

# Six Strategies for 21st Century Early Childhood Teachers



It's no secret that the face of education has changed dramatically over the past ten years or so. Teachers across the country are working hard to equip children with the skills needed for success in the 21st century world. In addition to instilling in students the flexibility to readily adapt to changing technologies, teachers must foster learning environments that encourage critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, global awareness, and social responsibility. Listed below are six strategies early childhood teachers are currently using in classrooms to prepare kids for the boundless future ahead.

## FEATURED PROGRAMS

SPONSORED LISTINGS

### SCHOOL

**Rasmussen College**

### PROGRAM

- Early Childhood Education (ECE) Certificate or Diploma
- Associate's in ECE or Child Development
- Bachelor's completion program in ECE Leadership

### MORE INFO

**Request Information**  
([http://degrees.rasmussen.edu/ece?utm\\_source=l-XYZMedia&utm\\_medium=affiliate&utm\\_ccXYZMedia&utm\\_campaign=EarlyChildhoo](http://degrees.rasmussen.edu/ece?utm_source=l-XYZMedia&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_ccXYZMedia&utm_campaign=EarlyChildhoo))

**Capella University**

Online Master's in Early Childhood Education

**Request Information**  
(<https://ad.doubleclick.net/ddm/clk/30047https://www.capella.edu/lp/education/?revkey=228074&channel=ag&subaffilid=blstrategies-for-21st-century-early-childhood-teachers>)

## 1) INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

Today's youngsters were born in the age of the Internet. Many are more technologically savvy than the adults assigned the task of teaching them. To connect with these kids, teachers must learn to speak their language and become conversant with the technology that comes so naturally to the young. Integrating technology means tapping into students' interests and strengthening their technical skills, all while providing enriching learning opportunities. As with any new development, many teachers, eager to keep up with the latest fashion, simply go through the motions of integrating technology. However, if they are to succeed with it, they need more than the motions – they need a deep understanding of the tools available, as well as meaningful reflection about how to use them to enhance learning. In addition, the increased connectivity that accompanies this technology makes it vital that teachers stress the importance of Internet safety. NetSmartzKids (<http://www.netsmartzkids.org>),

an interactive website of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, teaches kids to use the Internet responsibly. Also, be sure to check out **ECE Technology: 10 Trending Tools for Teachers** (<https://www.earlychildhoodteacher.org/blog/ece-technology-10-trending-tools-for-teachers/>), which outlines many innovative tools that can enhance student learning.

## 2) COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRUCTURES

Teacher-centered instruction has had its day. Effective teachers are increasingly using a student-centered approach. Cooperative learning sparks engagement in classrooms by encouraging interaction among the students themselves. The teacher, rather than calling on one student at a time, allows children to discuss class materials with buddies or in groups, thus maximizing the level of participation. The students work just as hard as the teachers. No longer a one-man show, the teacher's role becomes that of a facilitator instead. This, in turn, leads to higher achievement, while promoting both team and class building. Kagan Cooperative Learning ([http://www.kaganonline.com/catalog/cooperative\\_learning.php](http://www.kaganonline.com/catalog/cooperative_learning.php)) developed over 200 practical, easy-to-implement instructional strategies, or "structures," that turn classrooms into lively scenes of both movement and stimulating discussion. Laura Candler's Cooperative Learning Resources (<http://www.lauracandler.com/strategies/co-op.php>) features a variety of activity sheets and blackline masters for teachers, useful for accountability during cooperative learning.

## 3) DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Teachers can tailor learning experiences to differentiate among the individual needs of students in the classroom. There are three main learning styles: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Cognitive Learning Styles of Children ([http://www.ehow.com/list\\_6399311\\_cognitive-learning-styles-children.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_6399311_cognitive-learning-styles-children.html)) describes the characteristics of these learners as well as the types of activities in which they best thrive, with the caveat that it is only *learning styles* being described, to be distinguished from *cognitive styles* (holistic, analytic, field-dependent, etc.). Teachers can also differentiate by matching assignments to readiness levels, offering appropriate intervention or extension activities as required. Allowing children to select activities based on areas of interest is another great way to differentiate. Offering choices is an excellent motivator for kids. Small-group work is one of the most effective ways to meet the needs of diverse learners in large class settings. Differentiation Central (<http://www.diffcentral.com/model.html>) offers insightful information, as well as a short video of educator, author and speaker Carol Ann Tomlinson sharing her experiences and views about classroom differentiation.

