

**AIAN Education Manager Webinar Series**  
**Individualization: Strategies for Teaching Children with Special Needs**

Dawn Williams: So let's get started today. We are focusing on individualization, strategies for teaching children with special needs. We have a special guest here with us today. It's Kristin Ainslie. She is a curriculum specialist here at NCQTL as well and has a wealth of experience in the field of individualization but also being a preschool teacher and is just really great when it comes to talking about this topic. Vanessa, who is usually here, isn't with us today, but that is because Kristin has some great expertise around individualization.

Oh, yes. Hi, that's me. That's Dawn. That was me talking, and those are my two little girls. And I'll have Susan go ahead and say hello as well.

Susan Stewart: Welcome, everybody. And just as a reminder, if you want to communicate with us in any way, go ahead and put that in chat, and if there's a technical problem, I'll see what I can do to help you out. And otherwise, throw out some questions, and we can share those with Kristin and be sure that you get your needs met.

Dawn: So I'm going to hand it over to her to get us started.

Kristin Ainslie: All right. Hi, everybody. I'm Kristin Ainslie, and I work here with Dawn Williams at National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning. And I'm really excited to talk about this topic today. It's truly one of my passions, is talking about children with special needs and children with disabilities. My background is in early childhood special education, and I also worked with Head Start, I've worked in developmental preschools, and so now I'm at NCQTL and I do a lot of writing on and presenting on children with special needs and how to individualize really for all children, and especially for children who need some extra support, which we'll be getting into. Here's a picture of me with my kiddos here celebrating fall in sunny Washington. We did have a lot of sun last weekend, so that's where this was.

So today we're just going to very briefly talk about some of the elements that make a high-quality preschool program. We're going to look at just a very few of those. When we really think about putting in supports for children with special needs and children who need some extra learning, we really need to first make sure that we do have a really strong foundation before we do that. And so we're just going to briefly talk about some ways that programs and teachers can look at the foundation of their program first. And then we're going to talk about some individualized teaching strategies. I'm going to talk about some curriculum modifications that can be put in for children. And then I'm going to talk about, throughout the presentation, the importance of planning. And so everything that we talk about today is just really about being so planful about what it is that each individual child really needs in order to be the most successful that they can be.

So this slide here shows, of course, on the right, the NCQTL House framework. We are going to just briefly speak about engaging interactions and environment and making sure we have a strong foundation. I won't be speaking about the pillars today, the research-based curricula and teaching practices or ongoing child assessment, although there's lots of information on those as well. But I will be up on the roof today. We're going to go up into the roof and to really talk about highly individualized teaching and learning.

And so just briefly on the foundation, there are lots of ways to think about and to—instruments of evaluating programs, foundational pieces, and best practices in the foundation, and I'm just going to go through three items today just to give you an idea. A lot of these resources I will give you at the end. There's a resource on the Head Start Center for Inclusion, which is [headstartinclusion.org](http://headstartinclusion.org). And again, you will get that at the end written down, so you don't have to write that down at the moment. But there's a lot of resources, a whole list of ways, and sort of 10 questions that a program could dig deeper into their foundation and seeing what's going on. I'm just going to go over three of them today.

So one of the elements to look for in a strong foundation are, really, do children spend most of their time playing with materials or with other children? So this means really, are they playing, are they engaged with other kids and materials and fun activities rather than waiting, rather than transitioning, rather than spending time waiting for materials to be put out for them, that type of thing. Another thing to look at are, are children learning within meaningful and relevant contexts to their own lives? So are they learning things that are meaningful to them and who they are as children and their cultures and really where they are as a family? And just thinking about this, just because it's fall in Seattle or wherever we are, just because it's fall, do we need to learn about squirrels or acorns or leaves, that sort of beginning-of-the-school topics, really thinking about what do these children—you know, what's really relevant to them. Another one to look at is, are we planning for children who are ahead, who are advanced in development, as well as children who need a little more support? So when we plan our activities, is there a way that we can add on or enrich the activity a bit for children who come into our programs already knowing their numbers or letters or writing their name, maybe they're even writing sentences, and what extra can we add on to an activity? And are we making sure that we are planning for children who come in and immediately need some more support?

