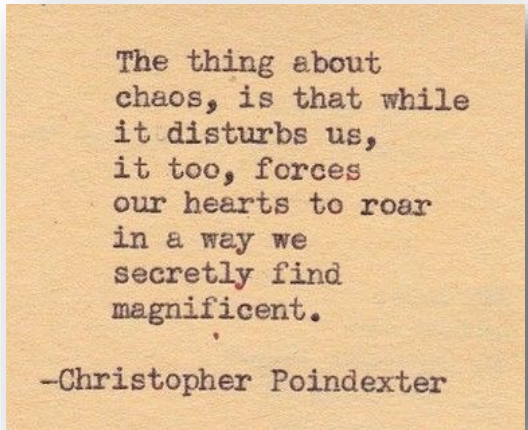


CONNECTIONS

Early Educator Support Office, Monthly Newsletter

In this issue:

- Message from Amanda
- Mentor Minute:
Differentiation
- Collaborator Corner:
Tracy Harrell
- Highlights from the Field
- Mark Your Calendar



I think it is safe to say your hearts have roared in a truly magnificent way in the midst of a kind of chaos like we've never experienced before. Your ability to adjust quickly to new conditions and your capacity to repurpose and envision your role in a different, yet still meaningful and relevant way is a true testament to your commitment and AWESOMENESS! Yeah, I said it– YOU are awesome.

During this pandemic, I've watched an entire team of individuals rally around each other and their cause, to a point where the genius of your adaptability is nothing other than inspiring. You've stepped up and proven yourselves to be the leaders, models, and champs I know you are– you pulled together to develop and deliver presentations from scratch to hundreds of teachers– pushing many of you completely outside of your comfort zone. You've been willing to adapt, not only to swift changes in procedures, but numerous iterations of procedures, all with a smile on your face. You have been exactly who your teachers needed you to be during this uncertain and unsettling time– a listening ear, a system of support, an advocate, tech support, a co-teacher, guest/reader during virtual group time, virtual PLC support, problem solver, resource portal, and above all else, a source of encouragement and empowerment.

You ran with the idea of staying connected and made our series less of a professional development offering and more of a revolution in terms of relationship building and the stance it takes to equalize. You're careful handling of this situation and the support you've provided has lifted our teachers up– allowed them to see their worth, what they have to offer, and to see themselves as part of this important work rather than a passive recipient of a process.

Let's think back to the start of this program year. The following are quotes from the power point that guided our beginning of the year team meeting in Boone:

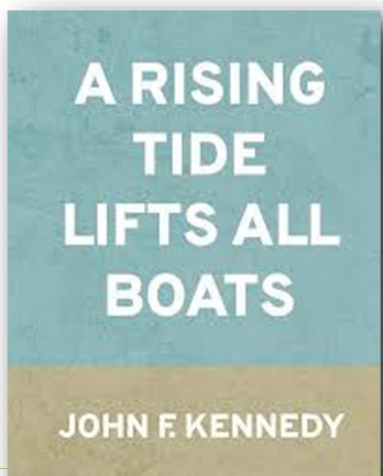
"In the waves of change we find our true direction" - unknown

"We are not here to be a drop, a drip, to make a splash or be a ripple. We're here to make waves in an ocean of infinite possibilities." - Spike Humer

"A rising tide lifts all boats" - John F. Kennedy

I don't think it's necessary to explain the profound lack of irony here. What does need to be shouted from the rooftop is, WE did not disappoint! We adjusted the alignment of our sails, navigated a new course, and made waves that lifted all around us! Thank you for being you– the most incredible team ever.

Amanda



MENTOR MINUTE

Differentiation in Early Childhood Education

Guest Contributor: Kawanna Jackson



“Just because there is a predictable pattern to growth, and a predictable season for blooming, doesn’t mean that every flower on the planet will bloom on the same day. Each flower opens at its own rate within the growing season. Children need to be allowed to bloom in season, just as flowers are. This doesn’t mean we do nothing however. There’s a big difference between feeding the plant and forcing the bloom.” - Amanda Morgan (Morgan, 2015)

What Exactly is Differentiation?

It is every teacher’s desire to support the children in their classroom to reach their full potential and to help them “bloom”. As teachers, we know that children enter the classroom with different background knowledge, experiences and needs. No child is the same. **How do teachers support children in the classroom with their similarities as well as their unique needs?** We can do this through differentiation.



