Sarah Lytle: Hello, everyone and thank you for attending today's webinar, Responsive Learning Environments for Infants and Toddlers, as part of the BabyTalks webinar series. BabyTalks is a series of webinars for teachers, providers and home visitors working with infants and toddlers serving Early Head Start, Head Start and child care programs. These webinars will introduce you to some of the research behind the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, the ELOF.

My name is Sarah Lytle, and I will be helping to facilitate today's session, along with my colleague Marley Jarvis. We're from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning and are based at the University of Washington's Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, or ILABS. ILABS is a partner organization in the NCECDTL Consortium, and we're one of the leading infant research centers in the country.

Before we begin the webinar today, I'd like to go over a few housekeeping items, as we'll be using some of the ON24 features during our webinar. At the bottom of your screen are multiple application widgets you can use. All the widgets are resizable and movable, so feel free to move them around to get the most out of your desktop space. You can expand your slide area or maximize it to full screen by clicking the arrows in the top right corner. I want to go over the different widgets that are available. As I'm talking through each one, I invite you to open the specific widget to see what it looks like on your screen. Remember, you can click the icon to have it appear or minimized. If you have any questions during the webcast, you can submit them through the purple Q&A widget. We will try to answer these during the webcast. This is where all technical questions and concerns should be entered as well.

A copy of today's slide deck and additional resources are available in the green resource list, which is the green widget. We encourage you to download any resources or links that you may find useful. Throughout this session, we will be using the blue group chat widget to engage with each other. You can also find additional answers to some common technical issues located in the yellow help widget at the bottom of your screen. For the best viewing experience, we recommend using a wired Internet connection and closing any programs or browser sessions that are running in the background that might cause issues.

Webinars are bandwidth-intensive, so closing any unnecessary browser tabs will help conserve your bandwidth. The webcast is being streamed through your computer, so there's no dial-in number. For the best audio quality, please make sure your computer speakers or your headset are turned on and the volume is up so you can hear the presenters.

Some networks cause slides to advance more slowly than others, so logging off your VPN is recommended. If your slides are a little bit behind, pushing F5 on your keyboard will refresh the page. An on-demand version of the webcast will be available 24 hours after the webinar and can be accessed using a link that will be sent via e-mail. Please keep in mind that this webinar is also being transcribed, and the transcription will be posted on the ECLKC. So, thank you all for joining us today.

I'll now turn it over to our presenter, Marley Jarvis. She will be talking about responsive learning environments for infants and toddlers. Again, Marley is from the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences at the University of Washington and the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. So, take it away, Marley.

Marley Jarvis: Thank you so much, Sarah. Hi, everyone, and, yeah, thanks so much for being here today and taking some time out of your day to talk about such an important topic. So, as Sarah has mentioned, we're going to be talking about environments, so these spaces that you create for children and families that you work with. And we're going to explore how these engaging and responsive learning environments that you help create help, in turn, infants and toddlers achieve school readiness.

So, to give you a little overview of what we're talking about today and what we hope you're going to gain from this webinar. First, hopefully, you will be able to explain what some of these key components of a responsive learning environment for children birth to 3 are, to get a little bit comfort around what those components are, and then secondly, that you'll be able to incorporate responsive practices that integrate the cultures and languages of the children and families that you work with into your learning environments.

And then also, you should be able to come away with the ability summarize how responsive learning environments promotes general school readiness, so across all learning domains. And, of course, you may need to modify your approaches based on the unique learning environments that you work with or the age ranges of the children that you work with. So, Chris, keep that in mind as you're listening today. And then our session agenda, so what we're going to be doing today.

So, first, I'm going to kick us off with going over a definition of what this term responsive learning environment, what that means. And then I'm going to give you an overview of four key components of responsive environments. So, this is a broad topic with many different things we can consider. So, to try to simplify that a bit, I've broken them down into these four components that we'll spend some time diving into. This is going to include lots of discussion and some examples of integrating cultures and languages of the children and families that you work with into those learning environments because, of course, integrating culture and language into your learning environment is a very, very key component of a responsive learning environment.

And then also, throughout the webinar, I'm going to give you some examples about how some of these key components of a learning environment support general school readiness across these ELOF domains.

Then lastly, we'll wrap up, and I'll leave you with some links to some great different resources and support at the end of the webinar. So, as a reminder, you do have access to this full PowerPoint so that you should have some easy access to those links at the end.

So, to get us started thinking about learning environments, we're going to watch a short video. I think it's a really nice introduction to our topic today, and just to note that this video doesn't just depict infants and toddlers, but rather it's mixed ages, but I think it's a great introduction, so we're going to start with this video.

[Music begins]

[Video begins]

Amanda Perez: The environment is a partner for staff and their work with young children and their families. Let's take a minute to think about environments for infants and toddlers. Use this practice moment and the practice guide to explore the ways that an environment can support learning. Take a look at what's happening in this outdoor area at a family child care home in Florida.

