

## **Teacher Time for Preschool Teachers**

### **Episode 3**

Judi Stevenson-Garcia: Welcome to the third of four Teacher Time Series preschool episodes. We are so glad you joined us today. I'm Judi 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 so excited to be with you today to talk about teacher-child interactions in settings that serve three -- and four-year-olds. Hi, Will. It's nice to be back together again.

Will Scott: Hi, Judi. I'm happy to be here today as your cohost. 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 curriculum practices.

Judi: Specifically how your classroom, materials, activities and interactions with children all work together to support children's growth and development. And we know how important it is to recognize children's individual interests, languages, cultures and learning styles and provide responsive, organized learning environments that promote children's growth and development.

Will: The series has four segments. Our first episode focused on implementing curriculum that is responsive to children's interests. Last time we learned about creating learning environments that support children's growth and development and meet their individual needs. Today, we're excited to dig into the important topic of teacher-child interactions. And just a note, when we use the term teacher we are referring to all adults who work with young children and their families in a classroom or other learning environment.

Judi: As you know, each episode is followed by a Coffee Break where we will ask the expert from today's episode your questions that you send in during today's show. So, please remember to enter any questions you have into the Chat Box at the bottom of your screen. Also, there will be several opportunities for you to engage with us through some chats and polls during today's episode, so make sure to keep an eye out for those.

Will: Also, we don't want this to be the end of the conversation, so please take some time to go to our special Teacher Time community in MyPeers. You'll be able to see the Coffee Breaks there as soon as they are released. And ask questions, participate in polls and engage in conversations with other teachers just like yourself.

Judi: 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. Plus, we'd really like to hear your feedback so we can make this the most useful experience we possibly can. We hope you'll use the ideas we share today and share your ideas both in the comment box and on the MyPeers group.

Will: Last time we talked about creating learning environments that act as a third teacher. Remember, parents act as the first teacher. Then they have you, their second teacher. And, finally, the learning environment can act as a third teacher with the classroom arrangement, materials and learning opportunities provided acting as an additional teacher that support children's growth and development. These materials and learning opportunities should be responsive to the specific children you're working with. We know how important it is to support children's learning with a responsive approach to curriculum.

Judi: Today's topic is teacher-child interactions, and the focus is on how our interactions with children impact their growth and development. Your curriculum likely has guidance for the types of learning opportunities you offer, and it's important to look to the curriculum for guidance around recommended language for specific skill-building activities and interactions. But from morning greeting till the time you say goodbye, there are many opportunities to engage with children in meaningful ways that support their social emotional, language, and cognitive skill development.

Will: The ways in which teachers interact and engage with children is part of the foundation of the house framework. Children enrolled in early childhood learning environments need frequent,

meaningful interactions with engaged adults and opportunities to support their learning. And quality teacher-child interactions are essential for children's social and academic development and learning. We are going to take some time today to explain what is meant by quality interactions and give you some strategies to help you fill your day with meaningful, high-quality interactions with your children.

Judi: But first we want to hear from you. If you've been on MyPeers this week you may have already answered this question. If not, please take a moment to do it now. We want to know what is your favorite type of conversation or interaction to have with your children. Maybe it's creative or imaginative, like playing in the dramatic play area. Maybe you prefer conversations around problem solving or mathematical thinking. Or maybe you like the informal conversations about children's favorite foods or what they did over the weekend. There's so many opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations with our children throughout the day. Please take a minute to complete the poll and let us know what you enjoy, and we'll come back to your responses in a bit. Now it's time to welcome our guest expert today, Dr. Alex Figueras-Daniel. 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 pre-kindergarten teacher and a teacher in a dual language program and has supported many programs and teachers in understanding and implementing high-quality curriculum practices.

Will: Today, Alex is here to help us understand the ways in which we can support children's learning and development through the use of frequent, high-quality interactions. Welcome, Dr. Alex.

Alex Figueras-Daniel: Thanks for having me.

Will: Thank you. Can you help us with what kinds of interactions help children to learn and develop for preschoolers?

Alex: I think interactions are important for two main reasons. The first is that they build community. They help for children to feel part of a community that is the classroom, and that entails both their friendships with other children, but also with the teachers themselves. And interactions also help us to build the knowledge and skills that we know are the important reason why children come to our classrooms and learning environments to begin with. So, I think that what we have to be aware of is that we communicate a lot through our interactions, and the more comfortable that teachers can make children feel, the more safe they are and the more part of the community they can be. I also think that the interactions provided by the teacher really help to foster the willingness to take a risk and to really engage meaningfully, and so I think for that we have to, as teachers, be very, very aware of how we're approaching children so that they feel comfortable to approach us in a meaningful way.

Judi: I think last time you were here, you were helping us think about how to use our learning environment to create a community. Right? So, letting children know that they're important by the things that you provide by offering things that they're interested in and providing routines and spaces for them that fit them as young children. So, today I think it would be great if you could help us think about how to do that same thing with our interactions. How do we communicate to young children that they're important through the way that we talk to them? One of the things that we know is that our interactions really can help support young children's social and emotional development, so can you tell us a little bit about that?

Alex: Yeah. I think that, again, as children feel comfortable in the classroom, the more the teacher gets to know them, spends time listening to them, things that they like. As with even adults, we feel happiest when we are comfortable enough to share and talk about our personal life. That bond and that foundation helps to allow you to feel comfortable to delve into the more academic side. But teachers really need to do this by creating a very positive environment where they're sensitive to children's needs, they're following the children's lead and they're also creating an environment that fosters this development. So, a lot really lies on the teacher and rests on their knowledge of how to do this.

