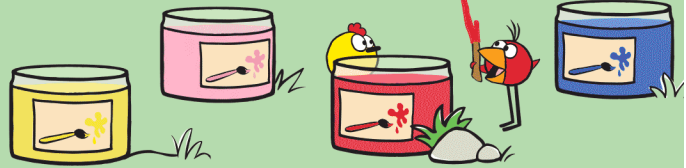


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Teaching Strategies Individualized Instruction

What is Individualized Instruction?

- It's a way of teaching that takes into account each child's unique personality, including age, developmental stage, interests, and learning styles.
- With an awareness of children's differences, an educator can plan learning centers and activities, offer instructions or explanations, and encourage children to express their ideas and experiences in a way that's effective and appropriate.

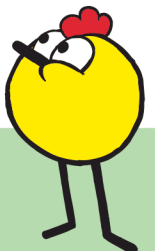
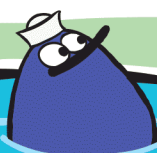
Why is individualized instruction important?

- Responding to children's varied needs, experiences, and interests is critical to teaching.
- Science is well suited to individualized instruction because it offers children the chance to explore in hands-on ways at their own level.
- By carefully observing children, educators can plan a wide variety of activities that address a range of skills and learning goals.
- Recognizing children's unique learning abilities, interests, strengths, and challenges will make them feel valued and competent, more likely to persist in questioning and problem solving, and increase their engagement.

Teaching Strategy: Planning for Children of Different Ages and Developmental Stages

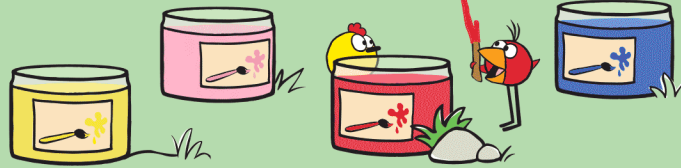
Why is planning for children of different ages and developmental stages an effective teaching strategy?

- In a family child care setting, children's ages often vary greatly. It's not uncommon for an educator to care for a toddler and a five-year-old, and it's a challenge to offer group activities that work for children at widely different developmental stages.





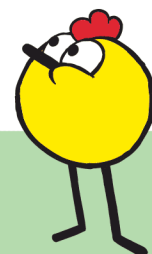
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- Even among children of similar ages, not all mature at the same rate. Children who are close in age can be quite different in terms of development. Attention span and interest level will affect their ability to focus.

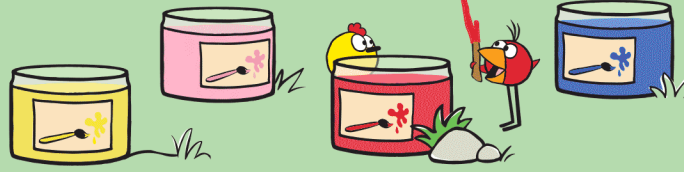
Some ways to take age and development into account:

- **Explain the same concept in different ways.**
 - For some children, a simple explanation will be sufficient. For other children, you will need to ask many questions to gauge their understanding.
 - Even children who quickly grasped the concept can benefit from hearing different explanations and watching demonstrations.
 - You can encourage peer-to-peer learning—having children explain concepts to each other.
 - The more ways you explore an idea with children, the more likely they will be able to understand and remember it.
- **Adjust the materials.** During science explorations, children need to be “hands-on” at whatever stage of motor skills development they’re at.
Example: Using an eyedropper or pipette to dilute colored water is fascinating and fun, but younger children may not have the necessary coordination. Instead, have basters or small squirt bottles available so they can still explore independently.
- **Offer independence—or more support.**
 - **More independence.** Some children may finish an activity quickly. Have additional materials and extension activities ready.
Example: If a child easily completes an activity about sorting two colors in an alternating pattern, challenge them to make more complex patterns with additional colors.
 - **More support.** Some children may need more guidance and thrive on the support you give them.
Example: If children are not able to create an alternating pattern of two colors, do it with them several times, repeating and pointing to the colors, saying *blue, yellow, blue, yellow . . . what comes next?* For children just learning their colors, you might begin by identifying the colors that you are working with: *This is blue. Can you find something in this room that is also blue?*
- **Engage the youngest children.** Family child care educators often have an infant or toddler in tow while leading science explorations with preschoolers. There are always creative ways to make it an interesting and fun learning experience for the very little ones.





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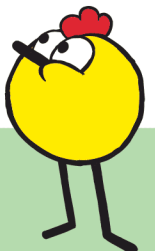
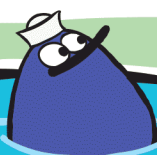
Example: While older children sort items by color into cups, set up the very youngest with other objects to sort and place in larger containers.