So some more things to consider with classroom quality before we put in some individualized supports for children is social membership: Are we taking time throughout the day to really support children's friendships? And are activities around creating social membership, does everybody feel as though they're a member of the classroom? Are we looking at the room arrangement? So what does—when a child walks into the room, what kinds of stories are they—do they see at the—you know, what kinds of stories does the classroom tell them? So in dramatic play, are there lots of things for them to do? Does the room arrangement show children where to play? Are there not a lot of wide-open spaces for running, and are there boundaries so that they can see each other and teachers can see children? The daily schedule: is it predictable? Does it show children pretty much what they're going to be doing throughout the day, every day? Have we looked at transitions? So are we trying to eliminate transitions that maybe aren't necessary for children and seeing how we can manage with fewer transitions in our day? And have we looked at our staff zoning and scheduling? Have we organized our staff so that everyone knows what to do when maybe there's just two staff members in the room? Are they real clear on what to do? And when there's a third staff member or even a parent volunteer, do we know where everybody needs to be?

Okay. So that was just again brief the foundation, and more of this can be found on Head Start's Center for Inclusion. So we are going to now talk about highly individualized teaching and learning. So during this, we're going to just—one thing I also, before we take a little poll here, I would love it if you all had a piece of scratch paper near by you. I wanted to mention that at the beginning. Because there's going to be a couple things throughout this that I want you to think about. We're going to be thinking about individual children and some supports that might already be in place. But go ahead and have that.

All right. So we're going to take a quick poll. And I'm going to do that right here. So here's our question today that I'd love to see sort of you weigh in on, is what percentage of children in your program need more individualization than what the foundation provides? Right? So do you think maybe 1-25% of the children, 26-50, 51-75, or 76-100? So I'll give you a moment to go ahead and chime in on that poll.

Susan: Wow, you guys are quick today. Over half of you have already voted. And so we'll leave it open for another moment or so so that we can get your input. All right, I'm going to go ahead and close that poll so we can see those results. Well, goodness gracious. I would say that 54% of those responding said 26-50% of their children need more individualization than what the foundation provides. And then that shows 1-25%, and then 15% said 51-75.

Kristin: Wow, that's really fascinating. I'm really glad that we're doing this and talking about this and that we can even follow up with more. That's really amazing, and I'm just—I'm thrilled you're all here today to learn about some strategies for teachers.

All right. Get here back on my PowerPoint. So again, we're up in the roof. This is where we really have distinguished our teaching practices from individualizing for all children to individualizing for children who need more, children who need more intensive strategies than are found in the foundation. And again, this is—again, we're always individualizing, but this really is extra support: more intensive, more planful, more targeted.

So the thing to think about with children, of course, and individualizing and in programs, is that one size does not fit all. And really, some children need increased access: more access, more ways to participate, more access to materials, access to engaging learning activities so that they—so we can really enhance their participation. Some children need lots and lots and lots of practice to show us what they've learned. Some children need more frequent opportunities during the day to practice than other children might. They might need just more than one opportunity if there's a child who's learning to identify their name. Maybe 10 times a day is really what some of my professors had recommended, 10 times a day that a child could maybe be able to identify their name. So just more opportunities. More salient and clear instruction. So instead of maybe having a group activity where an instruction is given, maybe it's an individual one-on-one that's already planned out for a child. More support: either more visual support, more adult support. More support needed, and again, this is all planned out in advance. And more challenge. Let's again think about the variety of children that we will be talking about in the roof. And some children really do need more of a challenge, more enhanced opportunities to show us what they know and to be really supported to go a little bit beyond and a little bit more.

So we—you know, to know where to start, it's truly about focusing on the child. So we have children who possibly are not making enough progress, children who, again, are advanced in their development, children with special needs. There could be lots of children who come in either with diagnosed special needs or special needs that have not been diagnosed yet and they're possibly in the process of having that happen for them. Children with challenging behavior, and not just once in a while, as all preschoolers have challenging behavior, but that this is children with prolonged bouts of challenging behavior that really need plans created for them. And children who are learning a dual—who are dual language learners also can really benefit from some of the strategies that we will be talking about and some really planned opportunities for them to be able to learn in their own language as well as another language.