Researchers at the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum define differentiation as a process to approach teaching and learning for children of differing abilities in the same classroom. The idea is to maximize a child’s growth and success by meeting them where they are versus expecting them to adjust themselves to fit a curriculum (Huebner, 2010). “At its most basic level, differentiating instruction means ‘shaking up’ what goes on in the classroom so that children have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn. In other words, a differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each child can learn effectively” (Tomlinson, 2017, pg. 2). Teachers oftentimes don’t feel comfortable with talking about differentiation or only have surface knowledge about it. Meetings or trainings on differentiated instruction often do not provide teachers with enough information to understand how to successfully implement differentiation. Hanayani, H., Tenggilis, J., & Indonesia, S. cite in their research that 83% of teachers nationwide find understanding and implementing differentiation difficult; preferring homogeneous groups of children. Furthermore, 77% of teachers responded that when grouping children by different abilities, advanced children are at a disadvantage (2017).

In the *NC Teaching Standards Rubric*, Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Young Children; in the first indicator (IV-a), the expectation of a proficient teacher is that teachers “understand developmental levels of young children and appropriately differentiate instruction.” In actuality, many teachers may not have a clear understanding of what differentiation means or what it looks like in early childhood education. **How do we then help teachers better understand differentiation?**



“When a teacher tries to teach something to the entire class at the same time, chances are, one-third of the kids already know it, one third of the kids will get it, and the remaining third won’t. So, two-thirds of the children are wasting their time.” Lillian Katz (as cited by Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1993)

(photo courtesy of Western Illinois University)

What Does Differentiation Look Like In Pre-K?



In a quality Pre-K classroom, a teacher subtly differentiates instruction, and with continuous practice it becomes second nature. There are many things a teacher can do in a developmentally appropriate Pre-K environment to differentiate instruction. A teacher can carefully choose materials to fit children's needs and developmental levels. When interacting with the children, she may adjust how she speaks or the kinds of questions she asks. The teacher may model based on the uniqueness of the group of children. There may be an adjustment made to a lesson for a large group based on the children's level of understanding that can fulfill the overall goal. The environment is playful, learning is not forced; it follows the children's interests and needs and is filled with intentionality, respect and needed modifications. This is differentiation in a Pre-K classroom. (McDonald, 2018)

Differentiation versus Individualization



Early childhood educators many times have a section for Differentiation and Individualization on their lesson plans. These terms are often used interchangeably when teachers are planning lessons to support the different needs of children in their class. What is the difference between differentiation and individualization? Simply put, differentiation focuses on supporting groups of children while individualization focuses on supporting the needs of an individual child. Below is a chart that points out what teachers do when differentiating versus what they do when individualizing instruction.

Differentiation	Individualization
<ul style="list-style-type: none">adjusts needs for groups of childrenuses the same learning objective for different groups as for whole classcreates instruction based on needs of groups (small and large group, and sometimes for individual)uses multiple avenues of learningplans for varied approaches to content,	<ul style="list-style-type: none">plans to accommodate learning for individualsplans specific objectives for individual childrenadapts learning based on needs of individual childrenmakes modifications to instruction based on individual needs of children

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In order to support differentiated classroom practices:

- Practices may look different based on children's needs, knowledge or interests.
- Focus on the main ideas and skills of the content area.
- Respond to children's different learning styles, interests, knowledge, etc.
- Be flexible in grouping children based by shared interest, topic, or ability.
- These should change over time.
- Incorporate ongoing and meaningful assessments along with instruction.
- Have ongoing assessment, reflection, and adjustments to the content, process, and product to support children's needs.

(Huebner, 2010)

For more information on differentiation, [click here](#) for Standard IV – Module

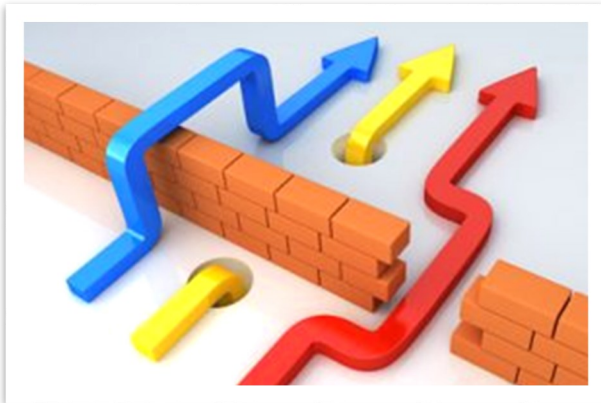
Strategies for Supporting Teachers



- ◆ Observe and get to know your children (their interests, readiness and learning styles)
- ◆ Use your assessment data (formal and informal), to know where to start instruction and where support is needed.
- ◆ Use the developmental indicators found in Foundations to see where children fall and next steps for their learning.
- ◆ Utilize Foundations for suggested strategies (You do not have to reinvent the wheel!).
- ◆ Provide a variety of materials (open-ended, variety of levels, based on children's interests).
- ◆ Provide a variety of options for how children can demonstrate their knowledge and what they are learning.
- ◆ Plan flexible grouping with children of different abilities. Remember that children do not need to stay in their tiered group all year! They will move as you monitor their abilities throughout the year.
- ◆ Collaborate with other teachers to gain knowledge and understanding of differentiation.

