

## Teacher Time for Preschool Teachers

[Music]

Judi Stevenson-Garcia: Welcome to the first of four Teacher Time series preschool episodes. We're so glad you joined us today. I'm Judy Garcia, and I will be one of your hosts for this series. I'm here with my cohost, Will Scott. We are both part of the National Center on Early Childhood Development Teaching and Learning, and we're both so excited to be with you today to talk about curriculum implementation in settings that serve three and four-year-olds. I'm a former preschool and elementary school teacher, and then I moved on to supporting teachers in a coaching capacity, as well as helping Early Childhood programs improve quality. I also happen to have two children, one who just left preschool this year for kindergarten, another who just began preschool. So, at home and at work pretty much all I do is think about early childhood.

William Scott: And I'm Will Scott. I'm happy to be here today as well as your cohost for this series. I recently moved to Dallas, Texas from St. Louis, Missouri where I worked for a parenting education program. I spent many years in Head Start as a classroom teacher and various other positions, including compliance specialist. I have a blended family with many children. I enjoy being a father as well as promoting fatherhood in early childhood education.

Judi: This series is intended to provide you with information about the ways in which you can support preschool children's growth and development through the implementation of high-quality and developmentally appropriate practices, specifically how your learning environment, material, activities and interactions with children all work together to support their growth and development. And we know how important it is to recognize children's individual interests, their languages, cultures and learning styles and provide responsive, organized learning environments that promote children's growth and development. The series has four segments. Today we're going to begin by focusing on implementing curriculum that's responsive to children's interest. And the next three episodes will focus on individualizing instruction, teacher/child interactions and supporting positive relationships between children.

William: Today we're going to provide you with strategies for using children's interests and abilities to inform your planning. As a teacher or a family care provider, you know that a developmentally appropriate research-based curriculum serves as the foundation for your work with children in your group. So, your curriculum provides a written plan that guides your work with young children, and you know that you will use it in a way that supports the way that you teach. Your children enter your learning environment each day with unique backgrounds and interests, and you know they learn best when they engage in activities with materials that represent their cultures, languages and unique abilities and interests. So, today we're going to share some strategies for using children's knowledge, skills and interests to inform your planning and instruction.

Judi: During today's episode, we'll have a couple of opportunities for you to interact with us via chats and polls. In fact, I believe one is showing on your screen right now. So, if you haven't already filled that out, go ahead and do that right now. But at any point during today's show, please feel free to submit your comments and questions. We'll be hosting a special Coffee Break in a couple of weeks where we'll ask the expert from today's episode your questions. Also, we don't want this to be the end of the conversation, so watch your email inbox for an

invitation to a special My Peers Group that's designed just for participants of Teacher Time. You'll be able to see the Coffee Breaks there as soon as they are released. You can ask questions and engage in conversations with other teachers just like yourself.

William: Finally, make sure you fill out the evaluation at the end of the show. After you complete it, you'll be prompted to print your certificate of attendance. Also, we'd really like your feedback so we know what resources and information will be most helpful to you. We hope you'll use the ideas we share today, and share your ideas in both the comment box and on the My Peers Group. Okay, Judi, let's take one more minute, because I think those polls are coming in. Let's see who we have with us today.

Judi: Let's see who we have here with us today. Quite a few participants here are classroom teachers. We have a large number of directors. We also have some content managers and coordinators, T&TA providers, and also family childcare providers and family service workers. Then we have another category that's others, which include support staff, administrators, SEAT education departments and supervisors and aides and advocates. We have a wide variety of participants here today, so we're really happy to have you here. Thanks for joining us. We're happy to have with us here today Dr. Alex Figueras-Daniel. Dr. Alex is an assistant research professor at the National Institute for Early Education Research, which many of us know as NIEER. She has collaborated on NIEER's field research projects over the past five years and served as the spokesperson for NIEER's outreach to the Hispanic media. Alex has been a prekindergarten teacher and a teacher in a dual-language program, and has supported many programs and teachers in understanding and implementing high-quality curriculum practices. Today Alex is here to help us understand the ways in which we can build curriculum and instructional decision making around the knowledge and interest of children and families and how we can introduce curriculum topics and design instructional activities that reflect the ages, developmental and linguistic abilities and interests of children. Before we get started, I'd like to remind you that you can submit any questions you have in the comments box. We'll be using those later for our Coffee Break with Alex, which will follow this Teacher Time in two weeks. So, hi, Alex. Welcome.

Alexandra Figueras-Daniel: Hi.

Judi: Thanks for being here. So, we want to talk today a little bit about understanding what it means to use children's interests and abilities and skills to help us inform our curriculum planning and think about why it's so important for children in supporting their growth and development.

Alexandra: So, I think that generally children thrive in environments that are designed with them in mind, and that the more likely that they are to really get engaged is because they are represented and reflected in their environment, and that their interests are there and that they're able to find things that they want to do and that they feel passionate about doing. These are the things that I think really help to give teachers a springboard for conversations and planning curriculums that are meaningful for them.

William: Dr. Alex, can you give us an example of how a teacher or a family childcare provider could design an environment that represents the children in their group?