So here's our first what we're going to call a scratch paper activity. So if you have your paper handy, and if you could just take a moment and think about a child who is struggling to participate in activities. And thinking about the poll that we just saw, it looks like there's a few possibly children that may come to mind, but let's just focus on one child for this presentation here. So think about a child who is struggling to participate in activities. Take just a moment to jot that down.

So I'm going to take you through a worksheet that is available for teachers to work through. And again, a lot of—I used to work with the grants of the Head Start Center for Inclusion, so I have a lot of the materials right at hand. And this is a really wonderful worksheet. It's called the Child Assessment Worksheet. And as you can see, the child here of focus is a little girl named Erika. Her teacher is Ms. Janet. And one thing that—the first thing that the classroom would do on this worksheet is to fill in on the left-hand side of the worksheet the daily schedule. So this classroom chose not to put transitions—write transitions down, but that's something that you could also write down. But their daily schedule, they had opening circle, small group, outside time, lunch time, center time, songs and word play, and closing circle.

And then in the second column—we're just right now looking at the opening circle section, but on the second column, we have the classroom expectations. So Ms. Janet and her team wrote down the expectations that they had for the entire class. So not just for Erika at this point, but for the whole class. And these expectations could be completely different for your program. It really is up to you. So that would be, the expectations for this class is that children sit on their mats, they participate in the opening circle activities, they have their eyes on the teacher, and they raise their hand before talking. So in the third column it says "Child's Level of Performance." And so Ms. Janet rated Erika on how she did during these activities. So during circle time, this is an area of concern for Erika. She bounced around a lot, she popped into the middle of the circle, would pop out of the circle quite a bit. For these classroom expectations, she needed a lot of support.

During another segment of her day, during outside time was a strength for Erika. So their expectations were that children explore the playground, share materials, play safe games. And for Erika, this was a huge strength for her. She loved outside time, she played with kids, she was sharing, she played safe games. So this was really something nice for the teachers to see, that, wow, during this time we can really interact with her and be just as supportive and positive with Erika as we can be. And during lunch time for Erika, the expectations were, for the whole class, were for children to sit at the table, have conversations, and pass food when asked. And for Erika, with these expectations she was pretty average. So some days she needed a little help, some days she didn't. So this is a worksheet, again, you can find on Head Start Center for Inclusion, and you can fill this out.

And one sort of hidden gem of this activity is that when teachers actually really get together as a team and write out their classroom expectations together, they might find that they have different expectations from teacher to teacher, and getting them on paper really helps. And it also really helps to know where a child's strengths are during the day. Because sometimes if you are thinking about a child and you think, "Oh my gosh, they need help through the entire day. This is overwhelming. I don't know where to begin." Well, if we might do this with certain children, we might think, "Wait a minute, there's three times during the day when they are fantastic, they know what to do." And really to focus on those times of the day to them, to really shower them with as much positive attention as possible.

All right, so you will see this slide throughout our presentation, because I just want to reiterate that, again, we're in the roof, and there's planning that happens at every level, in the foundation level as well

of course, but in the roof, all of the supports that we'll talk about are planned out in advance. So what are we going to say? When are we going to introduce this support to this child? How are we going to introduce it? What are we going to do if the child doesn't know how to do it right away? So all of those are planned out in advance.

So I really like this visual: teach, assess, adjust. And this just—I like to put it up—have teachers put it up on their walls even, because it really does show the whole kind of linked system between what we're teaching, right? We want to teach them meaningful—say it's a learning objective that they need some more support on, or possibly an IEP objective. We're going to assess how they're doing, and then we're going to immediately adjust our teaching and then go right back into teaching again. So I think this is just a really nice visual to keep on hand.

So here, our second kind of portion of our scratch paper activity. So you thought about a child who needs some support, who is struggling to participate. And now just jot down a couple simple strategies that have been put into place already to support that child. I'll give you just a few seconds to do that.

All right. So we'll keep continuing. All right, so curriculum modifications. And curriculum modifications are essentially just making a change to the environment, to an ongoing classroom activity, or to materials in order to facilitate or maximize a child's participation in planned activities, in interactions, and in routines. And there's a great book called "Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs," and it's by Dr. Sandall and Dr. Schwartz. And I highly recommend this book if you have it or if you want to get it for your programs. It just shows just example after example of how to support children with curriculum modifications, and we're going to go through some of these today.

