

Pam Winton: Systematically Support Children with Disabilities

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Announcer 2: You are listening to "Understanding the ELOF: Stories from Experts," where, each episode, we interview a leading researcher associated with the ELOF domain.

Announcer 3: Welcome to the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning podcast series, which focuses on the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. In this podcast, we will hear from Pam Winton about the applicability of the Early Learning Outcomes Framework for children with disabilities. We hope you enjoy this broadcast.

Announcer 2: From the ELOF — "Children with disabilities may need more individualized or intensive instruction in order to develop and learn the skills, behaviors, and concepts described in the ELOF."

Jan Greenberg: Pam, I am delighted to be sitting here with you, having a conversation about the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, or ELOF, and its applicability for children with disability. And so, to get started, I'd like to ask you to introduce yourself and then tell us a little bit about your background and current involvement in work around children with disability.

Pam Winton: I'm Pam Winton, and work at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development resource center, where I am a senior scientist, and also a research professor at the School of Ed at UNC-Chapel Hill. So, for a long time, like the last three decades, I have been passionate about my work with children with disabilities. And the focus of that work has often been how to ensure that each and every child really has multiple learning opportunities every day, so they reach their full potential. And for children who are struggling and have identified disabilities, that takes a lot of intentionality and a systematic and kind of really purposeful approach to their learning and development. I've ended up, in my work, often focusing on the professional-development, personal-prep level, and that's where I've been working for probably some 20 years.

Jan: We know that the ELOF helps to establish what children should know and be able to do to prepare for success in school and later life. So, can you talk to us a little bit about what current research tells us about how we might improve learning outcomes and promote the development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as described in the ELOF?

Pam: I think — I'm really excited about the ELOF, and one reason I'm excited is because, in my view, it's the first time we've had a national-standard Outcomes Framework. I know it came out of Head Start, but I view it as something we can embrace across all of our sectors — pre-K, early intervention, early-childhood special ed, childcare — and that's exciting. Also, in my view, though, you can't just expect a miracle — that the children will reach these outcomes. You have to think about what are the research-based practices that support those outcomes, especially for children with disabilities, but for all children, really.

Jan: For thinking about what the ELOF tells us about child development and thinking about what the interests and needs are for children with disabilities, are there some considerations we'd want to think about in establishing effective learning environments that would relate back to development?

Pam: Mm-hmm. Well, I think you would want to think about the environment and modifications to that environment that would then give the child more access to the general curriculum, access to the materials, and so access to multiple learning opportunities throughout the day. And then you'd also want to think about the specific responsive, engaging, developmentally appropriate, but also individualized teaching strategies that would be used to support that child, whether it's around cognitive development or social-emotional development. If the child has an identified disability, then that child will have an individualized family-service plan or an individualized education plan. And that plan will then be almost like the guiding light for teachers — what outcomes to focus on specifically for that unique child, and then, also, the strategies and practices that have been identified to be embedded within the curriculum or embedded within the routines that the teacher will use to implement those practices. That IEP and IFSP document gets developed in a partnership by a multidisciplinary team, including specialists, the family, and hopefully, the teacher. But we've learned that a lot of teachers don't even actually know that, if the parent invites them, they could attend that meeting.

They don't have support to attend, like they don't have substitute teachers available so they can be part of the meeting. And then some teachers even say, "Oh, I didn't even know I could see that document." And some programs don't even have a copy on file. So, when you think about inclusion and you think about who's doing the inclusion, it's the teachers in the inclusive program, often those folks aren't part of this whole planning process that's so critical.

Jan: So, if I were to ask you to add any other ideas about guiding principles or concepts about applying the ELOF that practitioners keep in mind, working with children with disability?

Pam: First, I would say, find professional development that helps you build the skills you need to implement the practices that have been shown to be research-based, that will lead to those ELOFs. I mean, find it — not only find it, demand it, because you deserve it.

So that would be the first thing. I think the second thing would be, find your community allies and collaborate. You can't do this on your own, and there are people out there in the community, at the LEA, the preschool disability coordinators and specialists in the Early Intervention Program, and if they aren't finding you, go out and find them and collaborate with them. Third, partner with families, because families know so much. They are the experts on their children, and when you think about an ELOF outcome like social-emotional or peer relations.

Jan: Pam, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today about how early-childhood educators can best meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Announcer 2: You have just listened to another episode of "Understanding the ELOF: Stories from Experts." Make sure to check out our other interviews with ELOF experts and download the free "ELOF to Go" app for even more engagement with the ELOF.

Announcer 1: Thank you for joining "Head Start Talks." For more information on what you heard today, visit the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, or ECLKC, at eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov.