

Teacher Time: Supporting Creativity in Infants and Toddlers

Maria Alvarez: Hello, everyone. Welcome to Teacher Time. I am Maria Alvarez. Nice to see you again, Gail.

Gail Joseph: Yes, I'm Gail Joseph. It's nice to see you, too. We are both from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning, often shortened to just DTL. We're so excited to have you here with us today for our fourth infant-toddler episode of Teacher Time and our last episode of this season, which is hard to believe.

Maria: I know, but we'll be back next fall.

Gail: That is right, we'll be back.

Maria: I would like to call your attention to the Viewer's Guide, you will find it in the resource widget that Gail was mentioning. If you're new to Teacher Time, the viewer's guide is something made just for you. You can download the guide and use it throughout our time together like taking notes, reflecting and planning how you'll use the Teacher Time practices in your own setting. This month's Viewer Guide is full to the brim of reflections and printable resources that can be useful and information.

I think that's it. I think we're good with logistics. Let's get started.

We're so excited to be focusing this season of Teacher Time on supporting young child's – young children's creativity. Supporting creativity is also referred to as Approaches to Learning, which you may know is one of the domains in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, or ELOF, as we like to say.

Gail: That is right. So far this season, if you've been with us, you know that we have focused on emotional and behavioral self-regulation. Then we focused on cognitive self-regulation, which is also what we call executive function skills. Then we moved on to fostering initiative and curiosity. Today, we are focusing on creativity. We're going to dive a little bit deeper and learn about the creativity ELOF goals for infants and toddlers.

This subdomain, as you may know, is made up of two goals. First, the child uses creativity to increase understanding and learning. And second, the child shows imagination in play and interactions with others. Today, we're going to focus on the first goal, “child uses creativity in thinking to increase understanding and learning.” While we're going to focus on that first goal and creativity today, it's important to note that the development of both skills in goal one and goal two are very related. By supporting the development of creativity, children often also demonstrate imagination, innovation, problem solving, and social skills – very related.

Maria: Why is creativity important? We might have an idea in our heads, but let's turn to research and see, why is it important for children now and later on in life?

Researchers in this book called “Nurturing Creativity: An Essential Mindset for Young Children's Learning,” we know that experts, business leaders, and educators identify several skills and abilities that today's young children need now and in the future. Children need to be creative thinkers, flexible, and able to adjust to an increasingly complex world in a world that constantly

changes; problem solvers; and able to generate innovative ideas. We live in a rapidly changing world – you might already know and live in – where flexibility and creative thinking is key to taking on new problems that arise, creating new solutions and different strategies for communication and collaboration, all of which young children can do sometimes more than us adults since children are still learning the rules of the world.

Creativity is also critical in celebrating each child's unique way of being, doing, and thinking. It's a core piece of who each child is and how each child expresses who they are. Finally, creative expression can help children cope and express their emotions. It's also important to remember that creative expression isn't limited just to the art-centered dramatic play. You can see creativity in all domains and all areas, so everyone is creative, and creativity can happen anywhere.

Gail: As we've been doing all season with Teacher Time, we're first going to turn attention to ourselves as adults. We like to think about, what can we do to foster our own creativity as an example so that we can foster the creativity of young children?

Did you know that everyone is creative? You might be out there saying, “Oh, I'm not creative, I can never be creative.” We probably – if you're like that, I know I've said that sometimes, you just have a narrow view of what creativity is, we know that everyone is creative. Creativity is a learned skill, which means we need to give ourselves time to practice being creative. It's not the case that some people are creative, and some people aren't. We're all creative. We just need to foster it.

We want to think about – and get your fingers ready to type into that purple Q&A widget – we want to think about how do you, as an adult, foster your creativity? Go ahead and answer your responses into the Q&A there.

While we're waiting for some responses in, Maria, I was thinking about this question for myself. Sometimes for me, I have to have a creative space. If I'm going to do my day-to-day work, I might be one place, but when I want to be able to think creatively about a lesson plan I'm doing, I'd love to sit someplace a bit different. That's one way of fostering creativity, is giving myself the right space and tools. What's something you do, Maria, to foster your creativity?

Maria: I think choosing to chase opportunities that are new and taking risks with things that are outside of my comfort zone, because that forces me to think outside of that box that sometimes I feel I'm inside too often and too long. Just taking those risks, especially when I feel like I'm in a safe and brave space.