So the great thing about curriculum modifications are, again, it's just a change to the environment or change to materials to help support a child's participation. Curriculum modifications are simple, right, but they're very intentional. So they're easy to implement. They should not be too much work. Oftentimes they take no additional resources, so there's nothing truly expensive that needs to happen or purchased for these modifications. And you can use more than one modification. And the thing about is you're probably doing it already. So a lot of times as teachers we try this, we try this, what if this works, let's try this. And that's what we want teachers to be doing all the time, is trying things here and there that could support children. And then finding something and being really intentional about it is the essence of a curriculum modification.

So here's our last part of this activity. So we've thought of a child who's struggling to participate. We thought of some simple strategies that have been put into place to support that child. And now, which strategies have already been successful for this child? So what has been tried that has really worked for a child? Or possibly, not yet. We could be there, and that's just fine. We could have tried lots of different things that aren't quite working for this child yet. And it's our job as teachers to really find what works. It's not the child's job to try to meet our expectations, but it's really our job as teachers and as ed managers to help support the child and find that perfect gem that's going to help them.

So you don't need to remember these, but there are eight types of curriculum modifications. And there's environmental support, materials adaptation, simplifying the activity for a child, using child preference, using special equipment, providing adult support, providing peer support, and invisible support. So let's see some examples of some of these.

So for environmental support, environmental support is making a change to the activity to support children's learning. And so... and really their participation. So this picture shows an environmental support. A lot of teachers already do this, to have maybe circle time mats that are set out and names that are already pre—sort of arranged for children where to sit. So, as you can see, the little girl in the middle in the striped shirt, she's sitting between two boys. So this little girl has a lot of trouble at circle participating, so she's placed between two boys who really are great at circle. They are really strong children to follow the directions and to do the actions of the song, and they participate. So this teacher has put her name between these two boys as a modification.

Here's a visual modification. So this is for a particular child that just goes right on their desk, right on their table that they usually sit at. Just some reminders: when I'm all done, I can stay at the table and I can either read a book or I can pick a toy from the All Done bucket. Here's a picture of an All Done bucket, and this is a really great modification for those kids who maybe spend just a couple seconds at the table and then they're done. And so to really help children—really help to increase the time that a child might be sitting at a table—usually we want them to be engaged in activities that we've planned out for them—we've created an All Done bucket. So in this bucket—this one looks a little too full, in my opinion, but—you could have just a Ziploc bag full of little puzzle pieces or a Ziploc bag full of Lego pieces or maybe a little tiny Play-Doh bin or some laminated folder games, something that can extend the activity for a child. And the whole table can of course use this All Done bucket, but it might be geared towards one specific child who we really want to engage longer in the activity.

So simplifying the activity is another curriculum modification. And oftentimes if we're having children at mealtimes, oftentimes in the classrooms that I've worked in, we want mealtimes to be times where maybe children are chatting with each other or talking about different topics or really expanding children's language. So this is just a laminated picture that simplifies the activity of a conversation. So this might have some choices on there that children can point to. Maybe a child can pull something out of a bag and ask, "What is your favorite thing to do outside?" or, "What are you going to do today at free choice?" And there will be lots of pictures on there that a child could even point to if they don't have the words, or they can use it as sort of a jumping off point for using more language.

So here's some more pictures of simplifying the activity. We're simplifying sitting at circle by placing circle mats, which doesn't seem like a modification, but it truly is. There's also maybe a little process chart here where some laminated pictures of a—for a child who again might have trouble with fine motor activity, maybe just doesn't want to participate or is having trouble with the writing, the coloring, the glue, glitter, whatever the activity may be, this is nice because these pictures can be taken off once the child is finished with the beginning of the activity. So maybe the first part is that they write their name. Maybe they're just writing their first letter. We can take that off and really reassure them, "Hey, you've done that part. You're done with that. That's fantastic. Only three more steps to go, and we can get the All Done bucket." So having that sort of predictability for a child, or there is an end in sight to this activity that for me as a child might be really, really challenging.

