Individualizing Curriculum in Preschool and Kindergarten: Finding Delight in Each Child

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I am an early childhood education consultant who works with programs across the country and the author of eight books published by Redleaf Press as well as several articles that have been published in the NAEYC journal, *Young Children*. I served as the Project Manager for NAEYC for resources related to the third edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. I am the creator of Child-Focused Coaching™, a new system to help teachers truly individualize and differentiate curriculum for young children.
Resources by Gaye Gronlund
available from www.redleafpress.org or www.naeyc.org

• **Individualized Child-Focused Curriculum: A Differentiated Approach** (to be published June 2016)

• **Planning for Play, Observation, and Learning in Preschool and Kindergarten**

• **Developmentally Appropriate Play: Guiding Young Children to Higher Levels** (with parent brochure, *Why Children Play*)

• **Developmentally Appropriate Play Stories Volume 1 (an interactive video program)**

• **Make Early Learning Standards Come Alive 2nd edition: Connecting Your Practice and Curriculum to State Guidelines**

• **Focused Observations 2nd edition: How to Observe Young Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning** (coauthor, Marlyn James)

• **Focused Portfolios: A Complete Assessment for the Young Child** (coauthor, Bev Engel)

• **Early Learning Standards and Staff Development: Best Practices in the Face of Change** (coauthor, Marlyn James)

• Produced the CD-Rom accompanying Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, 3rd Edition, NAEYC and the DVDs, “The New Developmentally Appropriate Practice”, “DAP and Intentionality” and “DAP and Play”

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The goal of our work is to be child-focused, to know each child well, and to delight in each child.
Finding enjoyment in your work

• You laugh with children at how silly it feels when a bubble pops on their nose.

• You smile when children proudly show them something they have accomplished or created.

• You respond tenderly to all-enveloping hugs or wet kisses.

• You cheer when a child tries something that had been unfamiliar and frightening to him.

• You listen with full, engaged attention as a child explains her thinking about the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly or where the sun goes at night.
How do we continue to experience joy and delight in being a teacher in an early childhood program?

By individualizing curriculum so that each child is successful in his or her own way.
Teachers...

• recognize the unique differences of each child,
• celebrate those differences,
• figure out curricular strategies that build on each child’s strengths,
• and provide support to each child for areas that are challenging.

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Successful teaching results in successful children – children who reach their potential. And such teaching requires individualization.
The Individual Child Information Record

• To be completed *in conversation with* the child’s family members
  – In an intake or initial meeting or at a home visit

• Can be revisited to add new information throughout the year

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# Individual Child Information Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Life Experiences</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Developmental Strengths</th>
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<tr>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Emerging Developmental Areas</th>
<th>Approaches to Learning and Responses to Challenges</th>
<th>Emotional Makeup</th>
<th>Physical Needs and Health Issues</th>
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Planning for Play, Observation, and Learning in Preschool and Kindergarten

More in Category Dramatic Play

- Preschool Weekly Planning and Reflection Framework
- Kindergarten Weekly Planning and Reflection Framework
- Weekly Planning and Reflection Framework
- Infant/Toddler Weekly Planning and Reflection Framework
- Individual Child Information Record
- Individual Adjustments
- Preschool Choice Record
- Kindergarten Choice Record
- Portfolio Collection Form
- Family-Teacher Summary Report
- Learning Goals Template
Why Are Individualization and Differentiation Important?

- Children develop at different rates, with different strengths and areas of challenge.
- Each child has special needs, interests, talents, personality traits, learning styles, and a social and cultural context in which s/he is being raised.

And all affect learning!!

- Individualization addresses the achievement gap and the wide disparity of success for children.
- Best practices require that teachers plan for the success of each child.
Individualization does not mean twenty different lesson plans!
Ways to Individualize & Differentiate

• Plan for community and relationship building
• Focus observations to get to know each child well
• Plan modifications, adjustments, and accommodations for individual children
• Plan ongoing projects based on children’s interests

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Ideas for Community Building

• Be welcoming to children and families
• Have arrival and departure routines
• Use songs, chants, and games as rituals to gather the group together
• Have ways for children to take turns speaking in group times (i.e., passing a talking stick or stuffed animal)
• Have class meetings to discuss classroom problems

• Do favorite activities again and again
• Adopt a class tree and follow its changes across the seasons
• Have class pets and plants and rotate their care among the children
• Make class books that reflect the experiences of the group
• Have a Kindness Jar to recognize and celebrate helpful, kind behavior
• Set up a Peace Table or other routine for resolving conflicts

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Ideas for Relationship Building

- Warm smiles, hugs, winks
- Sit and/or play with a child
- Use children’s home languages and provide materials in that language whenever possible
- Respect a child’s personality (avoid pushing a quiet child to speak; avoid touching a child who is sensitive to touch)
- Let the child take the lead (go first, answer a question, give an idea)

- Ask a child to be a special helper
- Give a child positive feedback
- Set limits with a child
- Allow a child to have some quiet, private time.
- Recognize that a child has lots of physical energy to spend.

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Your observations and reflections lead you to modifications, adjustments, and accommodations for individual children.

He knows some of the letters of his name. I’ll point out and name the remaining letters in his name on his name cards and in print around the classroom.
Your observations and reflections lead you to modifications, adjustments, and accommodations for individual children.

He’s using his left hand consistently and holding the paintbrush in a pincer grasp. I’ll build on his interest and success and plan for and encourage him to use writing materials in various play areas.
# Individual Adjustments

For week of: _______________________________ Teacher: _______________________________

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Name</th>
<th>Planned Adjustment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>Due to his personal space issues, allow him to be a special helper setting up snack during group time</td>
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<td>Brianna</td>
<td>Provide more early readers in library - she’s ready!</td>
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<td>Christian</td>
<td>Pair with Timothy and Evan at math area - encourage simple addition and subtraction</td>
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<td>Evan</td>
<td>Math games with Timothy and Christian</td>
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<td>Gabriella</td>
<td>Provide more writing materials (create books or journals?)</td>
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<td>Henry</td>
<td>Be ready to support his participation at group time</td>
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<td>Layla</td>
<td>Pair with Gabriella at writing center - see if that encourages more writing on her part</td>
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<td>Michael</td>
<td>Provide more wait time for his responses (per recommendations of speech pathologist)</td>
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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Help her express feelings appropriately - pound a pillow? use a puppet? draw?</td>
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<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Support her emerging leadership skills, especially outdoors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>Math games with Christian and Evan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So, your modifications for individual children might include...

• Following up on a child’s interest
• Working with the child in his/her favorite activity (that delights the child!)
• Providing assistance (scaffolding!) in a transition, a daily routine, a group time, or in play experiences
• Extending the child’s engagement with a challenge or provocation
• Partnering the child with different peers
• Partnering the child with an educator
• What else?
Why build on children’s interests?

Children are more motivated when they are interested in something.

Children will tackle harder challenges when they are interested.

Children will stay focused longer on something in which they are interested.

And, meaningful play experiences usually engage children!!!
Remember, with all that you are balancing as you teach young children....

*To teach is to touch a life forever!!!!*