

## Exploring the Meaning of Curriculum in the Early Head Start Classroom

Joe Preece: Good afternoon to all the federal staff that have been able to join us for today's event. My name is Joe Preece and I am with the Early Head Start National Resource Center. Of course, this is the first of two webinars in the Federal Leadership Training Series. It's our hope that you enjoy attending and obtain information and knowledge that inform your work with the program. I first want to say that no one can deny that the work you do is extremely important and we appreciate the amount of time, the amount of energy, and passion that goes into all you do.

So, for today's webinar we will be exploring the meaning of curriculum as it applies to the infant and toddler. That being said: Infants and toddlers deserve the very best services we can possibly provide. Again, the bottom line for us who play a role in Early Head Start is that each toddler, each infant, and every family in our program enter a classroom that is loving, warm, supportive, and developmentally appropriate. By developmentally appropriate this is what I mean: I mean a classroom that is set up in such a way that children are free to explore; they're free to discover, to learn, and to grow in a safe and responsive environment.

Today's session is "Exploring the Meaning of Curriculum in the Early Head Start Classroom." And I am hoping that this is going to provide you with valuable insight into the Early Head Start classroom and curriculum. So, this is the highlight of the webinar.

I'm excited to share with you that Sandy Petersen, the Director of Outreach, Research and Innovation at the Early Head Start National Resource Center, will be joining us. She is considered one of the top experts on infant and toddler curriculum in the early childhood community. Also joining us is, of course, Angie Godfrey. Angie is the Infant and Toddler Program Specialist from the Office of Head Start. Angie, of course, is a champion for working on behalf of infants and toddlers in Early Head Start and other early childhood programs. So, as the webinar progresses you will get an opportunity to hear from both of these respected individuals. And just so you know: We have a group of people at the Early Head Start National Resource Center that's helping us with techno -- technological side of it and that is Summer Harrington, Lena Cunningham, and Jennifer Boss. So, if anything comes up, you may hear us call out to them and that's just so you know that they are there.

So, okay. So, what are we going to do today? What are we going to cover? And what is it that we want to accomplish? Together we are going to examine how curriculum transpires in the infant/toddler classroom. Based on the e-mails that I've got from the EHS liaisons, I know that you have a great interest in knowing how Early Head Start curriculum is different from Head Start. And it is. So, hope...so we hope

to clearly illustrate and paint a beautiful picture of how curriculum unfolds through individualization and responsive caregiving in Early Head Start. To meet this goal, we are going to start with review of the Head Start Program Performance Standards as the definition of curriculum pertains to infants and toddlers. Then we're going to examine the processes programs can use to select the curriculum most appropriate and inclusive of the children and families they serve. And to conclude the webinar we're going to have a question- and-answer session. And I strongly want to encourage you, as we're going through the webinar, if you have any questions do not hesitate to submit them as we'll do our best to provide a solid response during the Q-and-A portion of the webinar.

Now that I've set the stage, I want to turn the webinar over to Angie, who is going to speak to the importance of today's content from the Office of Head Start perspective. Angie?

Angie Godfrey: Thank you, Joe. And welcome to everyone. I'm so glad that you're all able to join us today. And I'm really excited about this topic. When you said in the opening, Joe, that people always want to know the difference between Head Start and Early Head Start curriculum; I do think that that's just a key point to understanding what curriculum is with infants and toddlers. And for this call what it is for infants and toddlers in group care and in a center-based setting. And, you know, some things are similar. You have to have a written plan. You have to have an individualized plan for every child in your care. But the wonderful thing about it is that it is individualized. It's adaptable. It's flexible. And it's responsive.

The other term that Joe used in the beginning is responsive caregiving. And it's really nested in the relationship with the baby and the caregiver and the family and the caregiver. And it really is curriculum that's responsive to families and who they are and what their beliefs and values are. And our ability to support that in a classroom with a very informed and appropriate plan for each child in the classroom. Where we have expectations that are appropriate for individual children whether it's part of a routine or part of an experience that really is helping to support development in cognitive or physical ways. And like I said I'm just very excited. I think it's such an important topic for all of us and I think it's just wonderful that we're going to be here today. And I'm just going to sit and listen with the rest of you. So thank you, Joe.