This program serves a mixed-age group of children with different temperaments and interests and at different stages of development. Notice the ways they use this space individually and together in smaller and larger groups. Look at this group together. What do you see here? And here? Watch this little girl. And here's another young toddler. What is happening for this child? Watch the boy in red. What is he doing?

So, this space accommodates children in a large group activity, but also offers lots of materials and child-sized spaces to meet individual needs and interests. This infant has a protected space to be on her tummy, and when she gets frustrated, her caregiver, who's close by, picks her up to eat. With her body, this adult offers a safe environment where the baby can both enjoy her bottle and watch the other children. And those children are busy.

This little girl wants to be close to her friends at first, but when she wants some quieter time, she finds a place to paint at the edge of the group. Children have many interests, and she has lots of options here. This young toddler also likes to paint, but has chosen a different space for her project. She carefully and deliberately explores her materials sitting by herself at a low table. She has unhurried time and ample space to follow her own interests.

This toddler enjoys long, uninterrupted play at the water table. Notice the ducks he has lined up here in his fun with sand. This is an environment of yes. The sand doesn't need to stay in the sandbox, and he builds a play space for his ducks that he explores with them.

Did you see how these friends play in sand? What is sand like when it's dry? Later, one of them plays at the water table, focuses on water, wonders how the sand his friend left behind will move through its water wheel.

In this space, children at different ages with different interests and different temperaments have lots of options. Each can play independently, at their own pace and rhythm, and choose whether to be with others or alone, focusing on what interests them.

There are opportunities for play that invite children to play in different ways, with small and large muscles, for example. There are enough materials for everyone to use as they'd like, and the arrangement of the space and the adults in the environment encourage discovery, exploration and learning.

How does your environment encourage independent exploration? For those who want more on creating environments for infants and toddlers and their families, use the resources listed in the practice guide or watch Early Essentials webisode seven featuring Louis Torelli, an early childhood educator and environmental designer and other experts talking about those important environments.

[End of video]

Marley: All right. So, I think that's such a nice overview to get us sort of thinking about how the environment can play a role in supporting children in your care or children that you work with, and I think some key points from this is that the space in this family child care environment is very flexible. So, it provided room for the infants and the different young children to play in large groups if they wanted or in smaller groups or even by themselves.

So, I think that's a great place to start thinking about your learning environment is what might you do to support the flexible use of spaces in your learning environment? And you also might think about how your environment can support independence and choice for young children so that they can seek out what they need or what they're interested in in that moment that might be changing.

So, these are all great questions to kind of get started thinking about in any early learning space. And so moving on to building this common definition of what we mean by a responsive learning environment. So, a responsive learning environment is an engaging physical space, but then also that's fastened to an emotional atmosphere. We'll dive into what that means a bit more, but this physical space and the emotional atmosphere together in which teachers meet children's desires and needs to find relevant and meaningful connections between themselves and significant adults, between their peers and also with play and other activities.

So, responsive learning environments are nurturing spaces that support the development of all young children. They, through doing this, are offering developmentally appropriate schedules, routines, indoor and outdoor chances for choice and play and exploration and experimentation and help support that, and responsive environments also include age-appropriate equipment or materials and supplies.

And as I mentioned, they also integrate home cultures and languages, and we got a question about what culture means in this context. And so culture I mean in terms of people's various languages, their beliefs, values and other things that might differ from family to family or from person to person. And in order for a learning environment to be a responsive learning environment, it needs to reflect that of the different children and families that you work with.

So, a responsive learning environment should be flexible to support the changing ages, interests, characteristics and needs of the group of children over time, and then thinking about home-based programs, the learning environment includes the home, and it also includes the community and any group socialization spaces.

So, while we're on this definition page, I also wanted to define what I mean when I say the term teacher. I'm really referring to everyone who works with infants, toddlers and their families in an educational environment. So, I'm including home visitors and people who provide child care at home or in centers and including all of those folks within this term teacher for this webinar, so just as a note. So, to summarize, responsive learning environments are nurturing spaces that support the development of all young children.

It's also really important to note that these learning environments, it's not just a classroom. So, a variety of spaces can be learning environments, so it includes classrooms of course, but also play spaces, both indoors and out, areas where caregiving routines might take place and any other outdoor areas and other important places that children are learning in their community.

So, I want you to think about where are the most important learning environments for you when you were growing up perhaps, or what about your community or the children that you work with and the families that you work with? So, where are those important learning environments? And for centers and other out-of-home care providers, what, maybe, are some ways that you can bring in or recreate some of those important learning environments that are out in the community, so whether it's items or setups or arrangements that might be typical for environments in the homes in your communities?

So, feel free to share out any of your ideas or answers to these questions on the slide in the chat box. If you haven't found the chat box already, this is a great time to find it and practice adding in some of your thoughts, and we're going to come back and use this group chat several times throughout the webinar today. So, I hope you all have the chance to learn from each other as well.

So, an example that I heard that I loved comes from Tough Pueblo in the Southwest. So, they built an early learning center around the concept of a room in a traditional pueblo or kiva. So, they had a large central area with a kiva, so those are these traditional fireplaces. So, in the center, it was a nonworking one, but they built that large central area around this kiva, and they had smooth adobe walls, and they also had open areas. So, the setup inside had these big open areas for grandma time, which was something that was really important in their community, et cetera.