Alexandra: Sure. I think from a very basic level the materials that are included in the classroom, whether they be books and pictures in a very engaging library area, or a space where children can look at books, are a good start. In that area I think it's important not only to think about including children's languages and cultures, but also about including stories that may be familiar to them from their homes. Stories that they may read with their moms and dads just gives a good opportunity for them to have meaningful discussions with the children and the teachers in a way that they're comfortable with. And other areas of the classroom that are outside the realm of books and pictures, but that may most well match children's abilities, thinking about what children are able to do in the beginning of the school year versus the end of the school year—I guess not necessarily only school year, but the time in general that children are within a certain age range. And really having these materials that match their skills, their abilities, their interests are a way for teachers to have opportunities to watch and observe and listen so that they can be really good at reading between the lines and understanding what makes children tick so that they can be responsive in their planning, whether it's planning to work informally with them or on a more intentional basis when you are delivering content.

Judi: So, it's more than just listening to children and understanding their skills, but also being really responsive and thinking about what each child is going to need in the classroom and setting it up so they can be successful?

Alexandra: Absolutely.

Judi: Yeah. That's great. Thanks, Alex. We actually had the chance to speak with some teachers about how they're creating a supportive learning environment. We're going to take a minute to watch Rafaela, who's talking about how she responded to the interests of the children in her classroom.

[Begin video clip]

The reason why we decided to do the sink and float activity was because yesterday we were playing on the water table and the children were trying to figure out why some things went all the way down to the bottom of the water table while others would stay on the top. They were seeing the bubbles coming up on the toys that were going in and those types of things. So, that's why today we brought up the sink and float activity and gave them different choices of objects that they could choose from in order for them to see if they could figure out by themselves with critical thinking the reason why something was going to float and something was going to sink. I heard a lot of awesome conversations, and also maybe the reason why they thought it was sinking and why they thought they were floating. I know some of my kids were saying, "Well, it looks like a boat. Of course it's going to float. I mean, a boat floats." So, that was a good connection for them on their knowledge of what they do. And a lot of stuff they need to guess. And all the scientific methods that we use are guessing, so they have to formulate a hypothesis and then test that out and see if it actually works out. And they tell me, "That didn't work out the way I wanted it to work out. I want to know why." So, that's where the whole open-ended question came in play, and they get to figure out why it didn't work out for them.

[End video clip]

William: So, Dr. Alex, what do you think about how this teacher responded to the children's interest at the water table?

Alexandra: I think it was great. I think she definitely capitalized on their interest in putting objects into the water and use that as an opportunity to have some conversations about what sorts of things might float, might sink. And while there are definitely some deeper scientific pieces there, she did give them the opportunity to really think about and talk about and put into words some of the things that they were seeing happening in front of them.

Judi: Yeah. She said, "They really use some language—some predictions about what they thought was going to sink or what was going to float." So, she took the opportunity that they had just playing at the water table and turned it into a real learning experience where she said she could support their vocabulary, but also some scientific thinking, which I thought was really great. So, we're going to watch a little bit more of this teacher. She's going to be talking a little bit about how she creates a responsive learning environment responding to the children's needs.

[Begin video clip]

By observing them and see where they're at developmentally, I know which one I need to have close by me. I know which one I can put farther away, which one I can get a good conversation from. And there is a lot of routine and repetition. They know what we do every day. That's why they are in charge of the schedule. They know that after we're done working, we are going to go to circle. And when we get to circle, we're going to pick the stick and say how we're feeling, because I'm really, really big on feelings and emotion. And I think this is probably the only place where the children get to talk about their emotion and really understanding what their emotions are about and how to deal with that. It's a lot of conversation and open-ended question and observation. We also do a home visit prior for them to start in the classroom, so we do talk to the parents. We do ask the parents what they're interested in and what they think they really want to learn. And just by seeing them in the classroom—like the activity today, the sink and float activity, the only reason why that came out is because we were observing them playing on the water table. And we said, "I think that might be something that they really want to learn," and we just go with it. We just have to be super flexible and be ready to have materials ready for them to use and just some kind of activity that relates to what they want to learn.

[End video clip]

Judi: That's great. Alex, tell us what you think about this teacher and how she changes her learning environment and what teachers can do to change the learning environments to be responsive to the children in their classrooms?

Alexandra: Yeah. I think it's a great idea to change the environment on a yearly basis given that there are different groups of children that are going to be using those environments. I think even as a mom of three children, the same materials that interest one child don't necessarily interest the second or the third. I think it's important to respond individually to children as needed so that you're able to provide the supports that they need specifically, and that there

are materials and activities that are based on interests and also abilities that can address where children fall in their own development.

Judi: Can you tell me a little bit about at the beginning of the year when teachers are getting to know children? What are some of the things that teachers or family childcare providers can do to create an environment that's going to support children right away knowing what we know about young children? But then also something that would allow them to be responsive as they get to know their children.

Alexandra: Yeah. I think that in the beginning it's important not to have too many things out, and that children are sort of supported in an individual way to move around the environment and practice working with the materials that are there to show children all of the possibilities that each material holds. I don't know that that's always obvious to children, and I know that that frustrates teachers. I think it's important not lose sight of the fact that that facilitation around each set of materials is very important at the beginning of the school year as children are becoming comfortable and making this environment their home away from home, or, depending on what their setting is, just a new place that they're learning to thrive in.

