Teacher Time

Viewers Guide | Episode 2
CREATING A RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

SUMMARY

CONTENT OVERVIEW:

Dr. Alexandra Figueras-Daniel joined us to talk about the importance of creating learning environments that include materials and learning opportunities that are responsive to individual children's developmental levels, needs, and interests. We discussed strategies for providing materials and learning opportunities for children that meet them where they are in terms of their development and scaffold their learning of new skills. Because materials, routines, and learning opportunities can be used to support children's learning and development, we refer to the environment as a "third teacher."

- It is important to recognize that the learning environment we provide communicates values to children and what we hope they will experience during the time they spend with us each day.
- Take time to evaluate your learning environment – including the common spaces like entrance and hallways as well as outdoor spaces. What does the environment "teach" to the children who spend their days there? How does the environment support their growth and development across developmental domains?
- If we think about the learning environment as a "teacher" or "communicator," this can change the way we plan the spaces and materials children engage with each day.

Key Points:

- Designed environments with young children in mind – small chairs/tables, materials accessible, variety of spaces for individual/ small group/large group activities, materials that are accessible depending on the developmental level and ready to scaffold skills as they develop,
- Provide schedules/routines that support predictability – children depend on predictability – in schedules, routines, transitions, and in their environment (e.g., napping in the same space each day, drop off routine is the same each day, etc.)
- Create warm and supportive learning environments that reflect individual children's families, cultures and languages, as well as their interests. Preschoolers spend much of their day in free play and routines, it's important that the spaces for this are engaging and comfortable for both children and adults. That means it's important to provide for both active learning opportunities, such as learning centers with interesting and varied materials, as well as comfortable spaces where children can relax, socialize, eat, and transition from one activity to the next.
- Don't forget outdoor environments – remember that the time children spend outside is just as important to their growth and development as time indoors. The outdoor environment can support growth and development in all domains.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY WITH LINDA ESPINOSA

Dr. Linda Espinosa joined us to help us to think about ways to provide individualized materials and learning opportunities in order to support children's continued growth and development in this area. She gave tips to ensure that children's knowledge and skills are recognized and scaffolded by the materials and learning opportunities we provide:

- Design literacy experiences related to children's backgrounds and interests and focused on the important literacy goals targeted in the ELOF.
- Use the information gained from family interviews to select books, stories, themes and extension activities. Selecting the books to be read is important first step. Know and respond to the diversity of children and families.
- Use highly interactive book reading approaches, such as Dialogic Reading to build vocabulary, listening skills, and early literacy skills. This method engages children with the content of story books through interactive dialog and conversation before, during and after storytelling.
- When working with dual language learners, develop individual language goals based on child's level of English language development (ELD). Discuss levels of ELD and how this might influence goal setting. Major goals:
  - Higher levels of English proficiency are important at kindergarten entry.
  - Strong home language skills are foundation for acquiring English and future school success.
- Use grouping practices: small instructional groups and structured pairings that promote targeted, individualized instruction and conversational language development.
- Intentionally integrate songs, chants, visual cues/gestures to communicate content of stories, messages, and academic vocabulary.

TRY IT OUT!

During the episode we shared the story of two teachers who recognized that children in the classroom were showing different skill levels. The teachers followed these steps in order to create a learning environment that supported individual children:

1. Understand developmental progressions (ELOF learning goals),
2. Know where children are in that development (assessment), and
3. Provide materials and learning opportunities to meet children where they're at and build new skills (teaching practices)

We asked teachers to think about several of the children in their group who have a varied range of content knowledge and abilities in one or more learning domains/subdomains. Then, use what they know about these children—using tools such as observations, assessment systems, the ELOF developmental progressions—and determine what they might be ready to learn "next." Then take a look at the learning environment, and determine whether the materials and/or learning opportunities provided support those individual children in developing new skills.

ELOF MINUTE WITH PETER PIZZOLONGO

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) is a framework that represents the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. It is grounded in a comprehensive body of research regarding what children should know and be able to do during their formative years—from birth through age five. As you know, the first five years of life is a time of wondrous and rapid development and learning. ELOF outlines and describes the skills, behaviors, and concepts that programs must foster in all children—including children who are dual language learners and children with disabilities.

ELOF is organized in a way that can help teachers and families understand child development and guide the ways in which we help children learn. The framework includes:
- Domains—broad areas of early learning and development. The ELOF domains are:
  - Approaches to Learning,
  - Social and Emotional Development,
  - Language and Literacy,
  - Cognition, and
  - Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
- Sub-domains—categories of development within each domain, such as "relationships with other children" as a sub-domain within "social and emotional development."
- Goals—general statements of expectations for children's learning and development. Developmental progressions—the skills, behaviors, and concepts that children will demonstrate as they progress toward a goal. AND
- Indicators—the specific, observable skills, behaviors, and concepts that children should know and be able to do at the end of Early Head Start (by 36 months) or at the end of Head Start (by 60 months).