"Excellence in education is when we do everything that we can to make sure they become everything that they can."

-Carol Ann Tomlinson

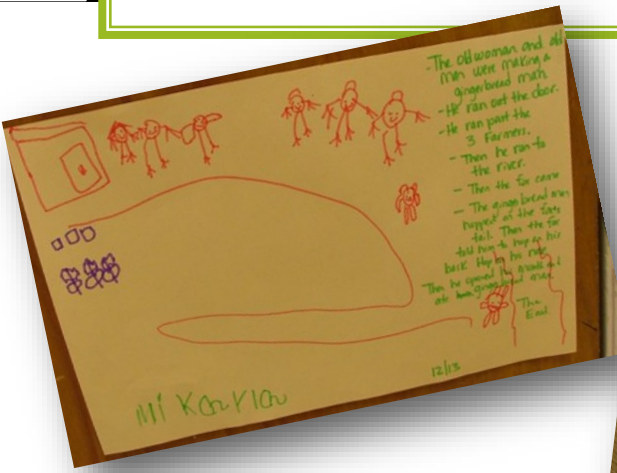


Guiding questions to support teachers as they think about differentiation and planning:

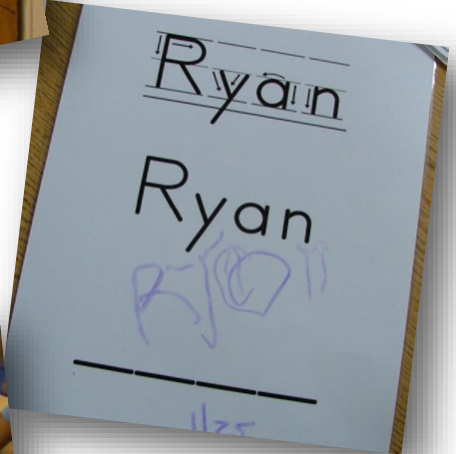
- What does your assessment data (formal and informal) tell you about your class? (in literacy, math, etc.)
- What is the learning goal/objective of your assignment or your particular teaching component? (whole group, small group, story-time, music)
- How could you modify the content/process/product to support children in?
- How can children show you that they have learned a skill or met the learning objective?
- How can you create tiers to support different groups in your class?
- What are the interests of the children in your classroom? How can you use this information to support learning objectives?
- How can your curriculum be modified to meet the needs of your children (same objective but different process)?

See it in Action!

The teacher planned a lesson on the Gingerbread Man and placed blank books in the writing area for children to create their own story of the Gingerbread Man. Children did not seem interested and she decided to tweak her lesson and introduce the idea of a story map for children to retell the story that was successful.



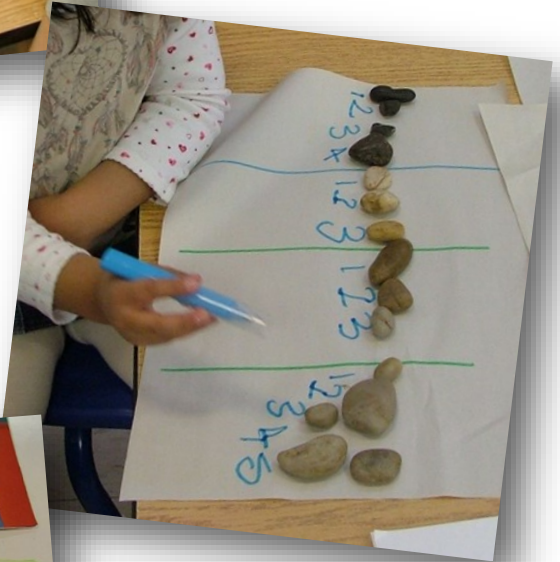
As part of morning routine, children wrote their name each morning. The teacher provided different levels of support for each child to be successful.



Board games were very popular in this classroom. Children worked together in small groups of different abilities supporting one another in their learning.



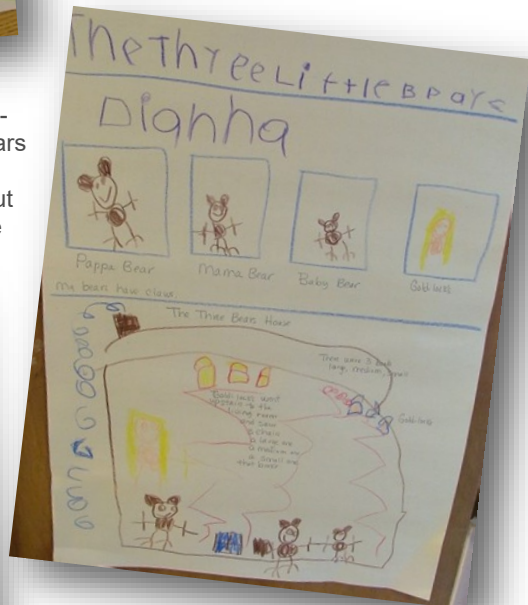
The teacher used rocks for a graphing activity in the classroom. Children participated in the sorting activity of sorting. Children worked in small groups or pairs.