So this series of pictures shows two children, and one of the, of course, things that teachers are teaching all the time in preschool are sharing. So I don't know if any of the programs that you work with have those big green sand timers. They're really a fantastic way to, again, simplify the activity of waiting and turn-taking and sharing. So in this first picture here, one of the boys is playing with the bus, the other little boy comes up and asks for a turn. They've already been taught how to use the sand timer, so they get the sand timer. And I love this middle picture, because they're both just watching the sand timer. The little boy who has the bus has another few seconds with the bus, but he is just watching it. And then

the sand timer is over, and he passes the bus to his friend. And it just is a really nice way for children to actually visually see the passing of time, know that they can ask for the bus again, and all they have to do is flip over the sand timer, and it will be two minutes. They can actually watch it pass, and they'll get a turn again.

So adapting materials for children. Some children—again, this is a picture with the clipboard of a child who is really advanced in development. So she came into this program already writing, already reading. So she is sort of a note taker at their large group activities, so she sits with a clipboard, and part of her modification is that she is sort of taking notes on certain things that are said at circle time and she might be able to read those back to a teacher afterwards. The other picture of a book is for a child with maybe some fine motor issues, and this teacher has put popsicle sticks inside the pages so a child has an easier time of turning the pages. So she's modified that book.

So using child preference is actually one of my favorite modifications because it truly, truly just gets to the heart of what is going to motivate a child. So really child preference can be a favorite teacher, a favorite color, a favorite character. This picture here is of Gail Joseph actually using a dinosaur puppet that she brought out at the beginning of circle time specifically for one child, and it was planned out for one child who loved dinosaurs but really had a hard time coming over to circle. So she would start her circle time with a dinosaur puzzle. I mean a dinosaur puppet, sorry, not puzzle. And that was his modification.

Special equipment is a modification. So I think we have all seen these special cups, adapted cups, or maybe putting a little stool under a child's feet so that they can reach the floor and kind of ground themselves during activities.

And adult support. This is one that we're really good at, actually. We provide a lot of adult support, which is fine, which is great. We just want to make sure it's planned out. So the adult up here in the left-hand column, she is modeling jumping on one foot. Again, this could be for a child who is working on some gross motor skills. And I think they're doing a counting activity as they're jumping here, too. And down here this other teacher here is supporting this other little girl with a science activity.

So peer support is another modification, and again, using children in the classroom as peer models and peer support and not being afraid of having children help each other. Oftentimes I know when I was working in a preschool, I was teaching—there was a little boy who had a really hard time with listening to adult directions and teacher directions. But once a little child would tell him, "Come on, Simon, come on, get your coat," he was just right there. And so we would just have a conversation with another little girl and say, "Hey, when we're ready to go outside, would you call Simon over and have him get his coat?" And it was just as simple as that, but it was truly, truly planned out in advance.

So invisible support is our last modification. And again, this is a support that could be put in place and doesn't look like a modification at all. This teacher has noticed that his class and his group of kids is getting a little squirrely. Maybe there's a child in particular that, again, has a hard time staying at circle. So he works in every few seconds a movement activity. And, again, this is what we do all the time as teachers, but this is truly planned for one or two specific children as a modification.

So here's our planning slide again that we—I can't stress enough that—say it with me: planning, planning, planning!

Dawn: Planning, planning, planning.

Kristin: Yeah, exactly. It's just—this, again, is what makes the roof supports different from the foundation. So we know that a lot of you see just amazing things that your teachers are doing, and now's your chance to sort of brag on your teachers. We know that you've seen some of these curriculum modifications at work, things that staff are already doing, and we'd love to know, in the chat box, what are some other ways that you've seen teachers supporting children with their individualized needs? And you can go ahead and just pop those into chat.

Dawn: All right, and we have some things coming in, and these really are reflective of that idea that curriculum modifications are things that folks are probably already doing in classrooms. And so we have someone that shared that they do have a process for hand washing. So they have visual pictures of that that shows each step. And I also see that someone else said that they modified a puzzle board and would put the puzzle pieces inside of a basket so that the children could have a better way to organize that and show some more independence when they were doing that work. See? I mean there's things already going on in all the—in many classrooms already.