Judi: Right. They spend a lot of time there. Right? So, it should feel comfortable, and it should feel like it represents who they are as little children and as young learners and have lots of places that are exciting and engaging. When you think of the water table, the water table is fabulous, because kids love to play with water. My boys will play in the sink all day if I let them. So, just by providing that, the teacher allowed the children to explore something that they're naturally interested, and then she observed them to see what they were exploring, because there are so many things you can explore in water tables: dumping and pouring. Sink and float came, and then she took that opportunity to really engage them in a focused learning opportunity with really specific goals around science and communication and language. So, that's great. Thank you, Alex. We're going to have Alex back in just a few minutes. Remember, if you have questions for Alex, you can submit in the comment box and we'll use them for our Coffee Break. Now we're going to do another chat with you. You can use the chat box to answer this question. Can you just let us know if there are some big ideas that your children are expressing right now—some big things that they're thinking about that you've used to inspire your curriculum planning? And we'll come back to that in just a few minutes after you have the chance to enter some of your answers. We're going to take a few minutes now to focus specifically on the development of language and literacy. We're so happy to have Dr. Linda Espinoza here with us today. Dr. Espinoza is a professor emeritus of early childhood education at the University of Missouri Columbia. She has worked extensively with low-income Hispanic and Latino children and families throughout the state of California as a school administrator and program director. She has published more than 120 research articles, book chapters and training materials on how to establish effective educational services for low-income minority families and children who are acquiring English as a second language. Thank you so much for being here with us today, Linda.

Linda Espinosa: Thank you for having me.

Judi: Today we're talking about how teachers and family childcare providers can be responsive to children's knowledge and skills and their specific interests. We know that that's so important when it comes to language and literacy development, because it requires interest and

engagement on behalf of the children. And we know that each child comes into the classroom with really unique backgrounds, ideas and experiences, and we know that they use those to guide their understanding of their communication, the way that they talk and engage, but also their interests in language and literacy. So, could you start out just by giving us a general idea of what language and literacy looks like in an early childhood classroom?

Linda: Sure. Language and literacy are slightly different aspect of the same kind of communicated competence, but language, to break it down into very simple terms, is really composed of two elements: receptive language, or how much a child understands about what is being spoken to them, and if they can follow complex sentences; past tense—they understand that it happened a while ago; and then the expressive is the second aspect of it, which is about how the child uses language. So, can they produce past tense? Do they know what it means when you put a clause at the end of a sentence, for instance, and that changes the meaning of the sentence? So, you've got these two aspects: receptive comprehension, which usually is much greater, so children understand a lot more than what they're able to speak or they're expressing.

One point that I think is really important for early childhood teachers is this need for young children—babies, infants, toddlers, preschoolers—to hear language. Whatever language is being spoken, that that aspect of hearing, attending to, processing—the sounds of that language are then going to eventually prepare them to develop the literacy skills. Sometimes we don't always think about it, but when babies are born, and actually before they're born, their brains are prepared and designed through evolution to attend to the sounds of any language. So, they attend to it, they give it preferential attention, and they start processing it in the last trimester of pregnancy. So, before infants are able talk or communicate, they are looking at you, so that aspect of one-on-one communication is extremely important in developing the expanded language that children need as they move into the reading or the literacy spheres. Literacy in general is reading and writing. Literacy builds on top of this thing that we think of as oral language, or those basic language skills.

So, if a child has a broad vocabulary, they know how to express themselves. Then the literacy task during the preschool years is really to map that onto conventional print. In the English language the sounds we make that they have been listening to since before they were born map onto letters, letters map onto words, words have meaning, you put them together and that communicates a thought, an interest, a desire, a need. Actually, if you spend any time with a three- or a four-year-old, you realize they are pretty sophisticated little communicators. They know who they're communicating to. They know which language to use. They're experimenting constantly. They come up with amazing combinations of words.

Judi: Yeah. My son's favorite word right now is gihumous.

Linda: Gihumous?

Judi: Yes. He uses that all the time.

Linda: They love playing with sounds, which is really important. One final point that I would make about language, when we're working with children who are native English speakers or dual-language learners, to always remember that language is language is language. So, that

language that I talked about earlier, that can and should happen in any language. It's the language the parents are most competent in that you want to keep that going. You want to keep that conversation, storytelling, singing to—whatever you do, keep that going and build on it, but do it in that language of the home. All of that language competence will transfer to and help the child acquire English. This is something that we've really found out in very strong terms that that first language strength is essential. It's not okay; it's really essential to English acquisition and eventual reading in English.

Judi: Wow. That's great. So, if we're going to be supporting children's language development and their literacy development, it seems like at first we need to know what they know. So, they're not babies when they come. They are three- and four-year-olds who are coming into our environments to work with. We need to figure out what they know and what they can do already, whether it be in a home language or whether it be in English. So, can you help us think about how to find out or how to think about what children already know and are able to do?

