



Transforming Professional Practice  
Through ***Intentional Instruction***

When someone hears the words “early childhood classroom,” what they imagine largely depends on how much time they have actually spent in one.

If you are a leader within an early childhood program, your first thought is probably not of the physical space, the materials in it, or even the curriculum you use.

### **What you think of is children.**

One of the most surprising things to people who haven’t spent much time in early childhood classrooms is just how unique each child is. While there are certainly many similarities among children in a given age-group or grade level, there are also a great many ways in which each child is a singular human being.



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So, if no two children are the same, why should their instruction be?

As a school leader, one of the most important ways you can ensure that you are honoring each child’s unique strengths, needs, and interests is through **intentional instruction**.

It has been estimated that, on an average day, a classroom teacher makes **1,500 decisions** (Jackson, 1990).<sup>1</sup> While that one fact may make a teacher's job seem overwhelming, it's actually empowering to both teachers and the school administrators who lead them. It means that teachers have multiple opportunities each and every day to be intentional in the ways they

- ✔ interact with children and their families;
- ✔ plan and implement learning experiences;
- ✔ assess children's development and learning; and
- ✔ create the type of warm, responsive environment that ensures children feel cared for and capable at school.



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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, P. (1990). *Life in classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Here are examples of how ***intentional instruction*** makes a difference in the classroom.



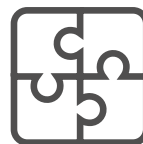
## OBSERVE

- **Formative assessment**  
Ongoing, observation-based assessment helps teachers better understand the children in their care.
- **How and where you display children's work and their discoveries**  
Displaying children's work can instill a sense of pride and ownership in their learning.
- **Your responses to children's work, discoveries, questions, and interests**  
Positive, thoughtful reactions encourage continued learning.



## PLAN

- **Responsive planning for learning experiences**  
Thoughtful decision-making ensures essential content is addressed and each child's needs are met.
- **Gathering and organizing materials**  
Thoughtful arrangement of interesting materials supports independent decision-making and exploration.
- **Scheduling**  
A balance of active and quiet experiences means that children can both move and rest throughout the day.



## ORGANIZE

- **Room arrangement**  
Organized, clutter-free classrooms inspire engagement and minimize distractions.
- **Group sizes**  
Children thrive when they have frequent opportunities to interact with adults and peers in small-group settings.



## CONNECT

- **Communicating with families**  
Building meaningful relationships with family members extends learning opportunities.
- **Opportunities for family engagement**  
Involving families in classroom activities can provide a sense of ownership of their child's learning.

***Intentional instruction*** doesn't happen by chance.

Intentionality, just as its name implies, requires thought. Intentionality is a result of reflection, preparation, and flexibility. It is built upon a foundation of trusting relationships, established goals, information about children's development in general, and actionable information about each child as an individual. Moreover, it requires inspiration, support, and the right tools.

The good news is that when teachers possess the attributes and resources to support ***intentional instruction***—and when they know that they are guided by school leaders who share their commitment—they unlock new opportunities to help every child learn, grow, and thrive.



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## You can empower ***intentional instruction***.

As a leader of an early childhood program, you are in a unique position to support the development and learning of both children and teachers.

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It is important that you help teachers acknowledge and celebrate their work as they strive to be fully intentional in all of the many decisions they make throughout the year.

Here are three things to keep in mind.

- 1 Inspire**
- 2 Support**
- 3 Equip**

# 1 Inspire

Models of implementation can be a powerful aid when coaching teachers to instruct with intention. Being able to hear and see **intentional instruction** in action can help teachers envision what this might look like in their own classroom. Suddenly, what seemed so daunting at first appears manageable and exciting.

One great way to provide modeling opportunities is through a community of shared learning. Encourage new teachers to shadow or observe experienced teachers. Invite all teachers to share their

own best practices or lessons learned. Ask experienced teachers to document the impact that **intentional instruction** has had within their classrooms.



## 2 Support

As a school leader, you can provide teachers with models of excellence and offer them professional knowledge that will help them realize their aspirations.

Offer individual professional development opportunities (e.g., recommend a book or an article to a teacher who would enjoy it or suggest a potential mentor).

Create professional learning communities that have a mix of new teachers, mentor teachers, and teacher leaders who can share their expertise; ideas; and research on specific topics, such as helping children

with reading comprehension, supporting children to ask and answer open-ended questions, or using positive guidance to promote social–emotional development.

Professional learning communities, sometimes called PLCs, harness the power of small-group collaboration to improve professional practice.





### 3 Equip

As a school leader, you can ensure that teachers have the tools and resources they need to support intentional instruction.

Look for curriculum and assessment materials that provide guidance and insight to help teachers honor and value each child as an individual.

Share resources with teachers that will help them create learning experiences that build on children's natural curiosity and desire to learn.



Join us at [blog.teachingstrategies.com](http://blog.teachingstrategies.com) as we continue to discuss the concept of *intentional instruction* and share hints, tips, and insights for building teachers' capacity to provide developmentally appropriate instruction for every child.



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