So, I love that as a really nice example of how these teachers have incorporated elements of important learning spaces from their community into their learning center that they were working with. So, I think that's always a great thing to think about is how do you work to make your learning environments be more reflective of the children and families that you work with? And I can see some folks starting to think about that in the chat center, so continue to share out if you think of them.

So, we know from research that responsive learning environments support children's school readiness across all domains, all of these learning domains. And these... If you have noticed, these are the five domains of the ELOF for infants and toddlers. So, I'm specifically showing you the five domains for infants and toddlers because that's our focus today, but just a note that they're similar but different domains for ages 3 to 5 that you can take a look at within the ELOF if you work with those children too.

And again, you can find the ELOF and supporting materials on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, the ECLKC, and I've included those links at the end of the presentation under the resource and support. So, remember, you have access to download all of these slides, so that has all those links in there. You should also be able to access that using the resource widget at the webinar platform.

So, each domain, each one of these learning domains, they're related to and they influence each other, of course. So, children aren't learning skills in isolation, but I'm going to share some specific examples about how responsive learning environments can support school readiness in some of these different domains of the ELOF. So, you can look out for this blue arrow that just popped up, so this one here. I'm going to use that sort of as an ELOF indicator when I'm sharing examples related to a specific ELOF domain.

So, research also tells us that responsive learning environments are a really wonderful way to give some extra support to children who are learning more than one language or children with disabilities or suspected delays. So, it can really help those children thrive because it can help have these extra supports to allow them to participate and communicate with us.

So, throughout our time together today, we'll discuss and explore the ways in which the environment can be tailored to meet the needs of all children, which is just so important. So, focusing in, what are the most important components in the environment? What do you need to consider? And of course, this is a huge broad topic. We can spend many, many webinars talking about this.

So, to focus in, I'm just going to pick these four things, so these four components of a responsive learning environment. So, first and foremost, the adults in the environment. So, adults might meant teachers. It also might mean grandparents, tribal elders, culture and language specialists and other community members and important adults in the child's life. So, two, creating a responsive learning environment means creating an environment that's safe and welcoming. We'll dive into that. Third, an environment that can help support autonomy, and also one that we're striving for this balance between engaging but not overwhelming. So, we're going to spend most of the rest of the webinar kind of diving into each of these four key ideas.

So, we're going to start with adults. So, first and foremost, although we're thinking a lot about physical spaces that make up our learning environments, really, the responsive adults involved are always the most important part of any learning environment, and one of the key reasons for this is that we know from research that infants and toddlers develop and learn in the context of responsive, supporting relationships with their caregivers, teachers and other members of the community.

So, adults, you will always be the most important part of a responsive learning environment. In this photo, we see a nice example. So, we have an infant teacher here interacting with a toddler during an everyday routine. It looks like mealtime. And you can see a good example here of how an infant teacher sets up and uses the environment as a tool to provide responsive support for a child.

So, first notice how the teacher has set up the learning space appropriate for the child at this age. So, for example, the toddler is sitting at a table for breakfast, and the table is at an appropriate height for them. They can reach what they need to reach. The child has a pitcher and a cup appropriate for a child of this age, and then also notice how it's a great example of how an infant teacher engages in responsive interaction here.

So, she's sitting at the child's level, and it looks like she's responding with supportive language, smiles and verbal interaction. So, through having this responsive adult, you really create these meaningful interactions out of a mealtime. So, mealtime becomes this rich learning experience. And just as illustrated in the previous photo example, you can think of the environment as your partner in supporting children.

So, the most important element is you as the teacher or as the caregiver, and the environment, again, as your tool can help you support children's emotional needs, can help you support that child's relationship with you or other caregivers as well as relationships with their peers. And this is also true in home-based settings. So, when we're thinking about what home visitors do, they're helping support the development of a secure child-parent relationship.

So, home visitors work with parents and families to use the home and think of it as a learning environment. Think about what that might mean. And they're also helping parents and families engage in responsive interactions and routines and to provide learning opportunities within the home and out in the community.

So, again, looking at this photo, we see a pretty good example of how a home visitor has supported the parents to use the home environment for learning. So, how've they done that here? It looks like they've made a nice open space here so that the children can practice crawling or walking. They're at a couple different ages here, so they need some space to practice some of those physical motor movements. You also see that there's some highly engaging toys in the photo. You see a xylophone there, and then that red crawling cube, that looks like a great engaging toy to practice some of those physical skills in crawling through, and these can promote learning across many areas. You'll also notice that the parents are all sitting down at the child's level, and the mother is responding to the child's needs.

So, you can see that she's holding his hands and helping him maybe get up to a standing position or maybe start working on walking, and the way that the home visitor has helped to set up this learning environment is really key. So, that helps to support all of this.