Gail: I love that. That idea of getting a little bit discomforted in a way to get creative or getting yourself out of your rut. I also like to read across genres, or listen at – let me be honest, it's more likely that I'm listening across genres. I really like audiobooks, but I find that – some people are writing in, too, that that's something they do to foster their creativity. Some people take classes, some people – you get the idea that we're creative. We want to foster our own creativity so that we can foster young children's creativity as well.

Maria: That's right. I'm doing so through modeling.

Now that we have thought about how we support our own creativity and why it's important, let's think about what creativity looks like in infants and toddlers. Creative skills like imagination, communication, problem solving, innovation, and collaboration will develop throughout early childhood, and even adulthood, like me.

When children have support, the developmental progression can look like what's on this slide that you're seeing. By the way, did you know that this information is directly from the ELOF? A link to the ELOF and the ELOF 2 GO, which is an app and mobile version of the ELOF, are in your Viewer's Guide. You can always go back, refer to that, and have the developmental progressions right at your fingertips.

Let's look at children between birth and nine months first. During this time, we see that infants use a variety of ways to interact with other people, and they might modify their expressions, actions, or behaviors best based on those responses to others. Like we see in the first picture, the infant is using a variety of ways to communicate with the adult. The infant is using body language, facial expression, and gaze. Of course, keep in mind that all children differ, so you might see some younger infants more able to interact and adapt their behaviors than older infants, or you might see differences day-to-day depending on how an infant is doing at school or at home. This is a guide to keep in mind as you interact with the infants and toddlers in your care.

Let's watch a video, as we love to see these videos. Let's watch a video of how an infant at a family childcare shows a variety of ways of communication skills and how they modify their actions based on how the teacher is engaging with him. And share, as you watch this video, share in the Q&A how you see the infant interacting with the adult, or write your notes on the Viewer's Guide. Let's watch.

[Video begins]

Teacher: I see them. Four big toes. There, big toe. Look at that. I think I see five toes here, too. One, two, three, four, five. You have 10 toes. Can I change your diaper now? I'll take that as a yes.

[Video ends]

Maria: So cute. Oh, my gosh, I see in the Q&A your thoughts are coming in. Eye contact, the shared attention was there. The vocalization, the tone is such great affect from the teacher as well. Even asking, "Can I change your diaper?" There's consent right there, right from the very beginning, too, what a safe space. Yeah, "Can I change your diaper?" I see all of those things, I see – gaze, becoming more vocal response. the infant really responded to the teacher once he asked, "Can I change your diaper now?" It was amazing to see.

Gail: Absolutely. Let's look at another age group. Between eight and 18 months, we see children start to find new things to do with familiar everyday objects, such as using a cooking pot for a hat or a spoon as a drumstick. Lots of things became drumsticks when I was with toddlers. Or like in the second picture, using a chair as not a chair, but as a push toy to get from one place to another. A box becomes anything for young children. This is something we see.

Let's watch the teacher and the children in this video, and then share in the Q&A, what you notice about how the child can find new things to do with familiar objects, and how does the teacher respond?

[Video begins]

Teacher: I don't think I can, either. OK, who's on the phone? Hello?

Child: Hello.

Teacher: Oh, it's your mommy. Yeah, it's Mommy.

Child: Hello, Mommy.

Teacher: Tell Mommy we went to the park. Yeah, we're at the park.

[Video ends]

Gail: Block becomes a phone. Love it. Some people are writing in some things, like they appreciate that the teacher has open ended materials. That's one of the ways that we can foster this creativity. Teacher actively engaged, responsive, warm. That was very fun to play along, definitely following the child's lead. How many blocks have we answered in our teaching careers? Many.

Maria: Many.

Gail: That's a good point, too, because while we see that over and over again, because we're working with the same age group, when a child does something for the first time, it is creative. Even if it's something that we've seen many children do in our experience, it's new and creative for that specific child, and we want to celebrate that.

