



Later, Lindsay reflects on the evening. Although the children are all about the same age, they are so different. She marvels at the fact that even the identical twins have such different personalities. She wonders if Rohan's shyness is influenced by his father's emphasis on participation. And what about Shira—how did she get to be such a social butterfly? Is it in her genes, or did her parents cultivate that?

Lindsay's thoughts turn to Carter, who has autism. She considers how well his parents coordinate with his teacher and other specialists to reinforce what he's learning in school. Lindsay also thinks of 5-year-old Cal, who is living with his grandmother after his mother's parental rights were revoked as a result of neglect. How is it that he is such a positive and vivacious boy given all he has had to deal with in his young life? Lindsay smiles when she thinks about Cal wanting a "boy car." How and when do these gender stereotypes crystallize?

Finally, her thoughts turn to the challenges she faces. How will she work with families to meet the needs of these children? How will she provide experiences that challenge Shira and Cal but don't overwhelm Carter? How will she make Rohan and Alex feel at ease in social situations? And how will she create a strong sense of belonging and friendship among these children? ■



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Individual differences abound in every group of young children. As is evident from the open house vignette, even children of the same chronological age differ from one another in many ways. The purpose of this chapter is to examine what is known about the range of individual differences among children and how teachers can effectively adapt the curriculum and teaching strategies to help all children participate, develop, and learn to their fullest potential. Understanding individual differences is a critical dimension of developmentally appropriate practice.

We begin with a discussion of the range of individual variation that exists among all children and some of the origins of these differences. Next, we describe Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which is a useful framework for thinking about individual children's strengths, needs, interests, and abilities. Then we discuss differentiating instruction and present a framework for responding to the diverse learning needs of all children. We conclude with a discussion of effective practices for teaching children with disabilities and special needs.

Understanding Individual Differences

Anyone who has been a parent or teacher is aware of the fact that every child is unique. Even people who do not have parenting or teaching experience have been children themselves and know that we are all different. Try to remember your earliest school experience and picture the children in your class. Were all the boys or girls alike? Did everyone enjoy and excel at the same activities? Did all of your classmates learn at the same pace and in the same way? Was anyone exactly like you? Of course, the answer to all of these questions is "no."