So, one of the five domains of the ELOF is cognition. So, notice that blue ELOF indicator is up, which includes the development of early math skills. So, I'm going to show you another video, and this is a great example of an infant-toddler classroom teacher who's working on some math skills with her kids, and as you watch the video, I want you think about how the teacher is supporting early math skills with these young children.

And in particular, how is the environment serving as her partner or as a tool to help the teacher support these children's school readiness goals in this ELOF domain of cognition? Okay, so here goes that video.

Teacher: Here we go, Callie. Are you ready? [Video begins] Say, one...

Child: Go!

Teacher: ...two...All right! That'll work. Want to count Mason out? Ready? One, two, three, go! Are we going to four? Good job, Connor. I like that. Whee, Isabelle. Here comes Allison.

Allison: Go!

Teacher: Go!

Child: Tell me, "One, two, three."

Teacher: Okay. One...

Child: Two.

Teacher: ...two...

Child: Three.

Teacher: ...three. Go! Good job, Connor. You want to count? Okay. One, two, three, four, five, go!

Child: Go!

Teacher: Yay! One, two...

Child: Go!

Teacher: Oh, she couldn't wait could she? She just couldn't wait. That's fine. She went on two. That's good. You want to count? Hayley didn't want to wait, either. That's fine.

Child: One, two, three.

[Video ends]

Marley: I just adore that video, and I think it's such a great example of why the adult is always the most important component in a learning environment. You can kind of think be able to how she is helping these children work on their early math skills by using the environment as her tool. But of course, she is just such a key component there.

So, I...Also, we've been talking about the ELOF domains and cognition, but are there any other domains being supported in this video? So, I'll bring up some of those other ELOF learning domains, and I want you to just think about if they were working any other skills and any of these other ELOF domains that video.

So, I'm seeing quite a few come up in this group chat here. Social, emotional... Yeah, absolutely. They're working on kind of taking turns, getting to do something really fun like going down a slide and inhibiting their emotions there or working on some of those emotional relations with each other as well as their teacher. Waiting and taking turns, that's so hard. They're going so fast I can barely read them, but you guys are very quick to point out here that probably just about any learning domain here.

So, again, a nice reminder that children are working on many of these different domains at the same time. So, I'm going to keep giving examples of how the environment can support different general school-readiness goals in these various ELOF domains, but I want you to also try and challenge yourself to think about what other skills and domains are supported by the examples that we talk about. Okay.

So, we're going to be moving on to the second area, so creating a safe and welcoming environment. So, what do I mean by this? We want to, of course, make sure that our children are learning in environments that are physically safe, and it's very important to think about these environments being safe and toxic-free, but today I'm focusing more on thinking about an environment that's safe for exploration and learning.

So, is there enough space for the children to crawl or run or whatever other developmentally appropriate play activities without running into each other, bumping into furniture. So, everyone should have furniture that fits them, also, the children and the adults, that should feel safe physically and comfortable to explore, and that means making accommodations when necessary. So, maybe children or family members with disabilities or what about cultures. So, sometimes different cultures might prefer to sit on chairs, maybe on pillows or rugs. So, what accommodations can we make?

And then we also want to think about making learning environments that are emotionally safe as well. So, emotionally safe refers to how the environment feels, so both to the child and their families. So, is it welcoming? Does it feel like a homelike environment? Does it support each child's social and emotional well-being and mental health? And importantly, does the child see themselves reflected in the environment? Does it feel like they have a sense of belonging there?

So, on this, know it's important to create learning environments that are reflective of the children and families in our program. So, we want to make sure that children can see themselves in our classroom. They spend a lot of time there, so should make sure that it feels that it's a place for them. So, some ideas might include incorporate cultural materials into the space or displaying items in the home. So, photos of children and their families are definitely important, but maybe also making sure that materials are diverse just as the children are diverse in your care, so books, pictures on the walls, baby dolls, et cetera, that are all reflective of the children that are in your care is so important.

And then also think about what is actually at eye level. So, you might even want to cruise around your center or your home and the other learning space at the eye level of the various children that you work with, kind of do that to take stock of what they see.

And then also thinking about the community you live and work in to make sure that the families also feel that they can see themselves when they walk into your space, to your learning space. And we know from research that children do best when they're rooted in their culture and their home language or languages. So, this, in turn, supports wellbeing and mental health, but also academic success as well. So, you can ask families how to make your learning environment feel more welcome to them or to their children. It's a great place to start. I'm sure you all are doing a lot to think about this and add to your space, but it's a great thing to check in with families about.

And then lastly, environments are not just about things or objects in the room. So, the learning environment can actually influence relationships and help support positive behavior. So, when children feel supported and when they're actually engaged, it can often reduce behaviors that you might find challenging.

So, we can think about trying to create an environment of yes, where everything a child can do or access within that space is safe or acceptable for them to play with. And of course, we want to always continue to observe and assess the environment to make sure that children are staying engaged.