Judi: I know you said in our conversations previously that the authenticity behind the conversations is really important. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

Alex: Yeah. So, I think that one of the things that I felt, even as a teacher or as the mom of three children, is that it can be overwhelming to be aware and always responsive to every single child in all of their needs and all of the things that they say. But I do think it's important to pay attention and to listen and to really let children know that you are genuinely engaged in what they have said to you so that they will feel inclined to do that again and to come and share with you again. So, yeah, very important.

Judi: It builds trust when you respond.

Alex: Definitely.

Judi: So, that's really helpful to think about. So, then the other piece of it that you mentioned is the knowledge building and skill building. So, if we think about our interactions as helping children to build cognitive skills, how would that look like in terms of interactions?

Alex: Well, I think this is where teachers, again, need to be extremely intentional and really be thinking about scaffolding language and vocabulary. These are the opportunities that once you're comfortable in engaging in a conversation that you have a moment where you can teach and, if you're intentional about it, can accomplish some of your objectives for the day or for the unit of study or for the month, however you're constructing your curriculum. And so I think that one of the things to keep in mind, particularly around language growth, is that you have to sort of build from where children are comfortable. And that looks different for different children depending on their age, their home language, their culture, where they're coming from, and those pieces are particularly important. And then being very intentional, so knowing that you're teaching a word and maybe you have to integrate it throughout the rest of the day or across different centers so that by the end you've accomplished your goal and that person has really learned what you hoped for them to learn.

Judi: So, the interactions sound very similar to what we talked about with the environment. Right? So, you have to be responsive to the children and know where they're coming from so that your interactions meet them where they are.

Alex: Definitely.

Judi: That's great. That's really helpful. We're going to take a few minutes to observe a teacher interacting with children in ways that support their social-emotional and cognitive development. Pay attention to the language she uses, her responsiveness to children's needs and the way she supports a positive climate by using positive affect, respect and thoughtful communication. Also, listen for the way she scaffolds learning, provides information and repeats and extends children's comments. Let's take a look.

Teacher: Are you gonna build something with those? Sure. What are you gonna build? Thank you, Christian. Hey, here's another one, Arie. Where would you like to put that one?

Student: Six.

Teacher: Ooh, is that six of them now? I see you counted them. There's seven and eight. Oh, these are different. Yeah? Cover that cough please, love. Okay. Thank you for saving our friends from germs. So, these are a little different. Look at that. This one is thick and this one is thin. Would you like this one, Arie?

Student: Yeah.

Teacher: Which one?

Student: Here.

Teacher: Okay. You put it there.

Student: I want that one.

Teacher: You like this one?

Student: Yeah.

Teacher: Okay. And then I have one more thin one.

Student: I like that one. I like this one.

Teacher: It looks like -- Logan, Arie's using it. You're welcome to ask him if you can have one.

Student: Can I have one, Arie?

Teacher: There's no more of those. Maybe we can use a different kind now.

Student: Ms. Curti, look, I made an "I"

Teacher: Ooh, for incredible. Wow. And icicle, right?

Student: And island.

Teacher: And island also. That's a very good call. Yes. See if you can find them. What's that, Logan?

Student: Arie's not talking.

Teacher: Maybe he didn't hear you. Try asking him again.

Student: Arie? Can I have one of these?

Teacher: Maybe you could swap one and give him one of yours for one of his. Uh-oh, what happened to the I?

Student: He broke it.

Teacher: It's okay. We can build it again. Can you show him how you made it?

Student: Uh-oh. Uh-oh.

Teacher: What's wrong? What's wrong with it? Do you need something for it?

Teacher: Yes.

Student: Look it.

Teacher: Now what are you going to connect to that I to make something for the people?

Will: Dr. Alex, what did you notice about the video?

Alex: Well, the video is great. I think it's a great example of the teacher being very aware and sensitive to all of the children that she was working with. You could see that she was focused on some skill development for math concepts, literacy concepts she points out, she adds to when children tell her that they're doing something And, very importantly, she acknowledges everybody in that area despite that she is very focused on work with one particular child. She talks about the difference in the blocks that the boy is using to make a street for his car. And she smiles with them. You can see that they're sharing excitement about all of the learning activities. So, she's very aware of the whole group. She's very positive. And children are clearly very comfortable to approach their teacher and talk with her despite that they see that she's working with other children. And she balances that very nicely here.

Judi: Yeah. It was really great. It was a nice, relaxed environment where you could see kids were really engaged and really learning. That's great. Thanks, Alex.

Alex: You're welcome.

Judi: Remember, if you have questions for Alex, please submit them in the Comments Box, and she'll be back for our Coffee Break to answer those questions.

Will: Let's take a minute to look at the responses we received from the poll about what types of interactions you like to have with your children.

Judi: Yeah. So, we got some great responses. I think it's really interesting. So, almost 40 percent of the respondents said they prefer imaginative and creative storytelling conversations. About 20 percent said singing, dancing and making music together, which is great. We love to see that in a preschool classroom. And then we had about 20 percent talking about life and friends and what happened over the weekend. And lots of people really like talking about concrete concepts in math and problem

solving, which is one of my favorites. So, that's great. Thanks. We love to hear from you. Those were some great answers. But it's time for another question. So, we just heard about what kinds of interactions you enjoy. How do these types of interactions support children's learning and development? Are your strengths and interests more aligned with supporting children's social emotional development? This means you are comfortable creating a positive climate, demonstrating sensitivity with children and following children's leads. Or is your strength in supporting cognitive development? This means supporting concept development; providing quality feedback, which includes extending conversations and scaffolding; and modeling language for your students.

