

Pillar 5. Respecting individual differences

Key points

- Sensitivity to individual differences goes to the heart of DAP
- There are many important sources of differences between children. Among the most important are
 - ability,
 - relative age,
 - gender,
 - oral language skills,
 - attention and memory skills,
 - temperament,
 - attitudes to learning, and
 - home culture.
- Sensitivity to individual differences cannot be engaged unless the above attributes are observed and considered carefully. In addition
 - be aware that children with multiple sources of disadvantage will be at strong risk for failure; and
 - Remember that good record-keeping ensures that observations on individuals are not forgotten.
- While children will always do better in some curriculum areas than in others, the aim should be to make all children as well-rounded as possible.
 - Encourage children to work on skills at which they are weak, as well as praising them for using skills at which they are strong.
 - Look for ways to motivate individual children effectively.
 - Try to ensure that the same children don't just play with the same resources all the time.

Deficient attention and memory skills will hold a child back in both the short and long term. Address such deficits promptly with memory games and rehearsal exercises.

For example, young for year group boys in a high deprivation area are disadvantaged in three ways

Post-its are very useful for recording short observations for later filing.

Some children are more people-oriented than others for example. The child's own interests are a strong indication of what will initially motivate them. Then, having got them interested, they may be more receptive to broadening their activities.

Remember that ability is still **very** malleable at this age and avoid putting children of similar ability always together.

Make an effort to learn something about the cultural background and home context of all the children and encourage them to talk about these things.

This will be easier if you try to praise for effort rather than achievement.

For example, boys who like to stay on the computer all the time

QLI indicators of success

- *Confidence*: Children show evidence of being aware that their contribution will be valued.
- *Respect*: Children treat other people, including their peers, and resources with respect. Adults treat children with respect, never showing contempt or dislike, even when they are angry or disapproving.
- *Motivation*: Children address their work with enthusiasm in a variety of different contexts.

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Cameo 1. Literacy task time: Sentence on a stick

A small group in a Year 1 class

The children are already familiar with the story.

This is quite structured reading work but formality is not evident; it's a fun session.

The puppet and hiding their eyes turns what could have been a dull task into a game.

She gives the child enough time to work it out but not enough for him to get stressed and then turns it into a shared reference to popular culture, thus directing attention to the fact that adults may need help too.

Differentiation is supplied for children who would be expected to find the task harder.

The teacher, Miss James, reads through a previously read story with a group of six children. The reading is interactive with the group. Miss James acts the parts in the story with gusto and invites the children to join in with refrains or she makes a mistake or pretends to stop and not know a word occasionally and models working it out. The children join in with obvious enthusiasm. Then Miss James takes a sentence stick with one of the sentences from the story on it and reads it through carefully twice, touching each word as she reads. She explains that Patch Puppet is going to hide one of the words while they cover their eyes and she will ask each child in turn to guess which word it is. The children are almost out of their seats with excitement. The first three children answer easily. The fourth boy, Oliver, pauses. After waiting a little to give him time to think, the teacher says, "Does he need to phone a friend?" The children all laugh, including Oliver. "Who can help with the beginning sound of the word?" asks the teacher and another boy answers. Oliver still cannot guess the word so she allows someone else to do so. The last two children get easier words from the sentence to guess. Finally, she comes back to Oliver and gives him 'the' to try. He answers successfully.

The read-through is an interactive and fun process.

The teacher shows that she can make a mistake too and it's not a major problem. She models struggling with difficult words and finally getting them right.

The teacher understands the importance of repetition, even though the sentence is quite short. Young children's short-term memory skills are not as good as those of adults.

She gets another child to supply the scaffolding.

The boy finishes on a note of success.

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Cameo 2. Literacy task time: Phonics session

Group in a Year 2 class

Notice that although this is a structured session, it not formal or dry.

The teacher validates the first answer, even though it wasn't the one she wanted.

The teacher knows that it is little use continuing until all the children are securely engaged.

The pace of the lesson is quite slow but it is appropriate for these children, who remain highly interested and interactive.

The teacher later says that Paul had made very little progress until recently. He has just begun to pick up the pace. She believes that he needed this special recognition of his effort in the session to help secure his motivation for the future.

The group of eight children have only recently begun phonics. They are working on CVC words. The teacher reminds them of what they learned in the last lesson. Then she puts up a picture of a policeman's hat with three letter boxes/locations marked underneath and asks what it is. "It's a hat," says one boy, Seamus. "Yes, and it's a special kind of hat," she replies. "Does anyone know what it is?" "A cap," says another boy. The teacher demonstrates "stretching the word out", accompanied by a gesture starting with knuckles touching and pulling them apart. The group copies her but she is not satisfied that everyone has done it properly and asks them to do it again. "I need good listening," she says. They all comply this time. "What is the starting sound?" she asks. The children are all eager to answer, except one boy who seems sleepy. "Are you still feeling not well Joseph?" she asks him. He agrees and she asks him if he wants to sit up beside her. The lesson continues with the children showing good engagement; even the sick child tries to join in. "When she asks a harder question and an older-looking boy answers, the teacher turns to the rest of the class and the classroom assistant. "Mrs May, there is someone here who is showing really good listening today and it's Paul Cleery." Paul looks extremely pleased at this very pointed public praise. The lesson continues for 20 minutes with the teacher using links to the children's own experience and the humour of mispronounced words to help keep the interest going.

Links are made to the previous phonics session.

The teacher knows the importance of the physical gesture to support the mental process.

The teacher shows warm concern and has already asked Joseph's mother to come and collect him but in the meantime, her proximity is comforting.

The teacher uses any tool she can to keep the children on task.