Two of the children in the classroom seldom visited the art area to draw. The teacher introduced a dry erase board and placed a book about trucks nearby to encourage the children to draw.



The teacher planned various ways for children to revisit and share their understanding of the Three Bears (some children drew pictures of just the characters, others a detailed story (photo) while others acted out the story using props). Each child was able to share the story with the teacher in different ways.



Children were able to use their name card for support in writing their name on their art work if needed.





COLLABORATOR CORNER



As you enter Randleman Child Development Center (REC) and are welcomed by a live floral arrangement, you know that someone has intentionally created a learning environment that embraces the calming beauty of nature. Angela Wilson introduces us to Tracy Harrell, Owner/Operator of REC, who has put great thought into designing and establishing a visually stimulating facility that promotes an appreciation of nature and its calming effects. She helps to remind the children and their families of the beauty and wonder of nature.

Ms. Harrell has been in the Early Childhood field and worked with the Early Educator Support Office (formally EESLPD/TLU) for 12 years. Ms. Harrell shares she really appreciates “the support that the

Early Educator Support Office provides for my center and my teachers. Ms. Harrell’s favorite children’s book is *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss. “It is a great book to get the children excited about reading. They are always so engaged when it is being read.” Ms. Harrell’s favorite quote is, “It’s not about being the best. It’s about being better than you were yesterday.” “I try to remind myself that no matter what happened today there is always tomorrow to start over and improve. Every day in early education is an adventure.” Something that you may not know about Ms. Harrell is that she and her family live on a farm where they enjoy raising horses. Congratulations Ms. Harrell on being our “Collaborator of the Month”!



Highlights from the Field

Angela Wilson shares highlights from one of her teachers. Young children learn best when they have concrete materials to explore in relevant contexts. In a classroom that I visited recently, Ms. K. was actively encouraging her children to interact with authentic materials in ways that were meaningful to them, and deepened their understanding of the Tree Study. During center play, she moved about the classroom to facilitate learning by gently scaffolding play for her children. I watched as a little boy tried to create geometric shapes by using real tree parts. The teacher noticed that he was struggling to make an equilateral triangle, and walked over to offer her assistance. She helped him to see that all three sides of the triangle were the same length, and encouraged him to find three sticks that were the same length. She insured his success by providing the materials, support, and time that he needed to explore his theory.

Ms. K. promoted interest in thematic play by highlighting center activities during morning group time. The children took turns reflecting on their play from the previous day, and how they could use the materials in different ways that morning. It was interesting to see children operate in teams to share their thoughts; often times, one child would start a sentence, and another child would finish it. Clearly, they were connected in their play. Children were not only assessing and reflecting on their own play, but sharing new ideas with their classmates, while demonstrating social competency. Various thematic activities and materials were thoughtfully planned and implemented around the classroom.

One of Ms. K.’s particular strengths is the ability to provide individualized instruction for her children. Special efforts were made to support dual language learners and children with special needs. The teacher says that she takes note of the children’s interests, and plans activities that derive from them. She cleverly embeds their interests into the current study whenever possible, and has occasionally provided individual children with a separate container of educational materials that are specifically chosen to support that particular child’s interests. She integrates social skill development for those children by encouraging them to invite a friend or two to play with them and their toy box. This teacher intentionally and systematically provides open-ended materials and ample time for exploration, discovery, and investigation in her classroom.

Highlights from the field continued-



Photo 1: Do you need four sticks to make a triangle? Ms. K. encouraged children to use twigs and sticks to create a triangle.



Photo 2: Ms. K. encourages collaborative play in her classroom to build a sense of classroom community.



Photo 3: Ms. K. provides individualized attention that validates children, promotes their self-esteem and supports their next steps in learning.

Useful and Relevant Resources/ References



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Looking Ahead

Mark Your Calendar

May

- TPOT (registered staff only) May 6-7
- TPOT (registered staff only) May 19-20
- End of Year PDPs should be completed and locked for ALL teachers by Friday, May 29th
- Informal Performance Review should be typed into the PDP evaluator comment box and Observation Scoring Summary attached for ALL teachers by Friday, May 29th

May 2020

<u>SUNDAY</u>	MON- DAY	TUES- DAY	WEDN ESDAY	THURS- DAY	FRIDAY	SATUR- DAY
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6 TPOT	7 TPOT	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19 TPOT	20 TPOT	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29 ** Year- end wrap up	30
31	1	Notes				