## 4) GOAL SETTING

Involving children in the goal-setting process is an excellent way to encourage them to take ownership of their learning. In the early stages, goal setting needs to be done in a very clear and simplistic way – for example, frequent two-way conversations with children about their progress in specific areas. Teachers can further facilitate goal setting through the use of organizers, anchor charts and similar aids. Free Printable Behavior Charts ([http://www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com/goal\\_setting\\_charts.htm](http://www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com/goal_setting_charts.htm)) provides models of personal charts for early learners. Teaching and Tapas (<http://www.teachingandtapas.com/2013/03/anchor-charts-reading-and-writing-goals.html>) shares a class's goal charts geared specifically towards reading and writing. K-5 Math Teaching Resources (<http://www.k-5mathteachingresources.com/ECAM.html>) shows a selection of goal charts for math instruction. In general, helping children reach their goals calls for teachers to provide specific, frequent feedback as well as ample time for self-reflection.

## 5) CROSS-CURRICULUM TEACHING


In contrast to the traditional teaching of subjects in isolation, teaching multiple subjects simultaneously can help students go much deeper in learning concepts and skills. Naturally, this approach asks more from the teacher. It can be easy to blend math, science, or social studies content with reading or writing. However, it is more challenging to combine all the subjects at once. Here are some of the major approaches to simultaneous learning. Project-based learning involves children carrying out a project that ends up with a concrete result of some kind. Problem-based learning asks the teacher to guide children in developing solutions to real-world problems. In inquiry-based learning, children generate their own questions according to their curiosities or interests, which they then investigate. These methods work so well because teachers don't simply tell students what they should know, but instead they engage children in exploring and uncovering the information in a more meaningful way in which all the subjects come into play together. Check out this video ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_eyuchMifto](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eyuchMifto)) of a group of five-year-olds participating in project-based learning at Auburn Early Education Center. These methods are not only fun, they are highly motivating for children and encourage collaboration, as well.

## 6) ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Assessment for Learning, or Formative Assessment, is a data-gathering process used by teachers to help them customize instruction to match students' needs. Summative assessments don't always give a clear picture of what a student knows. Also, by the time the data is gathered, it's already too late! The teacher is already moving to the next objective, leaving many students behind who haven't fully grasped the previous content yet. To prevent this problem, teachers can monitor how the children are learning as they teach, using observations, questioning strategies, class discussions, exit tickets, learning logs, peer assessments, self-assessments, and slate work, among other methods. Teachers can gauge the progress of individuals, groups, or the whole class, and they can adjust the process by supporting or challenging students as

needed. The article *What is Assessment for Learning?* (<http://electronicportfolios.org/afl/Davies%26LeMahieu.pdf>) provides additional insight into this technique. These ongoing assessments allow teachers to keep their fingers on the pulse of the classroom to ensure that students are learning.

---

**"To connect with these kids, teachers must learn to speak their language and become conversant with the technology that comes so naturally to the young."** 

---

#### **ABOUT AUTHOR:**

**BEVIN REINEN ([HTTPS://WWW.EARLYCHILDHOODTEACHER.ORG/AUTHOR/BEVIN-REINEN/](https://www.earlychildhoodteacher.org/author/bevin-reinen/))**

Bevin Kateri Reinen, a teacher and writer from Virginia Beach, holds a bachelor's degree in English from Mary Washington College as well as a master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Old Dominion University. Bevin has been committed to the field of education for ten years and is the 2015 Virginia Beach City Public Schools City-Wide Teacher of the Year. She is the founder of Teach.Train.Love. (<http://teachtrainlove.com/>), an educational blog for parents and teachers focused on promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of the early childhood learner.