Linda: Right. And in early childhood we believe and we practice that you start where the children are at. You have to know what vocabulary they have. How do they express themselves? Do they know the concepts of the big and little? Do they know all those kinds of things? What's really important for us to start with is a conversation with families. So, you find out from the families, particularly if they're entering your program at three or even four years of age, what has been that early language learning experience of the child. Who has been speaking to the child, in what languages, for what types of purposes, and what are the families' experiences, what are their preferences, what are their cultural habits and that will give you a lot of insight into what you're seeing in a child's behavior in the classroom.

So, if you see a child who's not responding, who's not talking it could be either a lack of comprehension of English or it could be a temperamental thing. But those are the kinds of the things that you would be able to discern once you have that deeper understanding of that earlier background of the child and the ways in which that has shaped their behavior and their language abilities. So, the conversation with parents is essential. Then the teacher's job, which we all do, is to observe that child, and observe that child when the mom drops the child off or the dad or the grandparents—whoever drops—observe what's going on. What language is the child using to the mom? How is the child relating to the mom? Are there hugs and kisses? Are there tears? All that gives you clues into the child's temperament.

And not just during large group or even small group or even one-on-one, but watch that child on the playground. This is a time where you can get some insight into how they relate to peers, if they're maybe interacting with peers and they're highly chatty and maybe even organizing things. That's a clue into their temperament and personality. You can use that as you build. I also want to say that an important talent of early childhood teachers, and they're maybe not even aware that they're talented in this way, is that they see where the child is at in terms of what concepts and what vocabulary they have. And then they need to intentionally build that toward the curriculum goals so you know what it is that you are starting to have greater expectations for. Yes, we know where they are, but we also know where they need to go, and so we systematically start to increase those expectations for children as they're more and more capable.

Judi: Right. That's really responsive.

Linda: Responsive is the key

Judi: Yeah. Help us think about the learning environment and the way that it's set up and what we can do to make sure that the learning environment is responsive to children's needs, but also really going to support their language and literacy development.

Linda: Right. Alex mentioned this early. Once you've had those conversations with families, you understand a little bit about the family's background, and that should be represented in the classroom so children see images that are familiar to them that connote good experiences and family traditions. The other thing that I like to talk about is this environment as a teaching tool. It's a way in which children learn both is this a safe place, is this a place where I can learn from the environment itself as well as what my teacher is intentionally teaching me? So, we need to very carefully arrange it, and it consists of both the physical aspects, the materials, the way we have organized our centers—all of that, as well as the social aspect. So, who the people are, how we nurture relationships, how we respond to children, that's also part of the environment, and whether or not the child has this sense of I'm accepted, I'm safe and I don't have to have my emotional defenses up, because everybody here accepts who I am, the languages I speak, the cultures I have. So, in addition to having the books, the materials, the print, the images be reflected, you want to have some print that represents the languages of the children. So, you know, and parents and families can help you do it. You have it around, and you even point it out so the children start to identify it.

Judi: Right. It's meaningful.

Linda: Yeah. Their name. The good place to start is just when you set up their cubbies and they have picture. Make sure their name is written correctly in their home language. And then we put under it English as well. So, you kind of color code. You make distinctions between languages, but you make sure that they are reflected. Another thing that we and many programs are very successful with is to recruit and encourage both family members, community members and sometimes older siblings to come into the classroom when they are native speakers of the child's home language so that child has a way of hearing that language and maybe having that book read to him in that language before the teacher reads it in English. There are many messages that we send when the child hears the language, and maybe even you teach everybody an unfamiliar language so everybody is exposed let's say to Mandarin Chinese where maybe there are two little girls who speak it at home, the whole class can benefit, including the teacher.

Judi: Of course.

Linda: We can all learn. As I like to say, not any of us will ever know all of the languages and cultures that our children and families bring. We just don't. Even if we're bilingual or trilingual, our communities are very diverse these days, but we can learn about them and we can support those languages through some very deliberate strategies. So, in some ways we all need to embrace something a little new.

Judi: That's wonderful. I really love that. I think it's really powerful to think about how we can create a learning environment that's a mini community that's representative of the children and the families who are there. And think about what that would mean to children and families who are there every day. I think it could be really powerful. Thank you for being here with us, Linda. I know you're going to come back to us in our next episode. Thank you for being here today.

Linda: You're welcome.

Judi: Linda is going to come back to be with us for the next preschool episodes to talk more about supporting children's language and literacy development. For more information on supporting language and literacy in your learning environment, you can go to the ECLKC and search for the Planned Language Approach. It's a comprehensive systematic research-based way for early childhood programs to ensure optimal language and literacy services for children who speak English and for those who are dual-language learners. So, now, Will, let's get back to our polls. We asked our participants to tell us a little bit about their big idea. So, can you share with us what you heard?

William: Yes. From Patty we have the changing colors on tree leaves.

Judi: That's great.

William: And then we have, "What happened to that puddle we jumped in yesterday?" We also have how we are like and how we are different. And the new baby is coming. What does that mean for me and my family? These are just some of the common ideas. We'll share more, so keep those rolling in. Thank you.

Judi: Yeah. That's great. I like the changing colors. My son has been talking about that. We've been noticing it every day on the way to school—the changing colors of the leaves. It's just kind of a cool thing, but it's definitely a big idea in their world. Right? What happens?