So, thinking about this from the ELOF perspective, it's important to remember that a safe environment means an appropriately challenging environment, so if you don't have appropriate challenges, children will often find ways to make their own challenges, and sometimes these are not as safe as the ones we may decide to provide or scaffold for them. So, physically safe also means supporting children's perceptual, motor and physical development as outlined in this domain of the ELOF, so that includes things like motor skills as well as perception and their health and safety and nutrition. So, infants can get experience with varied textures, colors, smells, sounds and tastes. This is all supporting this domain.

Infants and toddlers can work on their motor skills on padded floors and surfaces, maybe trying to roll over or sit up on a blanket or some other soft surface that's free of obstacles. Maybe they can use some risers or boxes to try standing up, and then as they grow, they can try taking their first steps without worrying about falling over and hurting themselves or kind of simple activities like trying to jump from pillow to pillow or squares on a carpet, maybe using a low balance beam. All of these are really simple activities that children can engage with throughout the day, not just at one particular time of the day like recess or outdoor time.

So, also thinking about this same domain in the ELOF, perceptual, motor and physical development, what about creating this safe and welcoming environment for children in the home that supports this? So, how can we help caregivers think about how to add in some of these safe and appropriate challenges to their home.

So, we're going to watch a video example of a home visiting situation, and as you watch, I want you to think about how you might help the parent or caregiver think about ways they could recreate this activity using materials found in their home. So, as you're watching the video, feel free to share out any ideas that you have in the chat box. You can see the tube here is something that this home visitor has brought in to practice crawling through and things like that, so how might you help that caregiver think about how to recreate this activity or something similar in their home?

Okay, I'll pull up the video now.

[Video begins] Woman: Okay. How is everybody?

Woman 2: We're good.

Woman: Oh, okay. Where is my seat? Oh, here today?

Woman 2: Yeah.

Woman: Okay.

Jaya: Yeah.

Woman: Yes, yes, yes.

Woman 2: What's that?

Woman: Ooh. I got some surprises. Let me set my bags down. Okay. Okay. Here. Help me take it apart. Here. Help me.

Woman 2: Can I help?

Woman: Here, help. Open. Open.

Woman 2: Yeah, open it.

Woman: Yeah. Ooh, got another one?

Woman 2: Open it.

Woman: One.

Woman 2: Pull it.

Woman: Two.

Woman 2: Good job.

Woman: Uh-oh. And three. Look! Oh!

Woman 2: Go, Kya.

Woman: Where are you going? Where are you going?

Jaya: Got you!

Woman: Yay for Jaya!

Woman 2: Check out the tunnel.

Woman: Yes.

You go bye-bye?

[Video ends]

Marley: There's so much joy in that short video. I love it. And you get to have some wonderful examples here of how a caregiver might recreate just using items from their home, so some of the examples you guys came up with is maybe making a tunnel out of some cardboard boxes or creating an obstacle course with couch pillows and other items. I love that. A lot of creative uses of blankets and other things to make a tunnel, etc. Oh, and making a tunnel with some chairs to crawl through. Yeah, those are all some excellent examples. So, it's important to try and help caregivers think about also creating some of these safe and developmentally appropriate challenges within the home.

So, if you have really limited space, another great suggestion is trying maybe some songs and dances that might use different parts of the body. Even if you stand in one spot, you can still work some of those motor skills, or try playing musical instruments and practice moving or dancing or bouncing to the beat, even, depending on how old they are. So, all of this is part of creating a safe and welcoming learning environment, and this supports, of course, children's school readiness.

So, we've been thinking a lot about this safe and welcoming environment that supports a lot of these really important physical skills, but, of course, a safe and welcoming environment is also one that supports children's school readiness through social and emotional development, as well, so I wanted to shift to talking about that a little bit.

So, again, the ELOF indicator here letting us know that we're on this ELOF domain. So, having a safe and welcoming environment, of course, supports this domain, as well, so that includes things like relationships with other children, relationships with adults, emotional functioning and also a sense of identity and belonging, and I love this picture. It's a great example from the Early Head Start Cook Inlet in Alaska, so they have a pretty large tribal population, and what they've done in their even to sort of support some of these social and emotional sense of identity and belonging...So, each child has their photo decorated with fake furs that represent traditional dress from some of those tribes there, and you could even potentially write the child's name or age or interest in both English and a tribal language or a home language.

And, of course, it's important that these things can be highly variable from child to child, so children's cultural backgrounds influence the way that they might demonstrate what they're interested in or how they engage in play situations, for example. Some cultures maybe encourage children to stand out as individuals while others might emphasize group identity, so try to get to know signs from each individual that indicate that they feel a sense of identity and belonging within your learning space.

So, this is all a really important way that we can help boost social and emotional development through the use of the environment as a tool. So, I want you to continue to think about what ways you are already doing this or maybe some ideas that you have.

So, in what ways do you support social and emotional development in your homes or your centers or your classroom, whatever your learning spaces are, and feel free to share out in the chat box some of your ideas of how you do this in your learning spaces and how you might make children feel represented or safe and welcome within your early learning spaces. I think, again, it's a really nice opportunity.

We have so many wonderful folks on this webinar today, so it's a great opportunity to learn from each other. And I'm going to continue on, but again welcome any and each of you to share out in the group chat if you have some great suggestions for how you make children feel represented, safe and welcome in your early learning spaces.