Susan: And, Kristin, there's somebody who is asking for some clarification about the "simplify the activity." And she said it's the slide with four cards at the bottom.

Kristin: Yeah, what was that last part, Susan?

Susan: She said it was the slide with the four cards at the bottom.

Kristin: Absolutely. So I'll just pop right up to here real quick. Great. So I think she's talking about this slide. So this is a visual support to simplify an activity. So let's think about a child who has—well, actually, I'll just tell you exactly who this was created for. This was created for a little boy who had a lot of challenges with fine motor tasks. He came into the classroom and was not yet knowing how to write his name or use a pen or crayon, and just really had a lot of aversion to sitting at a table and doing some art activities. And so he really needed to know when this activity was over for him. And so we broke the activity into four parts. And this could be three parts, this could be two parts when you begin working with a child who needs this simplification, but in this case it was four parts. And this is just on Velcro. So each of these little squares would be on Velcro, they were laminated, and we just had a whole bunch to choose from. And we would make sure that this was placed at his spot before he sat down. A teacher would go over it today. We'd say, "Hey, Jonathan, today we're going to do an art activity. You're going to write your name," which for him was just really at this point writing some straight lines on the top of his paper, and that was writing his name for him. He was going to choose a couple crayons to do a couple colors on his sheet. He was going to learn how to use a glue stick or practice using a glue stick, and then shake a few pieces, or shake some glitter on. So that was this activity for the day. So he would then write his name. Teacher would say, "Fantastic! You wrote your name. You are all done with that part of it." He would color. "Great. You colored. You are all finished coloring." Then he would do the glue stick and the glitter, and each time he was done. So he knew that this was not an activity that would go on forever. He knew there was an end to the activity. And he got some reinforcement and some encouragement each step of the way. So, again, this was the very beginning for him, and then we were able to fade it out; after that, he wasn't needing this. But this really, truly helped him to come over to the table and know what was expected of him and know that he was done after doing four things.

Dawn: Yeah, we also have—someone said that one teacher in particular has a few students who have trouble at the carpet outside, and they have trouble at transitions during this time, so they allow those students to be leaders of the class, and they made games to let their peers help guide them. So they're using child preference.

Kristin: Oh, I love that. I think child preference is one to really attend to because it's so powerful for children. And finding—really finding that piece that a child is really loving or, you know, some children, just like that, love to be leaders and really feel just a huge sense of accomplishment when they're leaders. And another child, it's maybe being able to—maybe as a teacher you work in a train. Maybe they can bring a train toy and just have it next to them while they're at the activity, and then when they're finished, they can hold it again. Anything can be used with child preference. Are there any more, Dawn, or should we pop...? Please don't hesitate to stop writing these in. These are great. And I would just love to hear any more that you have.

Susan: Yeah, we have one other that one of the teachers provides a private spot for all children, but one child with disabilities uses it a lot when that child needs less stimulation. So it's a place that everybody gets to use, but a child who particularly needs it chooses it apparently more frequently.

Kristin: Oh, that's excellent. I love that one, because that can be really tailored. Again, that's something that the whole class can use, but that can be really tailored maybe for a specific child. Maybe there's even some pictures on the wall next to where they sit that maybe has a couple ideas for maybe taking some deep breaths or whatever it may be, but I think that's fantastic to have a spot. A lot of children need that. Just sort of a chill-out spot or calm-down spot, or whatever the teacher wants to call it. All right. So please don't hesitate. Keep sending those in if you'd like to.

And planning. Again, here we are back at our planning, planning. So the next portion that I'm going to talk about is, so now we've identified the child. We know which child needs support. We've maybe done our child assessment worksheet at the beginning with—as a teacher, we've done that as a team. We've identified the child we want to focus on. We maybe have identified some curriculum modifications that we want to try. And now we're going to talk about organizing the teaching that happens so that we make sure to get in enough practice for children.

And so an activity matrix—and I'm not sure if we can do this. I would love to see a show of hands. I'm not sure—Dawn, do we know how to—I never actually mentioned that, but is there a way that you all could raise your hand? There's a little hand box right next to your name, and if you just click on that, how many people know about an activity matrix and how many people have seen teachers use an activity matrix?