Joe Preece: Thank you, Angie. And just so you know we are going to be sending you out the resource materials and Angie had mentioned that, you know, people do want to know what the difference between Head Start and Early Head Start curriculum is. And one of the handouts...the one from the NIFTI project, which is the National Child Care Training Division of Zero-to Three; there's a wonderful piece in there that goes through what the differences are. And it goes through content. The role of the teacher. So, you know, I do want to call your attention to that.

So, well, let's take look at the definition of curriculum in 1304.385 and as you think about the definition of curriculum and you see these four things on the screen in front of you, I want you to think about these four things as the foundation for the curriculum. And on this foundation programs have the flexibility to tailor the curriculum to the context, characteristics, strengths, and needs of the local community.

Now, listen to this carefully because this comes up a lot. Because programs purchased the same curriculum in two different areas of the country doesn't mean the implemented curriculum should be identical. The programs can tailor their curriculum approach based on the community they live in. And also programs can tailor their curriculum approach based on their own program philosophy that has been well thought out. As long as it all keeps within the requirements of the Head Start program Performance Standards. And Sandy is going to address this topic in depth a little bit later in the webinar.

Okay. So I think we're now ready to dive deeper into this definition. By looking at the first part of the definition, you know, the goals. Goals can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. So for Early Head Start curriculum this is what you need to know about goals. Goals describe two things. The competencies we want children to develop and the developmental milestones we want children to reach. The goals for children's learning and development can come from a few different sources.

So we know it's about competencies. We know it's about developmental milestones. But where do they come from? Goals can come from family. Goals can come from teachers. And goals can come from the programs' curriculum. However, but most importantly, the infant and toddler should be an active partner in the process of selecting their own curriculum content. By using the phrase "selecting their own curriculum," this is what I mean. The curriculum should be dynamic enough to move and flow on a daily basis with the infants and toddlers developing interest and changing needs. With this approach the curriculum and teacher is responsive and respectful of what children bring to and want from these experiences. But wherever the goal comes from, usually they fall into these development domains: Social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. So let's move onto slide 16. These domains sound a lot like preschool. Sound a lot like Head Start. But infants and toddlers cannot be treated like preschoolers. The focus of curriculum in Early Head Start is on process. Meaning learning and development evolved through relationships, responsive caregiving, and naturally occurring development versus preschool curriculum that focus more on learning through content, the exposure to concepts, play, and activities that are generally more structured.

So teachers, managers, directors, trainers like me, program specialists like you, we all need to support programs to ensure expectations in Early Head Start classrooms are realistic and provide care that match the developmental stages and meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers. So

programs, and as you can see here's the definition of developmentally appropriate. This is a big issue in Early Head Start. We must be extremely careful to ensure the infant/toddler experience is developmentally appropriate for their age and stage of development. And here is some examples that I'll share with you. Should toddlers be forced to sit in a circle time activity for ten minutes? The answer is: No, they should not. Toddlers are simply not developmentally capable of accomplishing that task. Teachers and caregivers can try to do that but it will not be very pretty.

Here is another example. Should toddlers be asked to practice writing their names? The answer is: No, they should not. Writing letters and words is a higher level preschool objective. As a matter of fact it is the last objective on a five-year-old level. So it's not appropriate for a toddler. These are just a few examples to drive home the point of developmentally appropriate practices. So let's look at a couple of real examples. And this is going to require the use of your imagination.

So on your screen you have a picture of a beautiful young baby. It's lying on its back. It's cooing. It's having a great time playing with toys and rattles and of course its feet. During the last parent/teacher conference the mother and father have stated to the teacher, you know, shouldn't our baby be ready to sit up? We really feel it's time for our baby to do this. What can we do? The teacher could reply: Well, you are right. It is almost time for your baby to sit up. And there are a few things we can do to ensure the baby continues building the muscles that are needed to do this. And of course the parent and teacher would then talk about, you know, the activities, experiences, and opportunities that would support the infant meeting this developmental milestone.

