

Vignettes from NAEYC (ed.)(2022), *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*, fourth edition, NAEYC, 281–285.

This collection of vignettes and reflections, written by early childhood educators, provides snapshots of the educators' interactions with children and what they have learned through their everyday experiences. The writers describe a specific learning experience, reflect on what the children learned and what they learned as educators, and make connections to the 2020 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice.

A.5 Studying Birds in the Spring by Amy Blessing, pp. 283-4

The children are fascinated by the birds that visit the feeders outside the classroom windows. Following the children's interests, we again dive deeper into studying animals, this time birds. Books are gathered from classroom collections and the school library to invite children to read more about birds. The children decide to build a tall tree to make a bird habitat. They begin by creating a tall structure with hollow blocks from the block center.

Using brown paint, they cover large pieces of easel paper and work as a team to wrap and tape the painted paper to the blocks to make the tree trunk. Next, they twist long pieces of bulletin board paper to make branches. Some children use scissors to cut out a variety of leaves to tape to the branches.

Carefully referencing bird books and photographs, they draw, paint, and fold construction paper birds to put in the tree. The children also decide to build a "window blind" to be able to sit, observe, and write about birds in the tree undetected.

Using developing skills at play-based centers.

The dramatic play center becomes a bird watching tour center. Children take turns role-playing as park rangers, bird experts, ticket sellers, and bird watchers. After making reservations and selling tickets, bird watchers meet with the park rangers, who explain the rules of bird watching. The park rangers then guide their classmates around the room, equipped with binoculars and bird checklists, to go on a bird watching tour. When birds (photos of birds hung around the classroom) are found, they record and tally it on their checklists. Children can be heard reminding each other to be as still and quiet as possible, strengthening their self-control.

Their excitement in their pretend play is evident as they ooh and aah at every new bird they spot. Through these activities, they develop language skills, literacy and math skills, and executive function skills.

Creating complex informational books, posters, and presentations about birds.

The children are excited to make books using the Bird Word Wall in the writing center. No longer making simple word books, they now compose informational books about birds or create works of fiction with birds as the main characters. Jonathan writes a multipage book about a bird and all of his bird friends. Some children also work in research teams to become experts on a bird of their choice. They create bird posters with facts and pictures and present them to the rest of the class. Dollar store bird calendars are cut apart, laminated, and placed in the art center for inspiration. As time goes on, the bird paintings done at the easel become more intricate and detailed. Estrella becomes very skilled at looking closely at the details in bird shapes and feather designs. After watching her work, her classmates are excited to use similar strategies in their own art. While her expressive language skills are still developing, she becomes a leader in our classroom

“A.7 A Monster, I’m Not Afraid of Anything at All” by Ron Grady, pp. 288-9

Three-year-old Jiro runs over to me, clutching in his right hand a white half sheet with loopy lines of crayon etched across the front. “Ron! Ron! I made this. It’s called ‘A Monster, I’m Not Afraid of Anything at All.’ I did it.”

“Whoa, that is a lot of color!” I exclaim. “Look at the work you did—such hard work.”

“Yeah,” he replies. “Write it down.”

After finding a pen, I write down Jiro’s words, verbatim, on the work he created. I then ask him if he has a story to accompany it. He is ready for my question and excitedly dictates a story about a bear who loses his mommy and then finds her in a cave.

When Jiro is finished telling his story, he goes off to play. For today, at least, he has finished his work. His pride is evident, and seeing it, I know that one of the most important goals has already been achieved.

A.8 The Name, by Ron Grady, p. 289

Another day, I am on the block rug when Raven, who is 2 years old, comes up to me with her work. I take a brief moment to revel in the comfort that this practice of close sharing has fostered in our classroom.

“Tell me about this,” I say intently as she kneels next to me.

Her page is alive with colorful lines that dart across the paper at all angles. Fine motor control? Check. An appreciation of thorough composition? Check. There is a circular figure in orange in the background; three intense strokes of red, purple, and black race across the top. A squiggle of yellow is to the right. There is a series of blue lines that moves up and down across the whole page, and I quietly wonder what they are. Waves? Birds? Snakes?

“It’s my name,” Raven tells me, her voice gleeful.

“Your name? Whoa!” I point to another of the blue lines. “And what about that?”

“That’s my mommy’s name,” she informs me.

As we talk about many of the lines, I learn that she has written the names of all of the members of her family, including her grandparents. By asking specific questions about her work, I am able to learn more about Raven’s interests in literacy, her understanding of text and pictures, and her ideas about the information those elements convey. I am also showing her that I value her work and the thought she puts behind it.

How different our conversation might have been had I said only something like “Nice work” or “It’s so beautiful!”