Will: Take a minute to tell us where your strength is, and give us an example of an interaction you've had recently that represents that strength. We'll come back to your responses in a bit.

Judi: Now we're going to take a few minutes to focus specifically on the development of language and literacy. I spoke earlier with Dr. Linda Espinosa about how teacher interactions with children support the development of language and literacy skills. Dr. Espinosa 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 90 research articles, book chapters, and training manuals on how to establish effective educational services for low-income, minority families and children who are acquiring English as a second language. Let's watch.

Judi: Hi, Linda.

Linda Espinosa: Hi, Judi.

Judi: Thanks for being back with us here today. So, the last time we were here we talked about how to use your learning environment to support children's growth and development in language and literacy. Today we're talking about the interactions that you have with young children on a daily basis, and what they mean for children's growth and development. So, I was wondering if you could help us think a little bit maybe first about the language opportunities and the ways that teachers support young children in their language development through their interactions.

Linda: Yes. Of course. And these interactions are so critical to everything that we teach in early childhood classrooms. But basically that content of the exchange between the teacher and the child combined with the emotional tone in which it's delivered, that is really the heart and soul of language development for young children. We create this trusting relationship where the child trusts us enough to listen to what we say and to spend the cognitive energy processing and understanding what we say, because the child understands that this is important for him as well as for us. And that's from the earliest days of life. So, that relationship building that relies upon an atmosphere of trust, warmth and acceptance when we do talk to children. I'm sure you know -- all of us have experienced this, but it really is true that young children are very sensitive to tone of voice. So, when you think you're just saying, "Oh, stop it," they really hear you yelling at them. So, we have to be conscious particularly for children who are not native English speakers. They have a sensitivity to tone of voice and to our mannerisms and the way in which we interact with children, which just has a huge impact on their ability to learn the language, to learn the content that we are intentionally teaching them.

Almost all of us have that at some level. We just can't forget about it as we go on in our interactions with children. And then the second thing I would say is that when we're having conversations with children, it's really important to remember they are 3 or they are 4. We very consciously model their perspective, or try to understand what their perspective is. So, if they're saying a particular thing, it's because it's out of their experiences or it's out of their interest or their curiosity. So, we always have to kind of be attentive to what it is that they're saying to us and our intentionality about drawing them out, about having these extended conversations with children, which we all want to have. Again it's the keystone for the future complexity that they're going to need as they move through the grades. One of the things or a method that I think is helpful to teachers of young children is to practice a sequence of events, if you will, so that as a teacher you know you need to interact with children. You know you need to use language and help them practice their emerging language skills. But what we don't want to do is dominate and suppress their natural language. So, a way to do that might be to

follow three procedures. Say a child is painting a picture, a child is building a block area, they're creating a little nurse-doctor scenario in the dramatic play area -- whatever.

And you see this happening and you want to deliberately extend that and introduce more complicated vocabulary- talk about a certain type of doctor. So, you might comment in a neutral way: "I see that you're making a very, very big pumpkin," or, "It looks like you guys are playing doctor," or whatever - just a comment. And then wait. For all of us, that's the hardest part, because then you pull back a little bit and you wait, and you see what the child has to say, how the child responds. The child might just be bubbling with things to tell you about that picture, about when he went to the doctor and what the doctor found out, and they had to give him a certain type of medicine or whatever. So, he might be rich with language and response or they might give you a look. We've all had a look that says, "Why are you bothering me?" And then they go back and they keep writing or building, because they're very engaged with their activity. Maybe they've got their friends and they're all engaged in the same thing.

Maybe that's not a good time to try to extend that language, because you want to encourage that perseverance, that attention to difficult tasks -- all those things that would come through that child not being interfered with in that task. So, the aspect of the teacher standing back a little bit and watching and seeing what the child says or how the child responds, and then being responsive to it so that you are not overwhelming the situation with your agenda. "I want to talk to this child. I want to know if this child knows colors and shapes, so I'm going to ask this child, 'Is that pumpkin a circle?' 'Is that pumpkin orange?'" Probably not. That's not the best way to extend and deepen a child's language experience. It's helping them take this interaction back and forthness where you start to provide language models that are more complex, and maybe you introduce words in a very natural way. "That's the most gigantic block tower I've ever seen." You do it in natural ways, but they're based on the child's attention and something that you have this joint interest in.

Judi: Yeah. I think that's so important, because so many times I feel like, when we think about interacting with children, that we need to bring the content or the knowledge and share it with them. So many times I think if you just wait, then you get to hear from the child what their interest is and where they want to head with the conversation. Then you can go and move forward with the content. This makes me think of the challenges that are often present when you are working with children who maybe speak a language that's different than yours. I'm wondering if you can help us think about how we can use interactions that might be a challenge, especially if we don't share a common language with children who are dual language learners.

Linda: Right. And that is a challenge, but I think in almost all classrooms that is the situation. A first challenge would be to know how much of English the child knows. So, if I'm having a conversation with the child, I don't speak the child's language -- let's say he speaks Urdu and I speak Spanish and English. So, we don't have a common language. But the child is very interested. The child's got a book, and the child is bringing the book to me and wants something from me -- I don't know exactly what. So, we might sit down together and through a whole variety of ways you might be able to communicate about that child's interest in the book. If nothing else, you can turn the pages and point to the pictures and say the word in English. The child will probably have something to say to you in Urdu, because this was an interest of theirs. So, you can have kind of a parallel talk where you're not exactly sure that the child understands you, and you probably don't understand the child, but you don't stop talking. You don't turn the child away. You don't not attempt to have this cross-lingual interaction with the child, because even in that interaction you are telling the child that the child is important, you're telling the child that your language is important, and maybe the child can teach you a word or two. "We say box this way in English, and you say it that way," and then you say it miserably and they laugh and they have a wonderful time with it. So, they're starting to internalize this value and the encouragement to bring that language into that interaction.