So, I have up here one of the guiding principles of the ELOF, so there are seven, and here we're focusing on the principle that's related to cultural and linguistic diversity, so every child has diverse strengths rooted in their family's culture, background, language and beliefs, and that responsive and respectful environments welcome children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

So, this is essential to keep in mind when you're designing your learning environments and those spaces that children are spending time in. And I wanted to just quickly point out this large body of resources available to you. So, the vast majority of Head Start and Early Head Start programs have children enrolled who speak a home language other than English, so you likely do, as well. And so this planned language approach is a comprehensive, systemic, research-based way that programs can help ensure optimal language and literacy services for all children. And it's very much a part of creating a responsive environment, so be sure to check out the Planned Language Approach on the ECLKC. I've included links, again, at the end. I just wanted to point out quickly that there's some great resources, especially here in this part where I'm pointing to, and then I've linked to some of those specific tip sheets at the end of the presentation, again, so you'll have easy access to those.

So, moving on to this third key component here, supporting autonomy, and I'll explain a little bit what I mean about that. So, the environment can promote a child's autonomy and skills based on their age, and this allows for support of, again, perceptual, motor and physical development domain of the ELOF. So, we want to think about how we can create an environment that fosters a child's autonomy based on their age or wherever they are developmentally.

So, the environment should, for example, be set up to encourage children to explore independently and kind of allow them to show you what they can do, so how, for example, does the learning environment support the development of fine and gross motor skills. And it's important to note that independence that kind of mean a different thing to different families, so this independence or autonomy can vary from each family or culture, that there's some important differences related to independence, and it's not necessarily a goal for all families at this young age. So, the point here that I'm making is that environments can support a child's autonomy in a way that's useful to building physical supports into the learning environment, that can allow children to grow and develop their school readiness skills across learning domains.

So, for example, can they reach the sink to wash their hands? Notice in this photo, they've added a way that they can reach the sink if they're not quite tall enough yet but are able to stand. Can they access play materials, maybe to pretend to cook dinner for their friend in the play kitchen area. So, how does the environment let children show us what they can do? And there are many different ways that you, I'm sure, have thought about, building ways into your environment to support this autonomy.

So, a great away to think about this is to ask yourself, "How does the equipment support the child's ability to do things as much as possible on their own with minimal assistance?" So, for example, once a child can sit up independently, they should be sitting in a chair that maybe that they can crawl to or sit in with minimal assistance, but it might have sides on it if they're still just learning how to sit. Maybe for toddlers, is the table height low enough that they can actually reach the materials easily? So, these are all great things to start to think about.

We can also think about what adjustments you can make to the learning environment that helps support children with disabilities or suspected delays. The goal here is to allow all children to participate fully, so here is a nice example. This little girl in the yellow play tube, she's a pretty shy child, and she can get upset around new people or new activities, and with her teacher, she's currently working on a school-readiness goal of showing interest in interacting with and developing personal relationships with other children, so her peers.

So, to support her in this, her teacher... She's at a home-based childcare center. They've added in some quieter spaces for her in the play area, and she has the autonomy to crawl into her safe space, which is this yellow play tube here, if she chooses or if she needs that, so in this way, she's able to participate in the play area. She can kind of see the action going on from where she wants to be in that moment, as close as she's comfortable as she's warming up, and so the environment here is helping support her build school readiness skills in many areas, so maybe, for example, building large motor skills as she's crawling through the tube. Also using her senses to explore the world around here, and then also working to build relationships with peers during play, so continue to assess your learning environment as children grow and change over time as, of course, things change. And think about, "When do they ask for my help?" because that's a great hint that there's something there maybe you can adjust.

And then, of course, if you're working with pre-verbal infants or children who are learning a different language or maybe have some suspected delays or some other communication challenges, how will you know how to read their signs? So, that's something to make sure you know even how they're asking for help. And then, is there something that you can change in the environment so that they can do that on their own to the best of their abilities?

So, this kind of comes back to trying to create an environment of, "Yes." So, to put all that together, I'm going to show you another video, and while you watch the video, feel free to share out in the chat box any ideas about how this adult, this infant teacher, is supporting this infant's autonomy.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Is that neat? Watch! Watch how this comes apart. Oh, no. Look at that. Isn't that neat? You want to...Are you trying to get it? Are you trying to get it? Huh? You doing hard work? Hard work on your tummy. Can you get it? It's so hard. It's so hard. Uh-oh. Did I take the top off? Hi. Oh, are you trying to get it? Are you working hard? Oh, you're working hard.

Whoa. You pushed up so high! You pushed up so big. It's so good. Can you push up... Oh, are we getting a little bit frustrated? Huh? Are you getting frustrated? Huh? Watch. Watch as I stack them. One purple, blue. Is that neat? Did you want to hold one? Did you want to hold one? Whoa. Did you want to hold one? Look at that green one. You see the green one? Can I stack that one on there? Do you think that'll work? Ooh, do you like the blue? You like the blue one. Hmm? Are those pretty? Lots of colors. Right? This one's a big one. Is that the big one? Hi, Lilly. Are you gonna chew on that? Is that one little? Is that one little? Huh?