This segment focused on the domain Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development. This domain includes goals for Perception; Fine and Gross Motor Development; and Health, Safety, and Nutrition. Perception refers to children's use of their senses to gather and understand information and respond to the world around them. Preschoolers rely on perceptual information to develop greater awareness of their bodies in space and to move effectively to perform tasks. This segment showed videos of children engaged in motor activities and shared related ELOF goals and developmental progressions The segment offered ideas about how to use the environment to support the natural learning preschoolers engage in every day:
- Include materials and learning opportunities that promote children learning new concepts and skills in this domain.
- Set up and use your environment—indoors and outdoors, and including routines—to promote children's learning and skill development.
- Understand developmental progression—and the strengths, interests, and needs of each child in the group—teachers know how best to support children learning new concepts and practicing new skills.
- Use a variety of equipment, materials, and activities for children to enhance their perceptual, motor, and physical development.
- Provide opportunities for children to carry objects that as they help prepare for mealtimes; take walks outdoors; move to music; engage in socio-dramatic play.

You can learn more about ELOF by going to the ELOF pages on the ECLKC Website—the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/sr/approach/elof

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT MINUTE

Dr. Neal Horen described what mindfulness looks like for preschoolers and why it contributes to social-emotional development and approaches to learning. Practicing mindfulness supports executive functioning and self-regulation skills, and supports capacity to focus, plan, remember, and multi-task. Mindfulness is paying attention in a very special way. Awareness of oneself, others, and their surroundings.

The practice of mindfulness supports children's development in the Social Emotional and Approaches to Learning ELOF domains:
- Developing Relationships with Adults and Other Children
- Emotional Functioning
- Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation
- Cognitive Self-Regulation

Mindfulness helps children specifically who may present challenging behaviors by supporting them in recognizing their thoughts and feelings and in understanding the thoughts and feelings of others

Teachers can build in opportunities throughout the day to support mindfulness and can implement a specific mindfulness curriculum or find ways to build mindfulness into games, activities, routines.

RESILIENCY AND WELLNESS

Neal Horen described why it is important for adults to practice mindfulness while they work with young children and what it means for adults to practice mindfulness. Stress can be associated with working with young children and families. A failure to address this stress can impact work life and relationships. Mindfulness supports teacher well-being and can contribute to less stressful learning environments and more positive adult-child interactions

Strategies Neal mentioned include:
- Intentionally paying attention –be in the moment and non-judgmentally - to our thoughts, feelings, sensations
- Regularly checking in with self – body, breath, food, self-care, etc
- Participating in professional development opportunities that support mindfulness/ health/wellbeing
- Supporting a culture of mindfulness within the classroom and program
- Checking in with other teachers on practice and creating safe spaces to talk about wellness

RESOURCES:

15-Minute In-service Suite: Materials to Support Learning https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice/engage/iss/support-learning.html

Planning and Organizing Thematic Instruction (inclusive of children who are dual language learners and supports the idea of planning based on children's "big ideas") https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/docs/dll-ts-planning-organizing-thematic-instruction.pdf

15-Minute In-Service Suite: Using Data to Inform Teaching https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice/assessment/iss/inform-teaching.html

Including Children's Home Languages and Cultures https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/docs/dll-ts-childrens-home-languages.pdf

Creating Environments That 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

Planned Language Approach (PLA). The Big 5 for All https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/big-5.html

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
§1302.31 Teaching and the learning environment
 (b)(1)(i)-(iv) Effective teaching practices – nurturing and responsive practices, interactions, and environments …; promote growth in ELOF developmental progressions; integrate child assessment data in individual/group planning; include developmentally appropriate learning experiences…
 (b)(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 – well organized; developmentally appropriate schedules, lesson plans, indoor and outdoor learning experiences …
 (2) for preschool children … teacher-directed and child-initiated activities; active and quiet activities; individual, small-group, and large-group learning activities
 (d) Materials and space for learning – provide age-appropriate equipment, materials, supplies and physical space for indoor/outdoor learning environments…; include necessary accommodations and make space accessible to children with disabilities; change materials intentionally and periodically …

§1302.32 Curricula
 (1) Center-based and family child care programs must implement developmentally appropriate research-based early childhood curricula…

HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

§1302.33 Child screenings and assessment
> (b)(1)-(2) assessment for individualization – conduct standardized and structured assessments (observation-based or direct) … that result in usable information/conducted with sufficient frequency to allow for individualization; regularly use assessment information with informal teacher observations and additional information from family and staff … to inform and adjust strategies to better support individualized learning …

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.

Subpart I – Human Resources Management
1302.93 Staff health and wellness
> (b) A program must make mental health and wellness information available to staff regarding health issues that may affect their job performance, and must provide regularly scheduled opportunities to learn about mental health, wellness, and health education.

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning

Early Childhood
National Centers