As you go through things, you're going to know in greater detail what the child does and doesn't understand, so you start pressing forward with a few things as well as you see, "He does get the fact that this is a big car, so I'm going to talk about that a little bit more." So, you have interactions. You manage ways to scaffold it down so there is some level of mutual understanding. These are hugely important for children who don't speak English in the home and have another language, because

oftentimes those children don't know the purpose of their home language when they go into these settings. They don't know if they are allowed to use it, should ever use it, what's the place, and that can create problems later on using that as a base for future language development. The other one thing that I think oftentimes we don't do as much as we could is bring members of the family, members of the community. If you have children who speak the language in your classroom, there are community supports for that sometimes around whatever religious affiliation they have. Sometimes it's in the community. Sometimes it's in the families. But you find those resources.

Oftentimes teachers in classrooms are surprised at how eager, particularly families that might have a grandmother, an aunt or an uncle or something like that, or even an older child who can come in and read that book to that child in that child's home language. Maybe read it to the whole class in that language and provide opportunities for the child to hear that language in the classroom. If you make that effort to bring that language into the classroom, then it signals value as well as ongoing development. Quite frankly, kids that don't speak that language will learn a few words as well as the teacher.

Judi: I think about how great it is for all of the children to be exposed to different languages within their classroom -- not just with their friends, but with other family members. I think that's a great way to show that who they are and where they're from is valued in the classroom. That's wonderful. That's really helpful to think about supporting children's language development. Can you help us think a little bit about literacy so writing and reading skills and how we would use our interactions to support children in developing those skills?

Linda: Right. Those early literacy skills, like knowing the alphabet, knowing how to handle books, phonological awareness, etcetera. One of the things that we do know is that they happen in the same progression for children who are dual language learners as for monolingual children, but throughout all of these one-on-one activities that we have or small group work that we have where we're reading books, you might point out the names of the letters and have the children find other things. If you're talking about butterflies or whatnot, the picture of the butterfly being phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge would naturally flow from that. And it's just a way of extension of that basic activity is. So, we start to find other words that start with the same letter with the same sound. You have word walls so they can start to match that particular object with those very specific literacy skills that they're going to need to learn to decode.

I do want to make one comment about that as well, because as we start moving into the whole topic of literacy, one of the things that we have found out about dual language learners is that they in fact decode very well. They have learned much of this alphabetic awareness and phonological awareness. Particularly Spanish-speaking students. Those skills transfer into the same skill in English. The reasons that they have tended to fall behind in schools is because they have lesser understanding of English vocabularies. That's the oral language aspect that we were just talking about.

So, building up that oral language is a huge component for learning these specific literacy skills. I can't overemphasize it enough, because it determines whether or not they will ever comprehend the text that they read. One of the things that we have found is that they can decode the words on a page, but they often have no idea what the meaning is, so the comprehension part gets slighted in favor of those early literacy skills. They're very, very important for initial reading, but undergirding it all has to be keeping up that rich language interaction, exposing them to rare words, to vocabulary, to complex grammar putting clauses at the end that changes the meaning of a sentence, for instance. All of that they're going to need to know. And all of that we do through our oral vocabulary.

Judi: I feel like sometimes teachers don't think that their conversations or the interactions that they have with children orally, they don't connect that to future reading comprehension. But I think that that's an interesting connection. It's important for me to use interesting words and interesting sentence structure when I'm talking with children and having interactions with them. That's going to support their future reading skills.

Linda: You couldn't have said it better. And it starts in the first days of life, because infants are primed to learn language. They attend to words and word structures, where words end off, how you put words

together to make sentences. That all starts happening in the first year of life.

Judi: They have that really early.

Linda: Right. So, even though you're talking with them and maybe exposing them to some words like gigantic or mysterious -- whatever -- you are really seriously introducing, and you don't see the immediate effect, they are in fact processing that word and that language. If you have centers set up where you have opportunities to use that word and practice that word -- and that's the art- where the art meets the technique of teaching -- then those children are likely to go and start repeating that word and using it in different contexts and hopefully getting beyond just pointing to a picture of it, but really starting to understand, "This is a word that I use for different purposes. I'm going to use it with my friends when I play over here. We're going to kick the can. I'm going to use it over here when I talk to my teacher. I can do that."

They start to really understand the depth of possibility for each of those words and can create these oral structures around it. Then that's what prepares them to comprehend as they get later into the years. The alphabetic knowledge and phonologic awareness- all of those things we teach young children very well, and they tend to learn it very well and very easily. It's the other part that we have to prioritize a little bit more I think.

Judi: That's great. Well, this has been really helpful. Thank you, Linda, for being here. And we'll see you again next time.

Linda: Okay. Thank you for having me.

Judi: Linda will be back with us for the next preschool episode to talk more about supporting children's language and literacy development. For more information on supporting language and literacy in your classroom, you can go to the ECLKC and search for the Planned Language Approach, 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.

Will: Well, we heard from many of you about where your strengths are in interacting with your children. Let's take a look at our chat responses.

