Teacher Time

Viewers Guide | Episode 2
USING YOUR ENVIRONMENT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING

SUMMARY

Your learning environment plays a huge role in day-to-day life in your program. You can have a responsive approach to environment just like you can have a responsive approach to curriculum. Your environment should be reflective of both your curriculum and the children and families in your program.

As a teacher you can:

- Assess how well your environment reflects your community. If someone came into your learning environment, what would they notice represents the children and families who spend time there?

- Be predictable! While it's a good idea to change the room arrangement from time to time, it's important that infants and toddlers know what to expect when they come in each day. Predictable environments help young children feel safe and secure.
- Keep the spaces where routines occur safe and comfortable. Everyone should have furniture that fits them – children and teachers!
- Make accommodations when necessary for children or family members with disabilities.
- Spend time outside every day you possibly can!

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY WITH CARRIE GERMEROTH

You can set up and use your learning environment in a way that supports language development and emerging literacy skills—for children whose home language is English as well as dual language learners.

- Follow children's lead and interests.
- Respond to children by copying the sounds they make.
- Read and reread favorite stories, poems, and chants in English and in their home language(s).
- Make sure books are within children's reach.
- Create a comfortable book nook or place where books are attractively arranged and easy to reach, such as low, sturdy shelves or book baskets for easy storage with places to sit and read.

- Provide durable books, such as board or cloth books designed to hold up to children's active explorations as they carry books around and turn the pages.
- Use "functional print" with young children. For example, children's names on cubbies or cups provide meaningful examples of how print is useful in our lives. Caution: Labeling every item in the room is not meaningful for young children!
- Point out and name meaningful letters of the alphabet, such as those in a child's name.

ELOF MINUTE WITH PETER PIZZOLONGO

Your environment is a big part of how you support children's perceptual, motor, and physical development.

- Perception is how children use their senses to learn about the world around them.
- Perceptual information is central to infants' and toddlers' interactions, explorations, and their experiences.
- Developing motor skills increase young children's ability to explore their learning environment. It's important to make adjustments as children become more mobile or better climbers so they can stay safe and engaged.

- For infants and toddlers, health and safety are primarily the responsibility of the adults who care for them.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH AMY HUNTER

The learning environment can influence relationships and support positive behavior!

- Create an "environment of yes" where everything children can do is safe and acceptable for them to play with.
- Continue to observe and assess your environment to ensure that children stay engaged. This will reduce challenging behavior.

- Ask families how to make your learning environment feel welcome to them. You may be surprised by their suggestions!
- Remember: responsive adults are the most important aspect of a responsive learning environment.

RESILIENCY AND WELLNESS

What is your work environment like? How can you contribute to an environment of wellness?

- Celebrate each other's successes; collaborate to learn from mistakes.
- Create a work environment that is welcoming of the cultures of staff members as well as families.

- Have regular substitutes so that people feel comfortable taking days off when they are sick or for vacation time
- Have comfortable, adult-sized furniture in learning environments.
- Staff should work together to create a plan for conflict resolution.

TRY IT OUT!

Your "homework" is to try adding one or two new materials to your indoor and/or outdoor learning environments and then observe how the children explore them. Tell us about it on MyPeers! Join MyPeers if you aren't already a member.

RESOURCES:

Learning Environments – This landing page has many resources about creating learning environments that are responsive to the needs of young children and their families.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/cde/learning-environments

Highlights from the Learning Environments landing page:
- NYCU: Environment as Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers – Use this as a resource to explore ideas about building nurturing environments to support the learning of very young children.

- NYCU: Learning at Home and Homelike Environments – This resource will help you think about creating a learning environment that feels like a kind and loving place for teachers, children, and family members.

- NYCU: Outdoor Spaces – Learn all about taking infants and toddlers outside as well as ways to create effective learning environments in outdoor play areas.

- NYCU: Take It Outside – Learn how to plan for outside time using your curriculum and parents as resources.

- NYCU: Take It Inside – Bringing natural items inside is another great way to engage young children with the natural world! Learn about creative ways to bring the outside, inside.

News You Can Use: Foundations of School Readiness: Physical Development and Health – learn about infant and toddler physical development and health.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/school-readiness/NewsYouCanUse.htm

Rocking and Rolling: Learning to Move from Young Children: Learn some of the latest research on motor development.
http://www.naeyc.org/yc/learning-to-move

How Caregivers and Teachers Support Book Knowledge and Print Concepts – This resource offers specific strategies for those who work with infants, toddlers, and preschool age children on how to support book knowledge and print concepts.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/docs/big5-strategies-teachers-book-knowledge.pdf

Creating Learning Environments That Include Children's Home Languages and Cultures – This resource provides strategies for creating early childhood settings that reflect and include children's home languages and cultures.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/docs/dll-ts-creating-environments.pdf

Creating a Welcoming Early Childhood Program for LGBT-Headed Families – A series of resources that explores how to enhance relationships with lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or transgender (LGBT) families.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/relationship/inclusive-early-childhood.html
Relationship-Based Practices with Families – This series of resources provide multiple ways to think about family engagement and creating a welcoming environment for families.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/relationship

RESOURCES (CONT'D):

Multicultural Principles for Head Start
Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five
– This resource provides recent research and
perspectives on key multicultural principles and
offers guidance to staff on how to implement
these principles in their programs.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/
cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20
Learners/pdm/responsiveness/revisiting.htm

HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Information in this episode reflect the following Head Start Program Performance Standards
Subpart C—Education and Child Development Program Services
§1302.32 Curricula
    (a) (1) Center-based and family child care programs must implement developmentally
    appropriate research-based early childhood curricula…
§1302.33 Child screenings and assessment
    (b) Assessment for individualization
    (1) A program must conduct standardized and structured assessments, which may be
    observation-based or direct, for each child to provide ongoing information to evaluate the child's
    developmental level and progress…
§1302.31 Teaching and the learning environment
    (b) Effective teaching practices
    (1) Teaching practices must:
    (i) Emphasize nurturing and responsive practices, interactions, and environments…
    (ii) Focus on promoting growth in the developmental progressions described in the Head Start Early
    Learning Outcomes Framework…
    (iii) Integrate child assessment data in individual and group planning; and
    (iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in language, literacy, social and
    emotional development, math, science, social studies, creative arts, and physical development…
    (2) For dual language learners, a program must recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as
    strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development.
    (c) Learning environment
    (1) For infants and toddlers, promote relational learning and include individualized and small group
    activities that integrate appropriate daily routines into a flexible schedule of learning experiences
Subpart F—Additional Services for Children with Disabilities
§1302.60 Full participation in program services and activities
    A program must ensure enrolled children with disabilities…receive all applicable program
    services…and that they fully participate in all program activities.

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