William: That's right. It's that time of year. Hi, Dr. Alex. Thank you for joining us again. So, can you tell us a bit about how a teacher can take a big idea that children have shown interest in and turn that into a really engaging experience in their classroom?

Alexandra: Sure. I can think of one experience working in a preschool classroom with a teacher where children were studying structures and living in an urban inner city surrounded by lots of buildings. In fact, this classroom was situated in a high-rise building. They started to investigate all the different kinds of structures, and the teacher did a great job at presenting them with pictures of the Empire State Building and other famous structures. But one thing that the children go really interested in learning more about were igloos. So, while this was not something that was part of their immediate community, the teacher was very responsive in that she allowed them to explore this topic. So, what they did was decide to make an igloo. The children really wanted to make a space in the classroom where they could model an igloo. And it wasn't just any kind of igloo. It was an igloo that they could actually fit in and use as a reading space or a quiet space. So, they forged on, and the teacher helped them and facilitated them by first asking them to make drawings and representations of what the structure would look like on paper as sort of a blueprint, and all the while using the vocabulary and terminology that you would use when thinking about architecture and building. They came up with really interesting

drawings of different perspectives of the igloo: birds-eye view, side view. And that went for very rich conversations. Then they delved into executing their plan and how they were going to do this. So, with the teacher's help they searched on the Internet for ideas of how to do this. They came on an idea of using milk jug containers. They proceeded with this. They started off with measuring a circle that would be large enough. With her help they engaged in this process of making a perfect circle and thinking about the diameter of the circle and how many children would fit inside it. Then they started to build.

The teacher quickly saw that the children needed a way to be able to problem solve through this idea. She was going to let them lead on the project. They figured a way to move and replace the milk jugs rather than just have them permanently fixed from the very beginning of the project. They started to quickly stack and noticed that they ran into a problem, because rather than having a globe structure, they were ending up with more of a cylinder of a structure. So, they really had to think about how to work around that. They offered suggestions like, "It needs to go from big to small," which I thought was a fairly interesting perspective, because that is what this dome shape does. Eventually they were able to do it. The structure became quite a success and quite a hit.

They got lots of visitors from other places. I thought that given the materials that they used—and it's very feasible and something that can be done in the classroom setting, in a home setting, and I did feel that it was responsive to what the children were interested in despite that it wasn't particularly what the teacher set out to do in an urban neighborhood where there are no igloos. So, that was very flexible of her, but there was still a lot of opportunity to cross domains and to target lots of different developmental areas as the children progressed through their idea.

Judi: Can you help me a little about what some of the learning goals were that the teachers were able to support the children in, because there is a lot that you mentioned there? Let's think about how building an igloo and following the children's leads would support their growth and development in different learning areas.

Alexandra: There was definitely the obvious vocabulary and verbal development piece. There was some spatial relationship thinking through that part of it. There was social emotional figuring out how to respect each other's ideas and not make someone feel bad about an idea that might definitely not work. And also they ran into lots of challenges around how to engage all the children, but maybe not at the same time, because clearly not everyone could work on it at the same time. So, they, as a class, worked through that and they came up with the system where they could rotate and take turns. And of course there was lots of math and geometry to build this structure that was large enough for them to fit in. Again, building on social emotional, I think the children felt very invested. It became part of their permanent classroom. It was a structure that stayed and that I think they felt very responsible for.

<<Judi: Some ownership over that. Just think about what it must have meant for them to be responsible for building this thing. It was their idea and they got to make it, and then they got to be successful with the teacher's guidance. I think I would be really proud of that too if I was a preschooler. When you think about how meaningful that is to have it stay in the classroom and it would be something that they could say, "I built that," or, "I did that. We knew how to do that." And the confidence that will give them to tackle other problems as they move forward,

something that they understand about working together and approaching that problem together, and then creating something great. They can take that with them as they move forward into other projects. That's really great.

Alexandra: Definitely.

Judi: Thanks for sharing that with us, Alex. That's a great example of taking children's ideas and being responsive and turning it into something really powerful and meaningful. So, thank you.

Alexandra: Thank you.

William: Thank you, Dr. Alex, for being with us today.

Alexandra: Thank you.

William: Alex will be joining us for our remaining three episodes to share more of her insights into how to implement a high-quality and rich curriculum in your learning environment. Now it's time for you to try it out. Your homework over the next few weeks is to take some time to observe your children and figure out what some of the big ideas are for them right now. Watch them as they play in the block area or dramatic play area. Listen to the stories they tell on Monday mornings when they've just come back in from a weekend at home. What is really interesting to them right now? What unique skills and abilities do they have that you can support through the materials you provide? The learning opportunities and the daily conversations.

Judi: That's right. We know that sometimes the things children are interested in are super heroes and video games or cell phone apps. I know my kids are. And that's okay. If you dig deeper you'll find some common themes to build on. Interest in super heroes can lead to rich experiences in the writing center, and providing writing and art materials will help you write down an adventure that a child has created. Or they can draw pictures to illustrate their adventures. You can explore common themes among these stories, similarities and differences among characters and find other stories that may not be about heroes. And find themes or characters that are similar. Or think about the block area. You can provide cars and trucks and people so children can build and then act out their stories. Think outside the box.