Judi: Yeah. We heard from Cynthia. She said that her strength is fostering social-emotional development during dramatic play and block area play.

Will: Yes. And we had a response where someone wanted to know more about how to support interactions with cognitive growth.

Judi: And then we had a response that said, "Some children are more difficult to engage in long, interactive conversations. Sometimes I struggle to make real connections."

Will: And then I had one that said this teacher likes to support her children with science and math wherever they're working.

Judi: That's great. We love to hear that. Well, this has been great. We love to hear your responses. Thank you for those responses. If you would like more information about how to have meaningful interactions with your children, you can go to the ECLKC and search for fostering connections. The link is also available in your Viewer's Guide. Now let's welcome back Dr. Alex. Hi, Alex.

Alex: Hi.

Judi: Maybe you can help us think, especially for these teachers who just responded here who are struggling, what are some things that they can do to help strengthen their interactions maybe in areas where they don't feel so confident?

Alex: So, I think that a really helpful strategy is, if possible, have someone videotape you while you're teaching and interacting in the times of the day that are less structured so that you can spend some time reflecting on how you're interacting with children when you are engaging in unplanned times of the day. And I think that from there you have to think about how to make small changes. Start small. Maybe think about, for example, increasing the quality of interactions during routines. We know we spend a lot of time with little kids in preschool settings doing things like washing your hands or going

to the bathroom or having lunch or breakfast. Those times of the day I think are times where we can really maximize and can benefit from more quality interactions that you can link to math and science, particularly when you are in front of a sink of running water or sitting and having a meal with your friends.

And so I think that essentially being very intentional so that you can not only be providing information for children, but also assessing what children know and where you can bring them next. As we talked about in the last episode, the learning environment- all of these pieces come together to really foster the growth and development that we want, but we have to be the ones to really pull that- The materials won't teach the children on their own for sure. They definitely will rely on the teacher to be making connections for them. And so the final thought I have, particularly when I observe teachers, is that we really need to be intentional about when we're listening versus when we're responding and really giving children the time to express themselves and to think about things. I think that's a strategy that can really come through from watching yourself and really thinking about how much time did you give to someone. I think in the moment it seems like there's a long time that's passed, but maybe when you step back you see that it was only 30 seconds or 40 seconds. I think that's a really good thing to think about.

Judi: Yeah. That's a great idea to just watch yourself, and then have someone help you reflect on where your strengths are and maybe where you can build on the areas where you're challenged. That's really helpfully. Thanks, Alex. So, we're going to take some times now to hear from teachers about how they use their interactions to support children's social-emotional and cognitive development. The first teacher is going to tell us how she develops relationships with children and uses those relationships to support their growth and development. The second teacher is going to tell us about how she supports and extends children's cognitive development. Let's listen. Teacher 1: One of the main things we like to do when the children first come in the morning is make sure that everyone is greeted warmly and welcomed, and asked how they feel today. Sometimes they're able to verbally discuss with us.

Other times they're not. And we do have props and options for them to use when they're not able to communicate with us verbally. We also share those greetings with the parents as well. And we look forward to having small amounts of dialogue in the morning with the parents as we're definitely very busy and focused on attaining all the tasks that we have in the morning before we get into the real bulk part of our day. We also try to make sure that we focus hard on respecting each other's space and just using our words, for even simple things like a high five and a hug -- just asking permission first to make sure that person is okay with you coming into their space and sharing some of their space with you. Being prepared to accommodate fifteen extremely different personalities on a regular basis is work. It's hard work. And keeping your sanity at the same time. But I will say hands down my favorite part is the free hugs. They just come up to you at random times of the day just to hug you -- just to squeeze your leg. Just to let you know that they're there and they care about you, and what you're doing matters to them. And that's really what it boils down to.

Teacher 2: One way that I engage them in critical thinking is by asking them open-ended questions where there's no wrong or right. They can think outside the box. I expand on their language. I try not to be so interviewee. And I will say like our drills, I try to be as natural as possible. The last two weeks we've been working on winter. In each center I had an activity that revolved around that. If they went to the science lab, we had a blizzard inside the bottle. "So, what happens in a blizzard?" -We just had the blizzard- "What did you do to get ready for the blizzard? What's in a blizzard? What happens during a blizzard? Where does the snow come from? How does the snow form?" Okay? A lot of open-ended questions. They might tell me, "It's ice. It's freezing. It's cold." Then I'll expand on that. I might tell them, "It's precipitation." I'll expand on what they're saying using proper vocabulary. Okay? So that they are exposed to all of that. If they're in the block center, they might tell me they want to build a house. Okay. I can end it there or, "Maybe we can make a winter home for an animal or a shelter for an animal, a shelter for us" -- I'll connect it to a book. We did the mitten, so the animals were going inside the mitten, but the little girl said, "No. They need to find their own shelter." So, we made a shelter in the block center for each of the animals that I had there. We bring math in. The bear needs a bigger shelter than the little bunny obviously, and then they might measure it. "How big is it?" They

might measure it. I always expand on their language always introducing them to a new vocabulary.

Will: Dr. Alex, what did you think?

Alex: I think this was great. I think both teachers really have a very deep understanding for what their role is in working with young children. The first teacher -- the point that she made about setting the tone for the day, greeting the children, talking with families, I think that's a wonderful way to get to know children, particularly when they're not fully talking yet. She talked about some of the strategies that she uses for when they can't do that for themselves. And she talked to them about how they're feeling. And, again, I think setting the tone for the day is extremely important so that children know what to expect and that they're starting from a familiar place every day. And at the end her admitting that it is hard work, and that there is a payoff with the hugs, but that it is very hard to be very intentional in fifteen different ways every single day of the week. And the second teacher also, in her conversation, really talked a lot about how she responds to children's interests and how she's using what's going on in their life -- the blizzard -- to integrate subject matter and concepts and math and literacy in the books that she's reading and really helping them to make connections during all the different areas of the classroom. When the children are engaging in activities that they chose I think is really important and really underlines what we're trying to say here.