Susan: And if you can't find your hand box—I see that some folks have, but if you can't, go ahead and type it in chat so that we can count your response. I'm only seeing one person at this point.

Kristin: Okay.

Susan: We've got a few more who have.

Kristin: Good.

Susan: There's quite a few, though, who haven't and who've let us know specifically that they have not had that experience before.

Kristin: Okay, excellent. So I'm just going to—I think an activity matrix can often really, really be the missing key for some teachers, because, again, the thing I think that happens, and it happened to me when I was a teacher, is it's so overwhelming to know where to begin, to know where to start and how to get this individualizing, this really highly intensive focused individualizing happening throughout the day. And so an activity matrix is truly just a chart. It's a chart that has activities down one side, and I'll show you a picture of that. And then it also has children's names possibly across the top. And what a teacher does is insert children's learning objectives into the matrix knowing that at a certain time of day, I'm going to work on Dawn's learning objective of recognizing her name, because she has still really not made progress with that. And I'm going to work that in at least five to six times a day. So I'm going to have her name for her to identify at small group, at outside time, at circle time. So an activity matrix is a way to really make sure that those—that's happening.

So an activity matrix helps match the child's learning objective to the correct activity. So if I want Dawn to work on identifying her name, I'm going to make sure to work on that in an activity where there's opportunity for that. I'm not going to choose an activity that we don't really have that opportunity to find our name. Activity matrices really maximize learning time by planning for the teaching to happen throughout activities, routines, transitions. And creating this plan is a way to make this happen. It really helps all staff to be aware of individual children's learning objectives. So I really encourage teachers to post activity matrices around the room, maybe four or five around the room so that if teachers are in a specific area, they can just glance at the activity matrix and say, "Hey, here I am at the sand and water table, and here comes Dawn up to the sand and water table, and I've got letters that I've buried in the sand that I've already planned out for her. And I'm going to help her try to find the letter D; that's the beginning of her name." And so I know as a teacher when exactly I'm going to work on that, and that's already planned out for me. And again, this can be implemented for all the children in the class, but it's truly essential for the children who need extra support to make sure that that's happening. Sometimes as teachers, we think, "Oh, yeah, I work on that all the time," but do we really work on it? Are we really planning it out and giving that child the practice they need?

So I'm going to just show you kind of how to build a matrix. Again, as you'll see, the names are across the top here: Mia, Addie, and Carlos. And then on the left-hand side, there is the classroom activities. So they start with arrival, free play, circle, outside, mealtime, class activity, and departure. So for Mia—actually, let's look at Addie here, because she's got a couple highlighted. For free play, she—one of her goals is to invite other children to play and identifying a problem in a conflict with another child. So she's working on sort of these higher-level social skills during free play. So the teacher would know that during free play, she's inviting—she's working on inviting other children to play, so to make sure to have that planned out for her in advance. She's also working on labeling emotions, and this is a really, really big one for Addie. So this teacher has planned for Addie to work on labeling emotions during circle time, during mealtime, and during transitions. So all three of these times is when the teachers have planned out for Addie to practice labeling an emotion.

So, again, how we create one is that we list the activities on this left-hand side. We list the children's names at the top, and then we insert learning objectives in the boxes that correspond with the activities. Right? So one thing that sometimes—well, one thing that I did when I was first teaching and creating an activity matrix was that I wrote every child's learning objective in every activity, and I was so gung-ho and I couldn't wait, and I knew this was going to help. And it didn't help me one bit, because what it did

was just create more of an overwhelmed feeling that you really can't work on every child's goal at every activity. It's just truly not possible. But an activity matrix can really help figure out, okay, when is the best maybe two times throughout this day that I'm going to help Mia work on talking about people or objects in view of her? We're going to do that at arrival—we're going to talk about the kids who are getting off the bus—and we're going to do it during transition times.

So really making it your own. So this does not have to be computer-generated on a clipboard. It can absolutely be anything that you want it to be. And it can be—this is just, in the top left, this is a whiteboard where the teacher has written the children's names across the top. And she's used just sticky notes here to put their goals and objectives. A great thing about—a great reason that this teacher did this was that she could move these around very easily. If a child is not coming over to dramatic play, maybe she moves—maybe Kiana's get moved to another activity. It could also be used for taking data. Maybe if Kiana comes and accepts toys offered by peers, maybe the teacher could make a little check mark on that sticky note and just put it right into her portfolio. It could also be a big piece of butcher paper. So really make it your own.

