



**Kentucky Department of Education - Preschool Programs
Guidance for Developmentally Appropriate Practice for
Workbooks, Test Sheets and Dittos
November 2011**

Kentucky Preschool Program Regulation [704 KAR 3:410 Section 6, Program Operation (15)(a)] states: Test sheets, workbooks and ditto sheets shall not be used as they are not developmentally appropriate for preschool children.

This paper presents a clarification of the preschool regulation in order to ensure that readers understand the intent of the regulation. Any printed material generated to be used as a mass-produced page or pages by a child or children would be defined as a ditto, worksheet or workbook page. However, there are times when certain photocopied pages would connect with open-ended activities meeting the developmental needs of children.

For guidance on this topic, we asked for advice from three nationally known experts in early childhood education: Sue Bredekamp, author of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)*; Ann S. Epstein, senior director of Curriculum Development at the HighScope Foundation and author of *The Intentional Teacher*; and Peter Pizzolongo, senior director of professional development with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

According to Bredekamp, “the problem with worksheets has always been that they are more like testing than teaching; they don’t deeply engage children’s minds in thinking or problem solving, but rather demand a correct answer.”

Bredekamp adds to this by saying, “Everything I’ve written about DAP and early literacy for years has stressed the need to use sign-in sheets and tally sheets to encourage children’s writing. Story starters or play plans are other good examples. ... In short, I think the open-ended kind of teaching tool doesn’t fall into the traditional category of worksheet that is defined as closed-ended. I also think that it’s important for people in our field to have conversations in which they analyze the pros and cons of a particular teaching/learning approach rather than rigidly adopt one position or take mine or anyone else’s word for it. Dichotomizing issues has not served us (or children) well in the past.”

Further clarification was provided by Epstein, who writes, “The only thing commendable about “worksheets” is the word ‘work.’ Play is children’s work, and they undertake it with the purposefulness and energy we want adults to bring to their work, too. However, worksheets as traditionally defined and used have nothing to do with children’s play. They reflect a narrow and misguided concept of the content and process of early learning. Referring to play as work respects what children do, while worksheets disrespect how they learn, that is, through active, hands-on engagement with people, real materials, actions, and ideas.

“Choosing appropriate materials for active learning does not mean that all adult-produced printed forms are bad, however. It is important to differentiate between worksheets (workbooks, test pages, and so on) and other printed materials. The former are used in convergent or closed-ended activities where children are required to fill in correct, predetermined answers. The latter simply refers to the use of print technology (copying machines, computer printers) to provide tools that children can use in

any number of divergent or open-ended ways to support their play scenarios and carry out their own investigations. In short, the issue is less one of format than how teacher-prepared printed materials are used to enhance meaningful and appropriate learning activities.”

Pizzolongo provides guidance from the DAP book by saying, “Is using a teacher-made photocopied paper resource that is more open-ended a 'developmentally appropriate strategy'? Well -- as with many things in our field -- it depends! ... For those answers, we need to look at the 3 core considerations of DAP as we decide if something is appropriate for a particular child or group of children:

1. What do we know about child development? What are the age-related characteristics of preschoolers that lead us to believe that a particular approach or tool is appropriate for children of this age?
 2. What do we know about each child as an individual? Knowing a child's strengths, interests, preferences, and so on--would a particular approach or tool be appropriate for this child, for another child, etc.?
 3. What do we know about the social and cultural contexts in which children live? What makes sense to this child, to this group of children--how we interact with children, the language we use, etc.?
- Based on our responses, we can then identify the approaches and tools for each child and/or for a group of preschoolers.”

According to the advice of these three experts, it is acceptable to have open-ended sheets that include story starters, sign-in sheets and tally sheets whose use would depend on the activity and abilities of the individual children. Traditional worksheets that are convergent or closed-ended sheets, where children’s work looks the same and the children are required to fill in correct predetermined answers, are not developmentally appropriate.* Similarly, coloring and tracing sheets have limited skill development, and their appropriateness in a high-quality preschool environment is questionable. However, laminated tracing materials such as letter, word and/or name cards are appropriate materials to scaffold skill development. For more information of appropriate activities please consult the *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. An acceptable use of print technology would include tools that children use in divergent and open-ended activities to support play and investigations. How teachers use printed materials is crucial. Ideally, the teacher would use them to enhance meaningful play and appropriate learning activities, especially when tied to the children’s own learning experiences.

The best learning experiences for young children would be to allow them to make sense of their environment through hands-on manipulative activities.

*Note: Published assessments are excluded from these criteria.

References:

Copple, C & Bredekamp, S.(eds) (2009) *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*. National Association for the Education of Young Children: Washington DC

Epstein, A.S. (2007) *The Intentional Teacher*. National Association for the Education of Young Children: Washington DC