Judi: Yeah. I love that she brought in that she uses new vocabulary when she can, or she tries to fit math into a literacy opportunity. I think that that's really exciting. Thanks for that, Alex. That's really helpful. Thank, Alex, for being with us today. Alex will be joining us for our remaining episode to share more of her insights into how to implement a high-quality and rich curriculum in your learning environment.

Will: In order to develop meaningful relationships and support growth and development, it is important to understand the different types of interactions and how they support children's growth and development. Take some time this week to reflect on what your interactions communicate to your children and how your interactions support social emotional and cognitive growth.

Judi: Your homework is to think about the area or areas you identified in the chat as your strength and the types of interactions you'd like to improve on. Take some time to plan to intentionally engage with children in your program in one or more of those ways. And, if possible, ask another staff person to support you by observing or videoing, and then helping you to reflect on what went well and where you can continue to improve. Then let us know on MyPeers. Now we're going to take a moment and connect this thinking about our interactions with young children to the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Peter Pizzolongo is here to tell us about that.

Peter Pizzolongo: I'm Peter Pizzolongo, Director of Training & Technical Assistance Services at the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. For this portion of Teacher Time we'll focus on ELOF, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five. ELOF is a framework that represents the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers what children should know and be able to do during their formative years from birth through age five. 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 & 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.

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. For today's topic, Let's Talk About It: Teacher-Child Interactions, this ELOF segment focus is on the domain social and emotional development. This domain includes goals for relationships with adults, relationships with other children, emotional functioning, and preschoolers having a sense of identity and belonging. As you might guess from the information shared during this Teacher Time episode I'm going to focus on the subdomain relationships with adults. This subdomain has two goals. The first goal is child engages in and maintains positive relationships and interactions with adults.

When you work with three and four year olds, you have an opportunity to experience many examples of the developmental progression leading to this goal. Preschoolers typically demonstrate affection

during their interactions with family members, teachers and other trusted adults. These children are able to separate from familiar adults with minimal distress when in a familiar setting. As they have more experiences interacting with adults, preschoolers can participate in longer and more reciprocal interactions with both trusted and new adults. The second goal in this subdomain for preschoolers is child engages in prosocial and cooperative behavior with adults. Again, you've probably observed many examples of this skill as you work with three and four year olds. Often, this begins for a child by greeting you as he enters your classroom or family child care home and later saying goodbye. Preschool children typically respond to teachers' and parents' requests, which might include assistance or prompting and progress to response without assistance or prompting. All of us who have worked with young children have probably experienced preschoolers at times demonstrating uncooperative behavior saying, "No."

This type of behavior is usually resolved with support from adults, and, in most instances, children progress to being cooperative with a few reminders at times, such as, "Use your quiet voice," and, "Walk, please." You might now be asking what are young children like before they're three regarding their relationships with adults. From infancy, children develop expectations of consistent, positive interactions through secure relationships with familiar adults. This leads to older infants and toddlers looking to familiar adults for emotional support and encouragement.

Toddlers can engage in positive interactions in a wide variety of situations with familiar adults. And they look to or seek familiar adults for comfort when distressed or tired. How do adults promote social-emotional development in young children, beginning with their interactions with infants and toddlers and continuing as children are three to five years old? Well, everything we've heard from Judi, Will, Alex & Linda during this episode. We know that all children benefit from high-quality teaching and classroom interactions regardless of language status, race, ethnicity, or special needs, which is true for all domains, and especially for social and emotional development. Children's social and emotional development is fostered when teachers develop positive relationships with them and are sensitive to children's needs. And, teachers certainly have an important role in helping children develop warm, supportive relationships, experience enjoyment and excitement about learning and feel comfortable in their learning environment.

As with all domains, one of my mantras during these ELOF segments is that teachers make decisions about the experiences provided for children and how they will interact with each child based on appropriate expectations of what children know and do at various stages of development, information you can access through the ELOF and your program's curriculum. And you know each child in your care, her individual strengths and interests and the social and cultural context in which she lives. You use that information to plan your interactions to know when you need to help a child who is in distress, when to use prompts to assist a child who is having an uncooperative moment. It all begins with an understanding of appropriate goals for children's learning and the developmental progressions that lead to these goals. The ELOF is a tool for teachers to use to help with that understanding. 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.

Will: Thank you Peter. We're going to transition now to talk a little bit about children you may struggle to engage with in ways that support their social-emotional and cognitive development.

Judi: Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Neal Horen from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. He's going to give us some strategies to help us develop meaningful relationships with young children. Let's watch.

Judi: Hi, Neal.

Neal Horen: Hi, Judi.

Judi: Thanks for being here with us today.

Neal: Always a pleasure.

Judi: Nice to have you back.

Neal: Thanks.

Judi: So, today we're talking all about adults and their interactions with children and how that supports children's growth and development. One of the things that we want to talk with you about is how adult-child interactions can really support a community or a positive learning environment in the classroom. So, can you tell us a little bit about what those kinds of relationships look like and how they support children in a classroom?