William: Now we're going to take a moment and connect this thinking about implementing a responsive curriculum to the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Peter Pizzolongo is here to tell us about that.

Peter Pizzolongo: Hello. I'm Peter Pizzolongo. For this portion of Teacher Time we'll focus on ELOF, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework ages birth to five as we continue to unpack today's topic using children's interest to inform curriculum planning. In each Teacher Time episode we'll present an ELOF minute, but I'll actually use more than one minute for this, because it's really important. Now, some of you might be asking, "What is ELOF?" so I'll begin with a brief overview of ELOF before we home in on children guide the curriculum and the role that ELOF can play to inform your practice. ELOF is a framework that represents the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers and preschoolers what children should know and be able to do 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 Early Head Start and Head Start programs must foster in all children, including children who are dual language learners and children with disabilities. ELOF is organized in a way that helps teachers and families understand child development and guide the ways in which we help children learn. You can learn more about ELOF by reviewing the handout that accompanies this episode, and by going to the ELOF pages on the ECLKC website, the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. For this ELOF segment, I want to focus on three components of the framework: the domains, subdomains and developmental progressions. Domains are the general areas of early learning and development. The ELOF goals are broad statements of expectations for children's learning and development.

Developmental progressions are the skills, behaviors and concepts that children will demonstrate as they progress toward a goal. Today's topic makes me think about the domain approaches to learning. Earlier teacher Rafaela talked about the big ideas that the children in her group have. Designing and building structures is a big idea that many preschoolers have. To be able to think about a structure and begin building it with the materials available and stick to the building activity despite the challenges that occur takes persistence. Building structures and sticking to the task is an example of an activity and a developmental progression that leads to a goal that teachers and families can set for a preschooler. Looking at the ELOF in the approaches to learning domain, one of the goals is child persists in tasks.

Your program school readiness goals could include a goal that is similar to this goal from ELOF, such as children will demonstrate persistence when working with materials, activities and information. The preschooler you see in this video clip is showing persistence, which is needed to get those pieces together, which can present challenges as a child solves problems regarding what fits where, issues around balance and other things that go into this important work. Looking at the developmental progression for this ELOF goal, child persists in tasks, for the child you see in this video, his skill falls within the range of typical skills for children between 36 and 48 months of age, persists on preferred tasks when presented with small challenges with or without adult support, such as continuing to try to build the tall tower with blocks even when some pieces fall. What can we expect this skill would lead to? Looking, again, at the ELOF developmental progression for this goal we see that for children 48 to 60 months of age, the skill would be frequently persists on preferred tasks, sometimes persists on less-preferred tasks with or without adult support, such as working to clean up an activity area. Have you seen children demonstrating these skills among the three- and four-year-olds you've worked with?

So, understanding the ELOF goals and developmental progression can guide your teaching practices. A mentor once said to me, "In early childhood education we meet children where they are, but we don't leave them there." When we understand the concept of developmental progression and know the skills and concepts children typically learn as they progress toward a goal, we are meeting children where they are and helping them to grow and learn. For example, as a competent teacher, you know that you'll need to provide materials so that children can learn and practice skills as they develop persistence, such as unit blocks and hollow blocks for building, puzzles that have eleven pieces as well as puzzles with more than twenty pieces and other experiences that require children to problem solve to complete a task.

Can you picture a child building with blocks figuring out how to balance the blocks so he can create a bridge for the first time, or a child being introduced to a twenty-piece puzzle after she's

mastered all the eleven-piece puzzles she's been working on for a while. Understanding and using developmental progressions helps you to know what materials to provide so children can develop persistence and learn new concepts and skills. Of course, the curriculum your program uses includes developmental progressions similar to the progressions in the ELOF, as well as the types of experiences and the materials to help children move along the progression to meet the goals you've set for your group and each child. In addition, you know each child in your care, so you know the best kind of support to provide to each as he or she is progressing toward a goal. For some children you will quietly observe as they persist at their task. For other children you might provide words of encouragement specific to the task. And for other children you might scaffold their activity by asking open-ended questions that help them to think about what they are doing and what they might be able to do next. I hope that this segment has helped you to better understand the Early Learning Outcomes framework and you recognize how the ELOF can help you to be a better teacher. Thanks for watching. See you next time.

Judi: Thank you, Peter. We are going to transition now to talk a little bit about how to support children who may have challenges that make it difficult to persist at tasks or engage in activities you've provided. Sometimes, even when you provide learning environments that reflect your children's interests, you may still struggle to connect with and support some children and really engaging with materials and activities in your learning environment. So, we're happy to welcome Dr. Neal Horen from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. He's here to talk to us today about how to support children in your learning environment who may struggle to engage with the materials or learning opportunities despite your best attempts. So, welcome, Neal.

Neal Horen: Thanks.

Judi: Thank you so much for being here today.

Neal: Thanks for having me.

Judi: What can you tell us about supporting preschoolers who may be exhibiting some challenging behaviors or not really being able to engage in the materials and learning opportunities?