So let's go back to your imagination for a moment. We're back at the screen with the beautiful baby lying on its back cooing. And this baby, of course, has been having a wonderful time at the Early Head Start. Everyone at the classroom is engaged. They're loving and playing with the baby and following the child's leads. And then, of course, the teacher has participated in this meaningful parent conference where the parents have expressed: Hey, we want our baby to sit up. And through this conversation this has created many intentional efforts on behalf of the parent and the caregivers to strengthen the babies' poor muscles. Of course, we know that this helps with sitting up.

Now, I want you to go back to your imagination and I want you to imagine the infant on your screen is now suddenly sitting up. Now, what we forgot to realize is that all the way this teacher and family worked together to provide the opportunities and experiences to help facilitate this developmental milestone. The simple act of sitting up. This is the curriculum as it relates to gross motor. And this is a very important concept. Facilitating development with an infant or toddler is a major piece of the Early Head Start curriculum.

Let's look at the specific developmental progression of an infant in the social developmental domain. Let's watch the progression of a two-month-old infant through nine-months in social development. Remember, this is curriculum for infants. Okay. So we had this infant at two or three months of age. This is what they can do socially. This isn't a list of everything they can do. But it is a list of some of the things they can do. They can visually fixate on a face. They can smile at a face. And then can be soothed by rocking. Infants at three to four months can communicate by crying. They can smile to the mother's face, voice. They can respond to person-to-person contact with adults. And they, of course, enjoy being cuddled.

And then the last slide of this is infants at four to nine months no longer smile indiscriminately. Meaning every smile has a purpose. They cry, smile, kick, coo, and laugh to attract social attention. And of course they cry if other children are crying. So, you can see that this is how infants develop through social emotional development and this is curriculum. This is exactly what curriculum is for the infant in the social domain.

So, of course, facilitating development is not the only kind of goal. Remember, earlier I mentioned goals can describe the competencies we want children to develop. This could be brushing teeth, saying more words, putting on your own jacket, toilet training, cause and effect. All of these are developmentally appropriate goals as a child gets older.

So, now that we've discussed curriculum goals, let's now look at the experiences through which they will achieve these goals. Okay. So, we know that there are thousands of experiences that occur in a classroom. Experiences are a large component of the infant and toddler curriculum. So with all these experiences I wanted to ensure that I at least cover what I consider to be the two extreme, important pieces or components for the infant and toddler. And these are...these are what I want to cover. Routine and relationships. So let's start with routine. Children thrive in a well-ordered and predictable environment where daily routines such as arrivals, departures, meal times, nap times, and toileting are carried out consistently by all caregivers. The keyword for routines is this: Consistency, consistency, consistency. Approaching routines the same way every day, so children know what to expect each day. We must hit the target every day. Daily routines are the method that a child gains a sense of stability, a feeling of worth and caring from the teachers, and the challenge for teachers and for us is develop appropriate daily routines that offer consistency and security yet remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs of each child.

So and another routine that I just absolutely love talking about but the teacher doesn't necessarily like to do all the time and that is diapering. Diapering is one of the experiences that children are a part of on a daily basis. So we're going to change the mood of the training for just a moment and I'm getting ready

to conclude my section. But before we do so I want to participate in a true- and-false poll question. And I'll give you plenty of time to think about this. Children enrolled in Early Head Start from birth to three have their diaper changed 1000 times while in care. So I will give you five seconds to think about that. So have we got the vote in? So can we pull up the results yet? Has anyone voted? Has everyone voted? All right. The responses that I get is that 29 percent of you believe that is true. And 12 percent believe it's false. Well, based upon...based upon my calculations, which are probably low, and based on a child being changed five times a day from zero to twelve months, three times a day from twelve to twenty-four months, and one time a day for accidents through toilet training, this is the magical number I come up with. Just for their time in Early Head Start. 1,530 times that a child has their diaper changed in Early Head Start in this program option.

Now, think of it this way. That's 1,530 that the child has the teacher's undivided attention. That is not even counting the number of times the child is changed at home. I think this brings up the importance of routine. You think about the opportunities that occur just within diapering over 1,500 times just in the Early Head Start classroom. So, there's plenty of opportunities for learning.