So just as I said before, start—or about my mistake that I made—really start small in the beginning. So possibly start with just one child. It could be just one child that we're going to really focus on. Maybe that's the child that you were thinking of earlier. And then I'm going to add Addie a few weeks later. And then I'm going to maybe add Carlos a few weeks later. And then we're all as teachers really in the habit of using this and knowing how to use it. But starting small is a really big, big tip. You could also start small by starting with only one activity. So maybe you're working with three children's learning objectives, but you're only going to think about your matrix during free play. And that is absolutely fine as well. Maybe free choice time or center time is the only time that you're going to focus on goals. So during free play, Mia's going to talk about people or objects in view, Addie, again, she's inviting another child to play and working on some problem-solving, and then Carlos is writing using pictures, squiggles, or letter-like forms. So the teachers know exactly that these three children are working during free choice on these goals. Then maybe you add a couple more activities to your matrix until you've got your whole day.

So again, make it work for you. If we look at Mia's here, she, during the class activity, is working on sorting a collection by color and it's just not getting worked on, you can take it out and maybe insert it during circle time. Maybe she's going to—maybe the teachers have planned an activity for circle time that she can sort a collection by color.

I also want to make sure, as a teacher, that I am providing the right materials. So if Addie needs to label emotions at circle time, I'm going to make sure that I have books about emotional literacy and labeling emotions at circle time ready to go. And again, that's where the planning comes in. And with Carlos, during class activity, if he is—really needs support with writing using pictures or squiggles or letter-like forms, I'm going to make sure that there are always writing instruments available for him: there's crayons, pens, pencils, lots of different things in lots of different areas for him.

So here's just some fun pictures to demonstrate. Again, here's Mia, and she is identifying her name. And so the teacher has put her name really visible in a lot of different activities. So here at her cubby, it's very visible to her. She can have an opportunity to see her name. Here at circle time, she's got a name tag that she can find easily and identify her name. Even at table time activities, she's got her name written on the table. So, again, these are planned out in advance.

So that was some really highly intensive individualized teaching and learning strategies for children. We were up in the roof today. Here's our planning picture again. And I know that you'll probably—you've probably gotten tired of hearing me say this, but it's all in the planning that this will happen, and that these children who need this support truly, truly benefit from all the planning that goes into it.

So really when thinking about the children in the roof or the children that need this individualized teaching, we're remembering where children—the children we're thinking about are children with possibly challenging behavior, possibly children who are advanced in development, whatever the need may be and strengths may be of the child, it's really about focusing on the child. Where do we begin? Well, we just need to focus on the child. We want to provide individualized supports. So maybe it's child preference, maybe it's simplifying an activity for a child. And then we really want to plan for teaching, and that's where our activity matrix comes in. So when are we going to teach this, and what materials do we need to teach this?

So thinking about your next steps. Of course, when we always do these webinars, we think now, you know, what—we want you to create a plan for sharing this information with your disabilities coordinators or sharing with your teachers, and really share the wealth on this information and expanding the ways we're able to support children. And really it just comes from us sharing this information and resources available. So as I said before, there is a great resource called Head Start Center for Inclusion. Many of you probably know about this. And if you don't, everything on here is free to download and to print out and to use immediately. And there's emotion pictures and trainings and strategies available. There's videos for showing some individualized teaching that happens actually in a classroom. Of course, there's CSEFEL, the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. And this is another fantastic website that, again, has all things social and emotional development, has free and downloadable information for teachers, for trainers to use immediately.

So I am going to end now. I think I might just leave this up on the screen for you to copy down, and I would love to know if there's any last questions that anyone has on this topic. And I just really thank you for listening to all my information today on individualizing. I know I gave a lot of information, but it's just such an important topic, and I hope you share with your teachers.

Dawn: All right, everyone. Thanks for joining us today. And thank you, Kristin, for all your work and time and effort putting this together for us.