Maria: Definitely. Around 16 to 36 months, close to when the child is getting ready to transition to preschool, children combine objects or materials in new and unexpected ways and show such delights in creating something new. As we see in this last picture on the slide deck, the child in the black shirt is smiling and holding their hands together. It seems like they're so excited. I love it. Let's watch this interaction. Think about what you notice about the child's expressive creativity and expression and their response and write it on the Q&A.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Can you say doggy? OK. Oh, I love it. That is such a good drawing. That is such a good drawing.

[Video ends]

Maria: Maybe this was the first time this toddler drew circles like that or combined a black crayon with green paper. It's all new. They showed delight in their drawing and creation when they said, "Whoa." I could see the satisfaction in their face when he paused, leaned back, and looked at his work. I also noticed that the toddler communicated their need for more space on the paper by gently moving the teacher's hand.

If you have been part of this webinar series, you know what this is. Let's get back to BASICS. These are a collection of strategies that can be used in any setting interacting with infants and

toddlers. The BASICS are teaching practices that you can apply no matter what content you're focusing on – math, literacy, social emotional skills – it is always important to use the BASICS, and it's always something so helpful, so useful to have. If you have watched our previous episodes, this is going to sound super familiar. If this is your first time with us, let me explain what the BASICS are.

Teacher Time BASICS are "B" for behavioral expectations in advance, "A" for attend to and encourage appropriate behavior, "S" for scaffold with cues and prompts, "I" for increased engagement, "C" for create or add challenge, and "S" for specific feedback. Today, we're going to provide some examples of how to apply the Teacher Time basics in ways that will foster and support young children's creativity.

Let me start with B, behavioral expectations in advance. Here are some examples of providing some behavioral expectations that are useful to have in advance and that support children's learning. When we support young children's creativity, we might think of open-ended, unstructured learning activities or impromptu art experiences, but it's also important to create an environment that is predictable, like we've mentioned in past series. This will help infants and toddlers understand what to expect and feel safe. Having stability in the environment is key to creating space where infants and toddlers feel comfortable taking risks and trying new things.

I know that when we take risks, we allow ourselves to be more creative and foster that. Taking risk is a huge part of learning and developing that creativity. It's important to provide behavioral expectations in advance, like, "We're going to have a snack in about five minutes. I know it can be hard to wait. I need to cut up the fruit and clean the table, and then we can sit down to eat." Or "We're going to try something new today. There is clay in the sensory table. It's okay if you're unsure about playing with it. Sometimes trying new things can be overwhelming. Or "If you start to feel frustrated, you can try taking a deep breath or ask a teacher for help."

Gail: I love that one. It's so important, those behavioral expectations in advance, I think that's an important part, is that all of those things are proactive and advance.

We're to the A. The "A" in BASICS is for attend and encourage appropriate behavior. Like we mentioned earlier, creating an environment where children feel safe to take risks and try new things is at the core of developing and expressing creativity. If we don't feel safe, if we don't feel like we can take risks, then creativity really gets squashed. We want to keep that light burning for young children in terms of their creative spirit.

One way we can build this type of community is to respond to infants' and toddlers' creative problem solving, thinking, and expression with wholehearted acceptance. We can do this with encouragement, such as "You're trying so many different ways to get the Cheerios into your mouth." Or "Look at what you created." Not only does this support the child's creativity, it also helps to foster a connection with a child. It's a nice little relationship builder as well.

We can also respond to a child's creative process with descriptive encouragement. We like those encouraging statements to be very descriptive. It might be something like, "I noticed you painting at the table. You were using the teal paint. First, you started smooching the paint on

the paper, and then you started covering your hands and wrists with paint.” Sounds very creative.

Being detailed in our encouragement shows that infant and toddler that we're invested in them and their work, and it provides the language that they can use to express their ideas, thoughts, and creations. You never know, they might start talking about smooshing paint because of what you said.

Remember your body language, your tone of voice, your smile – there's actual research that the more a teacher is smiling at a child, the more risks they take, in terms of curiosity and creativity, and those things are just as important as what you're saying. It's important to focus on the process and that effort that goes into creating. Not just the product, it's focusing on what they're doing. The smooshing of the paint, the using all the paint, the thinking, the exploration, not just, “Oh, look at the pretty picture that you've done.”

We are going to watch a video of a teacher supporting an infant's creativity with encouragement. This is a great time to use your Viewer's Guide and write down your observations about the behaviors you see the teacher use that are encouraging.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Oh, Alexandra, what are you going to do? You dropped your bells, and they're far from you? How are you going to get it? How are you going to get it? You're just going to get your shoe, your feet? You're almost reaching it. You're almost there. Yes. A different choice. You're choosing the turtle. You're choosing the turtle.