[Video ends]

Marley: Yeah, so I love some of the things you all are commenting on in the group chat. Thank you for that, and it seems like some of these key ideas you guys are talking about is that this infant teacher is really trying to follow the lead of this young child. So, for example, she's open to allowing that baby to maybe use the material or that toy in a slightly different way or to access the part of the toy that they wanted to grab, not necessarily the one that they thought that the child wanted. And she did a really nice job of using language and parallel talk but in a way that's not super overwhelming or taking over, so she had still allowing that child to take the lead without taking over, and you notice maybe she scooted some of the toys slightly closer but didn't fully take over.

So, there's a lot of really wonderful things there. So, I think this is a great video as an example of what that looks like. How do you support an infant's autonomy in this sort of setting? So, we're going to move on now to our last of these four main components, and that's that we're always striving to achieve this balance, so between an environment that engages but that doesn't overstimulate. So, we're always trying to strive for this balance, and one thing to ask, is there a variety of open-ended materials available to children?

So, open-endedness and this ability for choice, so still kind of coming off of that autonomy idea, that really allows for engagement across the developmental spectrum, so it allows children to use materials as a appropriate for where they are developmentally, and so we want a variety of materials available. It's a balance, right? So, it's important not to have too much stuff available to children, and a child's ability to make choices can help with this balance, so can each child, for example, can they choose or show you what level of social activity or interactions that they want? Can they find a quiet space to take a moment if they need to, or if they're not quite able to take themselves to a quite space, can they show you that, and is that available in the environment to them?

So, for more mobile kiddos, sort of those older toddlers, can you try to find nooks in the general room where you can still supervise them. You can still see them, and they can still see you, but it still feels like a private space? And it's very important to kind of think about environments in your space. Think about being a scientist, about observing and assessing your environment over time, and the goal here is to ensure that children stay engaged. So, as you notice their interest and developmental levels might change, you can make appropriate changes, and this is ultimately going to reduce behaviors that might be challenging to you.

So, again, be a scientist in your daily experience with kids, and home visitors, I think it's really important that you can help parents and caregivers sort of be scientists about it with their own kids, as well. And, of course, it's always important to work with families to learn even more about their children and really what they need to feel comfortable, represented, engaged and ready to learn.

So, I'm going to show you another video here, and I want you now, watching this video, to sort of practice making these kinds of observations, so practice being a scientist here, so we're going to have you make observations by watching this video of some young children in an early learning environment, and I want you to pay attention to what aspects of the environment appear to be engaging for each child, and also see if you think the child might overwhelmed by anything in the environment.

So, think about what your observations are, if there's anything that you think is going well. Just what do you notice? And feel free to share out, again, in that group chat as you watch the video, and if you're a home visitor, think about how you would support a caregiver to make these kinds of observations.

 [Video begins]

Teacher: We have blocks on the shelf. You want to get some blocks? Or the owl. Hoo. Where's the owl? Do you see him over there? Yeah, you like to play with him. Should we get the owl for you? Hmm? Oh, Alexandra, what are you gonna do? Huh? You dropped your bells, and they're far from you. How are you gonna get it? How are you gonna get it? Oh, are you just gonna get your feet? Huh? Oh. You're almost reaching it. You're almost there. Yes. A different choice. You're choosing the turtle. You're choosing the turtle, yes. You want to see the basket? Here is some more choices for you. Have some more choices. What do you want to use? What do you want to play with? Did we agree on the owl?

[Video ends]

Marley: So, there's some nice thoughts here in the group chat kind of noticing that not all of the materials are out all at one time, but that there's a few for these young children to choose from, and the teacher sure does a really nice job of following their lead and providing support while still supporting their autonomy, not kind of taking over. And so I think this video is a really nice example of how this learning environment can support school readiness skills, for example, in the cognition domain.

So, the cognition domain includes skills like exploration and discovery, reasoning and problem-solving and memory. So, for example, in that video we just watched, thinking about exploration and discovery. So, for example, the baby exploring different toys near her. Reasoning and problem-solving, for example, the baby working through how to reach the various toys around her, and we also saw an example of working on memory skills.

So, the caregiver was referencing the owl toy as a recurring favorite for the toddler, and so some children with physical limitations might have difficulty getting or exploring objects, so think about supporting their learning by observing the child's individual interests and providing engaging materials and experiences that allow them to explore and participate to their abilities, and really just giving children time and space to play in open-ended ways with varied materials boosts these cognition skills that are so important for school readiness.

So, lastly, I want to talk about what about these children who are learning more than one language? So, environments that are appropriately engaging, so I mean allows for open-ended use of materials, free choice between varied areas and materials and so on, give children who are learning more than one language sort of an extra boost, extra support in being able to communication with their caregivers using the environment.

So, I'm going to show you another video for a great example of this, so pay attention to how the learning environment in this video supports this little one who's working on learning more than one language.