Neal: In the words of a very wise childhood—it's a ginormous issue. I think that the place to start is to think about behavior as a way of communication, and Linda certainly talked really nicely about this. I think if folks can start to think about what the meaning of the behavior is, that children are trying to tell us something, and that communication starts from the moment they walk into the facility. From drop off all the way through pick up, there's communication happening. Sometimes it's very direct and sometimes it's much harder to decipher. If we're paying attention and thinking about that particular child, as well as all the other children and what they're bringing to the table, what we start to do is we start to act sort of like a detective, and we start to pay attention to some of those cues. If that child is having difficulty with drop off, what can we do that might help? What can we do to not say, "Boy, that child is really anxious, and that's a challenging behavior," rather why can't we say, "What can I do that might actually support that child and make that transition," which is, for many of us, a very difficult transition. I'm sure you'll have this difficulty when I step out. But I think when we, as teachers, think about ways in which to support that child and do something as simple as let them wave

goodbye from the window and work towards making that not such a difficult transition, we're using out detective skills. That's the important piece here.

Judi: So, you're trying to think about the different behaviors that children exhibit and not thinking about what to do about those behaviors, but really first stop and think, "What is this behavior trying to tell me? What is the child trying to communicate through this behavior?" and then think about solutions. It seems to me like the solution doesn't lie within the child; it lies within the teacher and the learning environment.

Neal: Too often what we do is we have an expectation that every child just comes knowing all the skills that they need to know. They know how to problem solve, they know how to enter into conversation, work with other children, share materials—whatever it is that we expect those children to be doing in our care during the day. And the truth is that some children do come with a very good level of skills and some don't. If we start to think of ourselves as having opportunities to help develop those skills, I loved Alex's example, because it wasn't just about building an igloo; it was about all the concomitant pieces that come together when you do something like that and follow the lead and the interests of those children. Then we have opportunities for problem solving. What if there are not enough milk jugs for each child to use one right at that moment? And then one child starts to get really frustrated. Well, instead of saying, "That child is really challenging," you might say, "What can I do to help that child figure out a way to express frustration that isn't knocking down the work of other children?" or things like that.

Judi: Yeah. That's really important. I remember working with a teacher who had a child who would always go into the block area and ram the cars into the kids' buildings, and it was a real challenge for the kids who were building, but also for the teacher. But instead of trying to change the behavior right away, she observed, and it was something that happened pretty consistently. Her assumption was that this child wanted to go and play in the block area, but didn't know how to say, "I want to play with you guys." And so his way to get in was to smash their buildings. So, she worked with him to help him figure out how to enter. And she worked with the other children. "This child is really wanting to play with you guys." So, the children were more prepared when he came along to say, "Do you want to come play with us?" but also she gave him some words just to say, "Can I play with you?" And I think that that's one of those things where she stopped and tried to figure out what was going on. "Is this kid just angry and aggressive?" He wasn't ramming his cars into any other kids in any other areas or aggressive. It was just in that one area. By giving him the language, he was able to then successfully enter into play. So, I think that that's really important what you're telling us about stopping and observing and thinking about what children are trying to communicate.

Neal: Yeah. I've heard—I think it's Jerry Paulay [phonetic 51:52]. I could have it wrong—"Don't just do something; stop," instead of, "Don't just sit there; do something." I think when we work with children, particularly when we think about behavior, one of the things we need to do is stop for a second. Challenging behavior, quite frankly, is what's challenging to the adult in the room. There are things that are challenging to you that may not be challenging to me, and vice versa. I have pretty energetic children at home. I'm okay with it. But I have friends who come over and it is really challenging. "Why are they running?" "Because that's what they do." So, for teachers to think about, "What pushes my buttons? What is it that gets me to think that this is a challenging behavior?" because challenging behavior is the intensity, frequency and

duration of a behavior and that it challenges your sense of competence. When you start to think about your day from drop off all the way to pick up, and the ways in which you feel competent, and what happens that challenges that, that's when you can start to think, "How can I help support that child and be responsive to that child so that it doesn't challenge me quite as much?"

Judi: That's great. Thank you, Neal. That's really helpful. So, I think next time, because you'll be joining us for our next episode, maybe we can take some time to dive a little deeper into these suggestions and maybe give our viewers some really concrete examples of things that they can do throughout the day to support children.

Neal: Sounds great.

Judi: That would be great.

Neal: Yeah.

William: Thank you, Neal.

Neal: Sure.

William: Now we want to take a few minutes to focus on you, the adults responsible for implementing curriculum each day in a way that is responsive and engaging. As we know, creating these learning environments can be a real challenge, especially when each child in your room has unique interests and needs. So, we want to give you some ideas about how to take care of you, because we know that your wellbeing directly affects the ability to care of your children. One of the areas we have been hearing more and more about is the area of wellness. These days we are much more aware of the effects of stress and not taking care of one's self.

Neal: Yeah.

William: So, what are some broad issues to consider in terms of staff and wellness?

Neal: I'm glad we're talking about it, because I would tell you that five to ten years ago this was something we didn't talk very much about—the wellbeing of folks in child care, the folks in Early Head Start and Head Start Home visiting. And, quite frankly, over the last few years we spend much more time talking about this. A recent study by Robert Whitaker and his colleagues and Pennsylvania Head Start staff really showed that this is a huge issue, and we need to start to think about it. There is research that actually shows that when caregivers are stressed, they tend to use more harsh discipline, more punitive discipline and they actually tend to have more challenging behavior arise because of that.