- **Plan different social groupings.** The way you group children during activities can enhance individualized learning.
 - **Pair children so that an older child mentors a younger one.** Younger children will be inspired to push their abilities when they see older children in action. Older children will develop language skills and social skills (and a sense of pride) as they explain things to a younger partner. They may also learn how to share and compromise.
 - **Example:** You might create a color lab where children can take turns mixing colors for one another and then painting with them.
 - **Working with groups of the same age is also important.** There will be some activities that you'll only want to do with older children and some that will work best with a younger crowd. To ensure that this happens, you might set aside a time each week for same-age peers to collaborate.
 - **Offer whole group activities for mixed ages.** Most science activities easily work for all ages and give children the chance to collaborate. These activities also help children learn from one another, develop patience, and appreciate others' perspectives.

Example: When exploring colors, you might put up a large sheet of paper for a mural and invite all the children to paint with colors they have mixed. Together, gather around the mural and discuss the different shades you see and how they were made.
 - **One-on-one attention.** Find opportunities throughout the day to check in with individual children to gain insight into their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Connect with students who may be having difficulty with an activity or trouble interacting with other children—your attention can make all the difference.

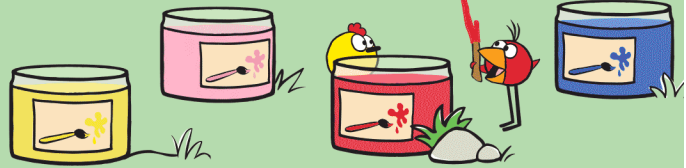
Your Experiences

- What are some of the differences you notice among the children in your program?
- How have you adapted activities to meet the needs of children who are at different levels of development? What have been your greatest successes? What has been a struggle?
- What are some ways you make learning experiences engaging for infants and toddlers?





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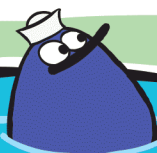
Teaching Strategy: Planning for Children with Different Interests and Learning Styles

How does planning for children with different interests and learning styles benefit your teaching?

- When children are given opportunities to follow their own interests and learn in their own ways, their engagement and sense of personal investment in the learning deepens.
- An educator's awareness of children's passions, motivations, temperament, strengths, and weaknesses can significantly affect how a child learns and grows.

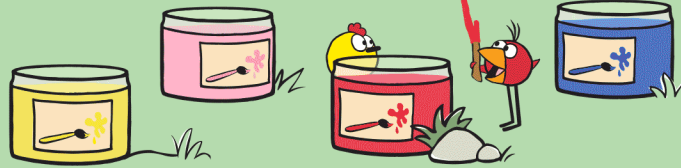
Some ways to address children's different interests and learning styles:

- **Get to know each child.** Engage with children to learn their interests, strengths, and weaknesses. The best way to do this is to observe children in action.
 - **Keep an observation journal** on hand. Dedicate a page to each child in your group. Take notes on what children like, what they already know, and what you hope to teach them more about. Make notes about children who work well together and observe how children play and interact. Use these insights to shape your teaching.
Examples: If you notice that a certain child loves to be outside, you might plan an activity in which the group goes outside to search for certain colors in nature. If a child is uninterested in coloring, suggest that he or she make a collage instead. Color sorting becomes exciting when the child who loves toy cars sorts them by color and shade.
- **Identify learning styles.**
 - **Most children have particular styles of learning they respond to best;** they may gravitate toward visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning. Over time, you will become familiar with whether children prefer to learn by hearing, looking, moving, or a combination of these sensory aptitudes.
 - **Address learning styles** in your instructions by explaining, demonstrating and, if appropriate, letting children try the activity or participate in the demonstration in a hands-on way.
 - **Offering visual, auditory, and kinesthetic explanations** doesn't just benefit the child who prefers to listen, look, or move. Research shows that





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the more ways an idea is presented, the more children understand and retain the idea.

Example: Traditionally, education favors auditory learners, but with this color science unit, visual learners will naturally flourish. But all learning styles can be addressed whatever the science topic. An auditory learner, for example, may enjoy coming up with creative names for colors and a kinesthetic learner may gravitate toward games like Red light/Green light or enjoy running after bubbles to identify their subtle colors.

- **Offer Choices.** One effective way to address the unique needs and interests of each child in your program is to devote your learning centers to different aspects of learning.

Example: In one center you might have children looking at books about colors and then creating their own color books. In another you might have children painting and drawing, and in yet another they may spend time sorting items by color or creating patterns out of colored objects.

Your Experiences

- What strategies do you have for getting to know individual children in your program? What's an example of an observation about a child that's informed your planning and teaching?
- Are you always able to tell if a child prefers to learn through listening, looking, or moving? What would you say is your own preferred way of learning?
- What are some challenges you have faced when trying to offer many choices to the children in your program?
- What are some unique activities that have come out of children's interests?

Additional Resources

For more information on individualized instruction

There are additional Teaching Strategy PDFs on the PEEP Web site along with instructional videos. These illustrate individualized instruction related to the other PEEP science units: Plants, Water, Shadows, Ramps, and Sound.

For more videos and information on other topics

In addition, the Web site offers Teaching Strategies and videos on other professional development topics: Learning Environments, Documentation and Reflection, Science Talk, and English Language Learners.