So I wanted to conclude my section in this webinar the most important experience for the infant and toddler and that is relationships. And I love the picture of the child on the right. You can just tell that whoever he is looking at he absolutely adores. So, the relationships the child has with family and teachers is the most important aspect for learning and development to occur. In other words, relationship is the heart of infant and toddler curriculum. Through experiencing the warmth and support of caring adults, children gain a basis for development and learning in all the developmental domains. Can you imagine with me for a moment that you are an infant and toddler and you walk into a room that you will be at all day and the teacher is simply not in tune with you. Even as an adult I will ask this rhetorical question, are there people that you are not in tune with? Probably so. Sure there are. So how does that make you feel as an adult? Imagine what that must be like for the infant and toddler who has less control over their environment.

Look at this picture on the right. Obviously the child is interested in something else. Oh, but no, we see the magical kitty cat finger puppet. And the teacher is adamant that the child is going to do her kitty cat finger puppet. It's a great idea but if the child's not interested in the teacher's kitty cat finger puppet the teacher is simply wasting time and out of tune with this child. And now I can just see this teacher chasing this child around the room with this finger puppet and obviously she's not following this child's lead. So, a part of this relationship is simply paying attention to the child in ways that truly meet the child's needs and interests. This provides the child with the confidence and sense of security needed to feel free to explore without any hesitation. And of course, infants and toddlers become attached to adults who are sensitive and responsive in social interactions with them. And who remain as consistent caregivers.

For example, when an infant and toddler begins learning to walk, they begin to use attachment figures or familiar people as a secure base to explore from and return to. A teacher's responses lead to the development of patterns of attachment. I hope this piece of the webinar has provided you with greater insights into the Head Start Program Performance Standards definition of curriculum. And before I turn to webinar over to my colleague Sandy, I again want to encourage you to submit those burning questions that are resonating within your minds. And at this time I would like to turn the webinar over to Sandy. And Sandy feel free to go to 3:05.

Sandy Petersen: Thank you, Joe. And thank you, everyone who has joined us. The infant/toddler curriculum which I think...I think this is the best picture I've ever seen of an infant/toddler curriculum. These children are having such a wonderful time together and, you know, the teacher is right there with them. Slide please.

The infant/toddler curriculum is designed to support new lives as they learn about being people. The three-year-old in Head Start already has a strong sense of self and is able to learn...really focus and learn about the world. But working with babies is different. It is intimate work. Slide.

Teachers and caregivers are in close physical contact with babies. All of the things that Joe said. All of the routine moments are the ones that have great meaning to the baby in terms of feeling safe and feeling understood. Slide please.

One of the big goals for babies from birth...very early goal is to learn to regulate or to manage their reactions to their own physical sensations, to things that happen with other people, and even their own memories and thoughts. This baby is a child who has trouble regulating and he can't move from sleeping to waking easily or being awake to going to sleep. And here he is trying to sleep. You can look at his eyes. He's very tired. He's sucking on his fingers as a way to regulate. His teacher has him wrapped in a blanket and she's holding him close. Slide.

And it helps him to fall asleep. He's holding her finger in this picture. He's sucking on a pacifier. And these little things are things that help him sleep. Slide. But here he is he wakes up again. He just does not have the self-regulation that he will need in order to relate to others and to learn about the world. So, this baby's curriculum goals are about regulation and whatever curriculum is chosen this is going to be one of the tasks for a young baby. And it takes a very different approach from the teacher to understand and care for a child whose working on their own reactions to the world. Slide please.

People have different definitions of curriculum. In addition to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, one author in early childhood says everything that happens to a baby from the moment they enter the door until they leave is their curriculum. Slide.

From Lally, whose name you probably know from his work at WestEd, the program for infant/toddler care, says every baby creates his own curriculum. And by that he means that babies are born ready to learn. They're curious. They're interested. They want to know how things work. And if the teacher is a good observer, she'll find that the baby is telling her, all the time, what it is he wants to learn and where he wants to go. Slide.

