

Differentiating for the Young Child

Teaching Strategies Across
the Content Areas, PreK-3

SECOND EDITION

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Thank you

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CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from
Differentiating for the Young Child.

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Learning centers with materials for different learning styles		
Colorful and diverse materials that are modified frequently	CLASSROOM	Small-group work areas
Space for teacher supplies and resources	Display and storage areas for long-term projects	Area for extended activities to promote higher level thinking and creative problem solving

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

If you're a primary teacher, you already know that rich, engaging resources are everything in a classroom for young children. To accommodate students' unique learning needs and styles, you probably have resource centers of your own. Some of them may have a variety of materials (e.g., books, art materials, displays, maps, games, construction materials) for exploring specific concepts in a unit. Others may be areas of the room where particular kinds of activities happen. An example of this might be a semi-enclosed, quiet area with rugs and pillows where children can read, write, or sketch their ideas away from the bustle of the classroom. Or you might discover that you have a number of performers in your class who need a space, equipped with costumes, props, and construction paper, so that they can work on dramatic presentations, a mime piece, or a creative dance piece.

There is no need to have any more centers than the ones you really need. They will evolve naturally from your understanding of the children before you and from your work together. In this regard, Howard Gardner's (1993) research on "multiple intelligences" can shed light on those students in your class who may require different kinds of resources to progress in your classroom (see Smutny, Walker, & Meckstroth, 1997, pp. 33–37). Children from other cultures often need alternative ways to process new learning and express the strengths of their heritage. The following list offers some ideas on how you can create learning centers focused on specific "intelligences."

Linguistic Center—Linguistically oriented students learn best through the written word. They exhibit mastery in language (sometimes in a dialect)

and often have a verbal wit and an ease expressing themselves verbally or on paper. A linguistic center should be located where it is quieter and have comfortable floor pillows, chairs, and tables.

Resources: Books; magazines; encyclopedias; dictionaries; paper for writing and drawing stories; books on tape; magnetic letters with board; spelling materials and games; alphabet games; sentence blocks with articles, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs; computer software for word processing and story writing; taped stories from oral traditions around the world; taped poetry.

Musical Center—Musically able students learn through rhythm and melody—by singing, humming, rapping, or tapping a pencil, foot, or finger. They often express a deep love for music, have an ability to compose catchy tunes of their own, and easily recognize a wide range of melodies.

Resources: Piano, keyboard and headset, other musical instruments, drums, rhythm instruments, cassette player and taped music, blank tapes for children's music, instrument picture cards.

Logical-Mathematical Center—Children with special abilities in the area of logic and mathematics are drawn to numbers and to discovering the logic and pattern of numbers. They often enjoy exploring other ways of calculating to understand how patterns work. They love logic and applying reason to solve complex mathematical problems.

Resources:

Math materials—felt board with felt objects and numerals; peg boards with colored pegs; pattern cards; puzzles; dice; number cards for sequencing and matching; math facts cards; number games and projects; tangrams; attribute blocks; Venn diagrams, graphic organizers, and matrices; codes to decipher; computer software for math activities.

Science materials—simple machines (e.g., pulley, gears), magnifying glass, microscope, telescope, mirrors, prisms, thermometers, models of planets, paper and pencil to record and draw data, computer software for computer-based science activities.

Visual-Spatial Center—Some gifted children gravitate toward the visual. They feel most at home in activities that involve seeing, representing, and manipulating lines, objects, and spaces. You might find them working out an idea in a diagram or sketching a word problem so they can “see” it and

solve it. They are often the first students to notice any subtle changes in the classroom (a new poster, the addition of a few more desks, etc.) and prefer to sketch, diagram, or map out their thinking process.

Resources: Paints, paintbrushes, and easels; finger paints; clay; cookie cutters to make prints; markers; crayons; colored pencils; paper in various sizes and colors; scissors; scraps of ribbon, fabric, and yarn; glue, paste, and tape; old catalogs and magazines; pictures; photographs; mazes; picture puzzles; posters; camera and film; illustrated books, maps, charts, and diagrams; computer software (CD-ROMs) showing famous works of art or museum tours.

Bodily-Kinesthetic Center—Gifted children who learn best in a bodily-kinesthetic mode express this through hands-on activities and by doing. They enjoy touching, building, and moving and often express an exceptional gross or fine motor control—in sports, dance, or mime. They may be the class clown or the theatrical children who can't resist acting out the stories they tell or imitating (to perfection) the different people in their stories. They play roles that imitate real life and often solve problems and deal with abstractions using their imagination.

Resources: Trucks and cars, equipment and materials for crafts, large blocks, cardboard bricks, dress-up clothes, a variety of hats and props, masks, kitchen equipment, dishes, pots and pans, workbench and tools, puppets, stuffed animals, manipulatives to sequence, puzzles.

Interpersonal Center—Children inclined toward the interpersonal domain relate well to others and are leaders, organizers, and mediators. This doesn't mean they are necessarily outgoing. They may be the unassuming students who quietly diffuse arguments or anticipate problems in group projects. This center could be an area for group activities or even total group work. Activities might include brainstorming, cooperative tasks, collaborative problem solving, mentoring and apprenticeship, and group games. It could also include biographies of great leaders from around the world.