And so we need to address this. We talk a lot about wellness and I think that we oftentimes have thought about it was physical wellness: either I'm healthy or I'm not. We need to broaden that. folks need to think about it in terms of different aspect of wellness. Physical wellness is obviously a big piece of this, but there is also social wellness. There is emotional wellness. There is financial or occupational wellness—how satisfied am I with my work, with my relationships in my community? Spiritual wellness—that connection with community in terms

of spiritual wellness. All of those are different for each of us. How I address my physical wellness is equally important in terms of how I address all those other aspects of wellness, but I can't do it all. I have to prioritize. What I would hope that folks start to do is to think about what you can do and what's important to you. So, if your social wellness is important to you, I have a colleague who talks a lot about the work-life balance. Balance is a huge issue in terms of wellness. She'll hang up on me at 4:30 on a Friday. She'll just say, "Work-life balance," and then she hangs up. I'm a little surprised. Actually, a lot of people hang up on me. We should talk about that next time. But that balance is really important, and figuring out and prioritizing which aspects of wellness are important to you is really critical.

Judi: Can you help us think a little bit about some practical things? Are there ways within a program or on an individual teacher or family childcare provider level—some things that they can do support this wellness in the workplace.

Neal: Yeah. Let's start with a group basis and we'll end with the individual basis so that folks leave with some tips. On a group basis, there are places across the country that have developed wellness teams. When it's done in a really thoughtful manner—there is a great program in Missouri that has done some really good thinking about this. What they do, as they start to think about it, is it about physical wellness, or are we doing things like exercises, and are we allowing some time for somebody to actually go take a ten-minute walk? It's about small things. There is a program where they have allowed staff to paint the walls of their office the color that they want to, which, for some of us, may not be important, but in some ways allows you to individualize, which is actually a piece of wellness. On the other hand, there are some people who don't like those sorts of things.

At work there's like a water challenge—how much water are you drinking? That's not my thing. I do my own thing. On an individual basis there are a number of things that people can do. There is a great push, and Robert Whitaker and his colleagues are really pushing this around wellness around mindfulness. Mindful breathing. Being mindful is a whole way of being that allows you to slow down, and allows you to focus on yourself. There are things that you can't do at work. When I hear somebody say, "I really like to ride a horse," most of our workplaces don't have hitching posts anymore, so we have to think about things that we can do in the workplace. For example, just some deep breathing. Not just taking a deep breath, but really focusing on that breath. Progressive muscle relaxation. On the [inaudible 58:12] website there is guided audio in English and Spanish for relaxation. Think about what the individual can do within the scope of what happens during the day? You don't get four-hour breaks to get out to the gym. But if you can get ten-minute breaks or even five-minute breaks to just focus on yourself, to do a little meditation, to do a little breathing, those kinds of things that might be helpful.

Judi: Thank you. That is really helpful. Going back to what you said about teachers who are stressed that it impacts their students, it's important for us to make sure that we remember that taking care of ourselves is going to have an impact on our students. Being mindful in the classroom will have a direct impact on our students and will serve the community on a daily basis. So, thank you, Neal. That was really helpful. Thanks for being here.

Neal: Yeah. Thanks for having me.

Judi: We've learned so much today about how you can observe and use children's interests and needs to create an engaging approach to curriculum that will support children's growth and development. Remember, children thrive in a learning environment that's designed with them in mind. They are more likely to get really engaged and persist at creating something new or solving a problem. It's important to make sure that the materials you provide represent children's cultures and languages and their communities. Most importantly, when you take the time to understand and learn about your children's individual backgrounds, that can guide your planning and help you implement your curriculum in a way that's really responsive.

William: Yes. I have really enjoyed hearing about the many ways teachers have been thoughtful about engaging their children in really creative and thoughtful ways. We'll look forward to seeing you again on our next episode, which will be on January 27<sup>th</sup> at 3PM. We'll be digging in deeper to the idea of creating a responsive learning environment and discussing strategies you can use immediately to meet the individual needs of all children you work with. We're going to leave you with some great resources. If you'd like to continue learning more about implementing a high-quality developmentally appropriate curriculum in your learning environment, you can find these resources by clicking on the View's Guide that is on your screen.

Judi: I'd like to thank all of our guests for being here today. Please remember to ask for questions in the Chat box. We'll have the chance to address some of those questions at our upcoming Coffee Break. Thank you for being here with us today. And, before we go, we'd like to leave you with this moment of learning.

[Begin video clip]

Teacher: What about if you turn your Lego upside down? What's gonna happen then?

Student: Upside down.

Teacher: It's just gonna be upside down. It's still gonna float.

Student: It might sink.

Teacher: It still floats.

Teacher: I have a seashell.

Student: Can I have it?

Teacher: Sure. Should we try it? Try it. Let's see.

Student: Okay.

Teacher: All right. Let's see if that sinks.

Student: It floats.

Teacher: It floats. What about this one?

Student: It sinks.

Teacher: It sinks all the way to the bottom.

[END VIDEO CLIP]