The Program Performance Standards, of course, is the important definition for our program. Go ahead. Slide. But in order for teachers and caregivers to be this responsive you have to have a structure that supports this. And this includes teachers and home visitors who are well trained and educated. And if you've been with Head Start for a while you've been seeing the requirements for education rising over the years. So, the Office of Head Start is pushing for our staff to be well trained and well educated. Small group sizes are important. The Performance Standards say no more than eight in a group and research pretty much backs up that you want between six and eight in a group. More than that creates so much noise and activity that it's very hard for infants or toddlers to regulate and focus. You need low ratios of teachers to children. And you can understand that when you think about the baby we just looked at and the amount of time one caregiver has to give to this baby so that he can get his sleep. She needs to not be responsible for too many children.

And talking about being responsible, there is a concept called primary caregiving. And this is also referred to in the Standards. And it means that one teacher is primarily responsible for a group of four children within the group of eight and although she'll interact with all eight she will do the communication with the families and be most available and a designated observer of four children.

The other concept...and our programs struggle with this is continuity of care. And the Standards refer to being with as few different teachers as possible over the years. Ideally, in infant or toddler...well, the infant would be with the same caregiver or the family would have the same home visitor for three years. From birth to three. But the programs do find that difficult to achieve. And that is something that you as federal officers can support and their TA system can support. Slide.

So the idea here is that the curriculum, as Joe said, consist of activities or experiences that further development. So the first baby we looked at is learning about regulation. And it's going to take him time. But over time he'll develop an interest in people. He'll begin to learn language. He'll be able to use full

sentences, and hundreds of words by the time he is three because of the experiences he has with that. He'll develop complicated games with other toddlers. He'll develop gross motor skills that really go from being able to hold his head upright to running and climbing as a three-year-old. And he'll learn to problem solve with materials and with friends. Next slide.

The curriculum generally describes the goals for the group of children. And it guides the teacher in how to interact with the children and how to set up the learning environment. It keeps sound child development practices front and center. Slide please.

When you actually visit a program and you're looking at the question of curriculum, what will you see? You'll see the written plan that Angie mentioned that describes all of the elements in the definition. You should see teachers holding babies with what they call one up, one down. One teacher should be on her feet so that she can move to any area necessary or maybe doing diapering while still having visual contact with the whole...with all of the children. The other teacher should be on the floor with the children. You should see calm children. And they should be engaged in play or in routine care. You don't want to see babies in any kind of container. The highchair. The car seat. Babies should be free to be on the floor and moving around. And you want to see a learning environment that clearly shows what each section is for. Slide please.

It has to have quiet and safe places. It will have book areas and chairs that are especially good for cuddling and holding. Block areas. Active areas. Creative areas. Each...each of these are visually clear about what their purpose is. And all of this needs to happen in a homelike environment. Slide please.

So, responsive caregiving which is really the individualization of curriculum, calls for careful observation from the teachers. So that the teacher can see the child creating his or her curriculum. I'm going to show you some pictures and I'm going to ask you to watch this little girl as she goes on her shopping trip with her doll and think about what she's learning. And when you visit a program, you want to see through documentation if the teachers...what the teachers are seeing. And so you should be looking for their observations and look for their understanding. Slide please.

This is a story about going shopping with baby. Slide. Here she is; she's going to put her baby in the shopping cart probably like she rides in the shopping cart when she goes with her mom. Slide. She's having trouble getting the baby in. So, she moves the shopping cart away from the wall. Slide. She's really...she's still struggling because she's trying to set up the seat part with one hand. But she's holding her baby in the other hand. Slide. Okay. So she's getting the baby in. Slide. But she gets her in the wrong part. But she's patting her head, taking care of her. Slide. And the whole thing falls over. Which for many

children might, you know, throw them into tears. Not this child. We often talk about children problem-solving. And some people wonder well, what kind of problems a child would need to solve. She has a problem here. And she's really working on it. So you can see that she's working on these ways to get her shopping cart back up. Slide. Get the seat set up. Slide. There she goes. She's got the shopping cart up but baby is...has been thrown on the floor to make this happen. Slide please. So, she's back to square one trying to get baby in the shopping cart. Slide. And she's still working at it. Look at her face. She's thinking. And she's concentrating. Slide. There she goes again. The baby is in the cart. Slide. And she ended up resolved to that and going ahead with her shopping. Now, the teacher might set up that area and in her mind the curriculum is the child learning about the world because they have pretend materials in which to reenact events of their life.