Neal: Sure. I oftentimes think about this just in terms of the relationships that I have, whether they're with other children, with adults, what sort of fosters warm and positive communities, relationships and things like that. I think for the adult-child interactions, one of the things to keep in mind is that there's so many opportunities throughout the day. There are opportunities when there's quiet time where you can sort of sit and talk individually to one child. There is group time. There are times where children are more active. There are times where children are a little bit more quiet. All those opportunities, when adults see them as our interactions have a huge impact on the development of skills in these children, you take advantage of it.

So, when that child comes in in the morning, you have a great opportunity to start that day right. We've all experienced this. When that child comes in, it's like, "Oh, good morning, Neal." You're super excited. You're excited for that partnership. And that's what this is. This is a partnership. When you are working as an adult with children, you're in partnership with that child. You are there to help support them. I don't know how to break this to you, but they're there to support you. You get something from those interactions. As opposed to thinking of them as, "I need to teach, I need to tell them what to do and I need to control their behavior," you actually are in a community where there's a partnership amongst all of you.

Judi: So, the way that the adult leads or engages in conversation or interactions with children is not just to develop them in terms of their growth and develop or language and literacy, math and science; there is something else going on there that's about building trust or community. I like what you said about how they're there to support you- communicating that to them.

Neal: Right. And keeping in mind that they're all individuals. They're all unique. The cue that might work for you in terms of helping you transition from one activity to another may be different than the other cue. The way that I greet you in the morning may be different. If you come in and you are immediately drawn to going into some area and throwing things around, I may greet you in a vastly different way in the sense of, "I want to make sure that your transition in is a smooth one, that I'm supporting your interest and that no one is getting hurt." As opposed to another child may be coming in and they're super quiet. They put their stuff away. They go do what they're asked to do. I may wanna just sort of acknowledge that they're doing the kinds of things as opposed to just saying, "Well, I don't have to worry about them."

Judi: Yeah. I think about my two boys and how they walk in every morning. My older one runs in and says hello to everyone, and is just so excited to be at school, and my younger one walks in behind me. He kind of peeks out from behind my leg. There are two different responses they're requesting from their teachers, because they're so very different in the way that they transition into the room. And so I think that's a good thing to think about. It shouldn't just be a standard, "This is how we do greeting in the morning," that every child should have their own individual greeting. That makes sense.

Neal: The same way we do for all of our friends when they come to our house for dinner.

Judi: Right. There is this kind of community building piece, but then there is an intentional piece around interactions that are supporting children's social -- emotional development. And some of that would be transitions. We know some children struggle with transition, so we're going to interact with them differently. Can you think a little bit more broadly about how we're supporting children's executive functioning, their ability to control themselves, transition and even some language development in there as well? What can teachers do in terms of the way they interact with children to support that?

Neal: Those adult-child interactions I think are critical, because, one, they're another model. So, the

children are seeing how other adults in their lives do these sorts of things. They're seeing how these adults are interacting with them and with other adults. Then all the children are interacting with peers. In interacting with peers they're really developing language skills and social skills and emotional skills that sort of drive forward how they make their way through life, because those abilities, whether they're problem solving, whether they are being able to regulate emotions, whether they are how to express emotions -- all those kinds of things -- those skills carry you forward in terms of how you interact with your peers and how you act with other adults. And if we think of that adult-child interaction as the opportunity to practice, it's a great opportunity.

Judi: I see teachers do that a lot where if it's raining outside they'll say to the child, "I'm really sad. I wanted to go outside today and play." And so they'll kind of model the expression of emotion or their feelings in their engagement with the children to say, "It's okay to feel this way, and here's how I'm handing this feeling. We're going to talk about it." So, that makes a lot of sense.

Neal: And so critical. I think it's a really important point, Judi, that the adults in those interactions have a great space in which they can say, "I am sad. It's okay to be sad." As opposed to, "We're not sad in this classroom," or, "No one gets angry." Well, the truth is everybody gets sad and everybody gets mad and everybody experiences a wide range of emotions. And, quite frankly, the more the adults do that in their home, in their program, in their centers, the more that they sort of show children it's okay to not only have a wide range of emotions, but to express them appropriately, the better chance we have of children doing that. So, when adults are willing to do those kinds of things, it may feel sort of awkward like, "I'm the adult. I'm supposed to" -- there's no supposed to. What you're supposed to do is you're working with children who are learning something that you've had a long time to master.

Judi: Speaking of expressing emotions, I think sometimes there are children who struggle in that area and sometimes will maybe act out instead of being able to say, "This is how I feel." I think sometimes in the classroom, there are lots of kids that you work with. Sometimes you might have multiple ages of children that you're working with who all kind of require different interactions. Maybe there are children who present a challenge in terms of developing a really positive relationship who you really struggle with or you maybe have a hard time engaging with or spending time together engaged in an activity. What is your thinking about that? Because I think it's hard to get along with everyone all the time.

Neal: It is.

Judi: But as the adult part of my responsibility is to foster relationships so that we can support their growth and development.

Neal: A couple of thoughts about that. One is that I'm always interested when I hear an adult describe the child that they have a concern about. If they say this is a challenging child, that's vastly different than this is a child with a challenging behavior. And the distinction for me is really important in the sense that if you only view the child as a challenge, then your whole goal is to fix the challenge. "I have to change that child." As opposed to, "I have this child who every once in a while presents with a particular behavior that tends to be hard for me to handle." But this is a child. Let's think about them holistically. And in a reciprocal relationship where adults are setting clear, reasonable expectations, and if a child is having difficulty, then we have to start to figure out what's causing them to have difficulty. As opposed to saying, "They're challenging," or, "They're bad, or, "They can't do this," it's, "What can I do to help them sort of adapt to what we're doing, and how do I adapt? I'm the adult. I should be able to adapt a little bit more easily than a young child." But if we're working together and it's a relationship that we're both in this- not just, "I'm an adult, so I just tell you what to do" -- but we're working together, we have a much better chance of seeing those more challenging behaviors sort of shift a bit.