Intrapersonal Center—Students with intrapersonal intelligence tend to be introverts. They are often independent and have keen insight into their own thoughts, feelings, and personal growth. They know what they need and where their strengths lie, and they are equipped to deal with their emotions and personal goals. These students tend to be quiet and prefer working alone. A center could simply be a couple of desks where students engage in independent assignments, journals, self-paced projects, problem

solving, time alone, reflection, or computer software for word processing, or it could have a few relaxing chairs where children can listen to audiotapes or think quietly.

Naturalist Center—There are children who have a close affinity with the natural world. They have a deep sense of connection with both flora and fauna and demonstrate an extensive (in some cases, an encyclopedic) knowledge of certain species. Their responses to nature often embrace a poetic as well as scientific sensibility. They enjoy classifying and identifying species and exploring natural phenomena such as climate, ecological change, and environmental conservation.

Resources: Rocks; seeds; pots and soil for planting; garden area (e.g., potting soil in suit boxes lined with plastic); live animals; variety of leaves, fossils, and seeds; pictures of plants and trees for classifying and comparing; pictures of mammals, reptiles, birds, fish, and insects; plastic creatures; dinosaur models; paper and pencils for drawing and recording data; database software; bird feeders (hopefully, one outside); nests.

Structured experiences at a few centers such as these will give you a chance to observe where your students' strengths lie. Having a rich collection of materials that are suited to different learning styles also enables you to honor what is unique about the children and to create a bridge to new ideas and information in the curriculum. Knowing *where* you want all your students to be in terms of essential learning, you can use the environment and resources to design *how* they will get there.

PRIORITIES AND PREPARATION

Before embarking on this journey, it is wise for you to consider carefully your own priorities and concerns about your students. The guiding principle in differentiating is always to *follow the children*—to allow their needs, abilities, and interests to shape the learning path. But differentiation is a journey for you as well. No teacher can be expected to create multiple assignments in response to different student needs throughout the day and keep track of everyone's progress and achievement. In many situations, changes to your current teaching program are not even required. Where change is needed, try to think of small adjustments you can introduce gradually in a number of skill areas and subjects. Or if you want to attempt a strategy that calls for more planning and supervision, do it in a unit you know well. In other words, if you are new to differentiation, try

to avoid making it harder by attempting large-scale changes in new units or by trying to do too much all at once, thus doubling the demand on your time and resources.

One of the messages we've consistently heard from teachers who are using these strategies is the importance of being gradual in implementing new ideas in your classroom and of finding your own way to make differentiation really work. This means that you have to make choices based on what you feel will most benefit your students, and if you are like most teachers, these choices will depend on two overriding concerns:

1. How ready are my students for the lesson I have in mind?
2. What are the most pressing needs that I must attend to *in this lesson at this point in time?*

Consider first where the most pressing student needs are and in what specific skill, knowledge, or thinking areas they reside.

Examples:

- Kindergarteners with little literacy at home who struggle learning their letters
- Gifted math students who finish everything in 10 minutes
- A student who never completes anything

Keeping these two questions firmly in thought will bring focus to your planning as you decide what "learning paths" you want to build into your daily teaching.

Learning area	Student need(s) to address	Features to look for in a teaching strategy
Reading comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readers with little literacy in their background • Gifted readers far above grade level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varies level of texts • Focuses on student interests • Integrates learning styles • Uses the arts

As just mentioned, when trying a new strategy that requires more planning, do it in a subject or lesson that you've taught many times.

Strategies I can implement right now: Match learning centers to student learning styles; vary challenge level in reading practice.

Strategies I can expand upon: Vary thinking process involved in math work through more or less challenging applications; tie enrichment activities in social studies to the goals of my unit.

Strategy I'd like to learn about or plan for: Independent study.

What I need to try it: More information on learning contracts; how to organize it so I can supervise and keep track of the process.

BEYOND PLANNING

After we have prepared and planned, we need to look for those unplanned moments and surprises when something new appears—a child has a question that sparks interest in the class; another child finds a creative solution to a math problem. Our plans have made it possible for more children to reach the learning goal of a particular lesson, but the openness of differentiation also allows other things to happen. One of the most important of these is for children to create relationships with their subjects. From their earliest years of life, young children learn by being in a relationship—with their environment, the picture books they've scribbled in, the stuffed animals they've pressed into service for their games, or the box of leftover construction materials they've used and reused to invent new transportation vehicles.

One of the great challenges teachers face today, particularly with the No Child Left Behind Act, is the pressure to “deliver” a prescribed amount of information and skills in a way that can be verified by testing. This means that children have little time to create the relationships that lead to a lifelong passion for learning. Instead, they encounter new worlds of knowledge in the mode of a hurried introduction: “Learn this and move on to the next thing.” While differentiation cannot solve this problem, it can alleviate it by providing more points of entry into a lesson or unit. And because students' interests and learning styles matter, they have more opportunity to bring more of themselves to a journey. You as a teacher can ensure that your children are reaching the goals they need to while at the same time providing the means for many of them to go beyond the planned destination to make discoveries that you had not planned. It is this zone of what can be experienced on a journey that makes teaching exciting and that gives teachers who feel so constrained by the curriculum,