 [Video begins]

Teacher: Anthony started in the infant room, like, two months ago, and he had a little hard time, too, at that at the beginning because he was not exposed to daycare, but he adapted, like, a month after, and since the first day he got a connection with me. I put him to sleep in his room that day, and then he start having a connection, and he always look for my hand because he doesn't have the language yet, but he give me signs or gestures for me to follow his lead, so I always follow his lead of what he wants to do, and he enjoys exploring all over, and once he starts one activity, he focuses on that all over and over and over, which is very good for him because he's in the exploration stage right now. Good pouring water.

And I saw him very interested on pouring water and getting water, even he hold the hose, like, he tried to do it himself, and I just opened the hose for him and then put a little bit so for him not to be too heavy, and then he went back and forth, back and forth, and I just knew that he wanted more because he offered the bucket to me to put more water on it. So, I just followed his lead until he just got tired of it, and he just stopped doing the activity. Thank you, Miss Deliah.

I speak Spanish to him because his parents both speak Spanish, and he understands more in Spanish than English sometimes. [Speaks Spanish] I feel like he's more connected with the Spanish language. [Speaks Spanish] My primary language is Spanish, and I love to sing in Spanish with them, too. [Singing in Spanish]

[Video ends]

Marley: So, we can kind of see how having open-ended and engaging materials, so there's just lots of things that that child could go and get and point to, can really help support that communication, and it also, I think, hearkens back to what we were talking about before of setting up your environment to encourage autonomy.

So, in other words, by having these open-ended materials that that child can choose from or to engage with, we're allowing them the space to show us what they're interested in exploring, and really, in turn, that just boosts learning in all areas. And there was some nice comments by you all pointing out how they had their schedules and routines in that space was indicated by some other visual indicators, some shapes and some pictures.

And there's some really great additional resources, again, in that Planned Language Approach, so go and check that out, and so notice, of course, also that these same strategies, having open-ended materials, supporting autonomy and choice, these can also be a really great way to have the environment help you support children with suspected disabilities and delays.

So, we are wrapping up our time today, and I want you to feel free to share out in the group chat any key takeaways that you have from session, and I will just give you a quick overview of the key take-home messages of this, those four key components that I've been talking about. So, again, there are so many different things that we can think about for a learning environment, for what we can consider, but I've found it helpful to just sort of narrow into these four components. So, of course, children learn through nurturing responsive relationships with trusted adults, so you will always be the most important part of the learning environment, and that includes the other important adults in that child's life, as well.

And then aim for creating a safe and welcoming or home-like environment that's comfortable and representative, so aiming for both physically and emotionally safe environments, but that are appropriately challenging physically, and that spaces should be welcoming and reflective of the cultures of the children and families in your program. So, remember, that culture is connected deeply with having a responsive learning environment.

Then this third key idea is about supporting autonomy. How can we have our learning environment help children show us what they can do? So, that can include things like choice or adding in some supports or adaptations to allow all children to participate and really strive for enabling each child to act on their own and engage independently with the environment to the best of their ability.

And lastly, we're always striving for this balance between having an engaging but not overwhelming environment or learning space for our children, so engaging tasks and activities that should be designed with children's level, backgrounds and interests in mind, and, of course, allowing for choice and having open-ended materials, as well as space for breaks and taking a little bit of time when they need a break, can really help with this balance.

So, in summary, by having an engaging environment, we encourage all children to participate fully, and they can communicate with us using the environment and these back-and-forth, supportive interactions, and as infants and toddlers learn really in the context of relationships, the environment can be a really great tool for helping you keep them engaged, which will really help support your relationship with all children.

And this, in turn, supports school readiness across all of the ELOF domains. So, sort of to summarize that in just one sentence, responsive learning environments include culture and can support school readiness for all children across all settings. So, lastly, I'll just show you I had those two pages of resources and support, and these, again, you have access to the PowerPoint, so you should have easy access to some of these. They include some of the videos we saw as well as the Planned Language Approach and a bunch of other great resources, so I hope you get a chance to take a look. And with that, thank you very much for joining us today.

Sarah Lytle: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Marley, and I'd like to take us immediately here to this evaluation link. So, we hope this information will be valuable to you as you help programs consider ways to enrich the experiences for children and the families that they serve. If you have thoughts about how this relates to your work, we'd love to see in the group chat. I know some of you have already been sharing that already.

And this is the evaluation link for today's webinar. We request that you complete the evaluation, as we use this information for improving our webinar presentations and planning for future webinars. Upon completion of the evaluation, you can download a certificate of completion for your participation in the webinar. If you're viewing the webinar with colleagues on one computer, and only one person is registered for the webinar, please forward the link to your colleagues who also viewed the webinar so that they can complete the evaluation and receive a certificate of completion.

And then, finally, some of you were savvy enough to note that this is the first BabyTalks of this year, and there are three of them total. The next BabyTalks webinars will be on March 14 and July 11, so look out for notifications for those in advance, and we hope you'll join us for the rest of this series. Thank you so much.