously. Educators who grew up and were educated in the United States must especially recognize the pernicious effects of systemic racism and other biases that have promoted inequities and the ways in which they themselves can be affected by *implicit bias*—subtle and often unrecognized attitudes or stereotypes that influence expectations of and interactions with others based on characteristics such as race and appearance (Kirwan Institute 2012; NASP 2017). (See Chapter 3 and the 2019 position statement on advancing equity [NAEYC 2019] for further discussion.) This is why self-awareness and critical reflection are so important for every educator, teacher educator, and administrator. Understanding what each of the core considerations means is the first step to learning how they work together.

Balancing the Core Considerations When Making Decisions

In practice, assumptions about general child development (the first core consideration) have been overemphasized, with less emphasis placed on individualization (the second core consideration) and little or no emphasis on social and cultural contexts (the third core consideration). Furthermore, the core considerations have been assumed to function separately, when in fact they are integrally connected. One of the biggest but most important challenges today is to ensure that all three sources of information are simultaneously taken into consideration when making decisions about practice in context. Consider this example:

1.7 Commonality, Individuality, and Context

Mr. Adebayo has some concerns about Rachel, who will be in his kindergarten class next school year. Although Rachel started receiving speech therapy when she was 3, she still has very limited speech. Her preschool teacher notes that she has difficulty assessing Rachel's knowledge and that her classmates have difficulty understanding what Rachel is trying to say.

Mr. Adebayo observes Rachel in her preschool classroom so he can better understand how she is functioning and what he can do to make her successful in kindergarten. He is thrilled with all the skills Rachel *does* have that are age appropriate for an incoming kindergartner. While her speech and language are significantly delayed, many of the other readiness skills are not. Despite Rachel's occasional frustration at not being understood, Mr. Adebayo sees an engaged and happy student with many strengths that he could build on the following year.

While Mr. Adebayo knows that Rachel will receive speech therapy and support from the special education teacher during the coming school year, he wants to be able to provide individualized supports to Rachel in the classroom all day, every day. While he needs to be able to assess her learning without relying on her speech, he also wants Rachel to have a way to communicate her wants and needs and engage in social interactions with her peers. He will work with the speech-language pathologist to develop a common classroom language using photos and words. This language will appear on labels for the classroom materials and centers; other labels positioned around the classroom will have photos and words for expressing feelings, asking questions, and providing simple answers. While this language is specifically for Rachel's needs, it is meant to become a part of the classroom that every child will learn to use. It will also help Mr. Adebayo design assessments for each of his lessons so he can assess Rachel's learning.

In addition, Mr. Adebayo thinks about his past practice. In previous classes he has shared with the children some simple words in Yoruba, his home language, but he realizes that teaching some basic American Sign Language instead could help Rachel communicate more easily and also be helpful for his students who are DLLs. He knows how important it is for Rachel to feel included and for her classmates to see her as a full member of the classroom. He wants everyone in his kindergarten classroom to know that it is okay that they are all different and that they all still belong together.

Contributed by Pamela Brillante

The core considerations represent a great deal of *interrelated* information that is always changing, requiring that educators continuously observe, listen, and learn. Every day educators make hundreds of decisions. Some are pre-planned to accomplish specific curriculum goals, such as helping preschoolers gain foundational mathematics skills or teaching reading in the primary grades. Such plans may or may not be implemented as anticipated. Many other decisions are in response to child-initiated play and discovery and intended to scaffold a child's learning using the most effective strategy or build on a child's strengths or interests. *Scaffolding* is a process through which educators intentionally support children's development and learning by offering help (in the form of interactions or materials) at the right time and in the right way. "It is a bridge teachers create to connect existing knowledge to new knowledge and understanding" (Gillespie & Greenberg 2017, 90). Consider these examples.

1.8 Scaffolding an Infant's Physical Skills

Shayla, 11 months old, lets go of the cart she is pushing and stands alone. Her teacher, Mr. Peters, sitting nearby, says, "Hi, Shayla!" He reaches his hand toward her, and she takes one step, then another, then falls down. Shayla's eyes open wide, and Mr. Peters says, "Boom, you fell down, but you're okay. Do you want to try again?" Shayla reaches up her arms and Mr. Peters helps her stand up. He holds her hands while she steadies herself, then gives her two small toys to hold so that she balances on her own. He says, "Okay, Shayla, can you walk to me?" Holding tightly to the two toys, she takes three steps and reaches Mr. Peters right before she falls down. "You did it!" Mr. Peters exclaims.

(From Gillespie & Greenberg 2017)