Judi: Right. And it seems to me like the better you know a child and the more secure your relationship is, the easier it will be for both of you to address those challenges when they arise. Right?

Neal: Right.

Judi: Let's shift a little bit and think about the adult's role in this, because we're really talking about

the adult's role. I have worked with children of all ages- birth to five -- and they each present a different challenge in terms of building relationships. But I think one of the things that you've mentioned frequently is how important it is for an adult to take care of him or herself so that they can be their best person walking into the room and engaging with the children. I want to think from the adult's perspective what an adult can do both in terms of self-care, building relationships with children, what does it look like when an adult has a positive relationship with a child from an adult's perspective? And what can adults do to really build themselves so that they're ready to engage and develop relationships with children?

Neal: I love the six-part question. That's good. Let's start with what does it look like, because I think that that's an important piece. And then we can talk about what can adults do to help themselves be ready to make that environment look like that. We talked about mindfulness, but sort of being able to be clear about what you're trying to do. I talk to adults about this all the time. What's your goal? If your goal is that every single child has to behave exactly the same way, you're in for a long haul. It's not going to happen. We have twenty unique individual people in this program, in this classroom, in your home -- whatever it may be. You just pointed to this. Really knowing each child on an individual basis and what works for them and what doesn't. What works for your five-year-old is, "Just open the door. I've got it from here."

For your three-year-old, I need to go a little bit slower. And when the adults are welcoming and not forcing that to happen, they're in much better shape. Clear and reasonable expectations can be really helpful. Allowing children to sort of express and regulate their emotions and then demonstrating it yourself, as we've been talking about, allows there to be a community of partnership around social-emotional development that we're all figuring this out together, that some of us are really good at certain things, some of us have more learning to do, but we're going to do it together. I'm the adult. It doesn't mean I've mastered everything. And I'm willing to say, "I'm sad, because it's raining today," as opposed to, "It's raining. We're not going outside." The other part of what you asked is that in order to be able to do all those kinds of things, that really does take a lot. Right? It takes a lot as an adult to be willing to go at a pace that different children are setting, to understand their individual needs and cues and things like that. Part of it is taking care of yourself.

We talked about this early on. Doing those mindful sorts of practices. Being reflective. Many of us do this when we leave our job. We say, "Boy, that really did not go as well as I thought it would. What could I do differently?" Not, "What did everybody else do?" but, "What could I do as an adult? What can I do differently when that child had that kind of difficulty?" Doing some relaxation and doing it not just for yourself; maybe it you and the other person who you work with, or maybe it's everybody that works together. Maybe it's you and children doing that together. And then just typical self-care: drinking water, exercising and getting sleep. All those kinds of things could be really, really helpful.

Judi: I remember there were days where I felt like the room was just crazy. No one was listening and no one was really engaging. Everything was just kind of a mess. You walk out feeling like a failure. I think sometimes the tendency was to say, "Oh, it was a full moon," or, "It was raining outside" or, "The kids were off the wall for whatever reason," and you don't stop to think about the role that I may have played in that. And so I think when you mention reflecting, that's really important, especially with individual children, relationships with individual children thinking about who you got to connect with. Do you have a meaningful connection with every child every day? Is there a moment where you have a conversation that's a back and forth? Because I think sometimes the tendency, especially on a crazy day, is some kids just get lost and you may not have a meaningful connection. I think you said to me sometimes the teacher is that one person. What did you tell me about that?

Neal: We talked about in terms of building resilience we know that one critical factor is having at least one unconditionally accepting adult in your life. That could be this adult. I also think that a part of this is around understanding that all the things that we're expecting of children we should be able to do- regulate our emotions, express them appropriately, problem solve, stop and think. These are all things that we oftentimes are asking the adults to do in those adult-child interactions. Let's make sure the adults are doing it for themselves.

Judi: I think I need to work on some of those things. All right. Well, this has been great. Thank you so

much, Neal, for being here. And we'll see you next time.

Neal: I'm super excited.

Judi: All right. Thanks.

Neal: All right. Take care.

Judi: Well, it has been so great to hear about the many ways teachers interact with children in ways that support their growth and development. We encourage you to consider where you can grow in this area. This is a wonderful opportunity to support and collaborate with others you work with.

Will: We'll look forward to seeing you again on our next episode, which will be on Friday, April 21st. We will be sharing strategies you can use to help your children to develop healthy relationships with each other and strengthen your learning community. If you want more information about today's topic, click on the Viewer's Guide that is on your screen.

Judi: I'd like to thank all of our guests for being here today. And please remember to ask your questions in the Chat Box. We'll have the chance to answer some of those questions at our upcoming Coffee Break. Thank you for being here with us today. Now we're going to leave you with this moment of learning.

Teacher: It's a cone.

Student: It's a square.

Teacher: It's a square. It's like you.

Student: Square.

Teacher: Yes. It's four corner -- it's like a square.

Student: I see the circle.

Teacher: You see the circle above that one. It's called cylinder. You find over here -- it's not here? It's like a circle. The cylinder.

Student: I got more.

Teacher: It's a 3D shape. The cylinder.

Student: I know I want a square.