[Video ends]

Gail: I love that teacher. Right down there with the infants and toddlers.

Maria: Having questions.

Gail: The questions, asking so many great open-ended questions that foster creativity, like “What are you going to do?” Or “How are you going to get it?” Nice descriptive narration of what the child is doing. “Oh, you're making a different choice. You're using the turtle.” She really accepted that infant's new ideas. She was just watching and – –

Maria: And narrating.

Gail: Narrating, which feels so validating. It's a great relationship builder with that infant, but also that warm and encouraging tone that I'm sure made that infant want to take a risk.

Maria: Exactly. That's the commonality that we've been seeing in all these videos. It's that warm affect. It's that warm tone that makes them feel safe and take those risks.

Let's move on to “S” for scaffold with cues and prompts. This is a very important part of helping a child learn, because you're providing them with the scaffolds that they need to get to that next level. If you don't know what scaffolding is, if you've never heard it before, I'll tell you.

Scaffolding is how we help a child learn by providing them with just the right amount of assistance. That's the key part there. It's just the right amount of assistance to help push them to the next level or help them reach that next level. Scaffolding children's creativity can include

things like asking those open-ended questions you saw that teacher asked in that previous video that helps them think about and reflect about what they're doing. For example, "Wow, you made up a game all on your own. Can you tell me about it or show me how to play?" Support that planning, or problem solving, or deep thinking by asking questions like, "What do you think is going to happen next?"

Sometimes people wonder, why would I ask such big questions to infants and toddlers? And the answer is, infants and toddlers come to expect what they know. The more they hear these questions, the more they can expect it. The more they hear the questions that scaffold their thinking, they will come to expect those kinds of questions, and eventually you'll start hearing some answers. You'll start hearing some one word, you'll start hearing some vocalization in response. You'll start seeing their behavior and their expressions come to light when you ask those open-ended questions. and they might not be able to answer the question.

They might not be able to answer the question. Don't worry, don't panic, because I know we've tried to panic when we ask questions and the kids are nothing, but they're thinking about it. They're processing, they're listening, and watch for those nonverbal cues. Watch for that body language, because they are responding to you in their own way.

Another way to scaffold is by modeling creative thinking, problem solving, and expression out loud. Those think-alouds are important. This might sound like, "Huh, I wonder how we can make the play dough dark green? Let's see what happens when I add a few drops of this food color that's green. And oh, look, I'm adding the food color. It's turning light green. Hmm, but I wanted dark green. Let's see, I wonder if I add some more, what will happen. And then, "You can see that it's turning dark green."

Those wonderments, those things, those questions – modeling that, that's so important for children to see. That might include other statements, like "I noticed." And "I wonder," "I wonder" is one of my favorites. But "I noticed" or just thinking out loud, even if I'm thinking about my own things, I just think aloud sometimes, because that's an organic way of modeling it too for the children.

It can also be a time to talk about what it feels like to take risks, to try something new. Modeling creativity can look like making up voices or sound effects, or gestures. I do a lot of gestures. Maybe that's cultural, but I do a lot of gestures when reading or telling stories, using recycled items in a new way, and problem solving.

Gail: That is so great. I love the little phrases you gave us too, like "I noticed," "I wonder." Sometimes I've seen in classrooms that teachers have those little phrases up around the room just as a reminder, like when I'm stuck on what to say. I love that.

Another way we can support creativity is to increase children's active engagement. That one is a captain obvious one, right? If we want children to be creative, we need them to have some active engagement. One strategy to increase active engagement is to provide open-ended materials that allowed children to use them in many ways, like we were talking about. Children start to use familiar things in novel ways, and they use novel things in new ways too. Providing open-ended materials allows infants and toddlers to decide how they're going to use the

materials versus a prescribed way. This supports the child in exploring any way their mind can create to do it.

In these pictures, we see a range of open-ended materials. You see on one side that there are cups, shaker eggs on a clear plastic plate on a light table. On the other side, you can see a bunch of canning lids in a small tray. You can imagine all the different ways infants and toddlers can play with these items. There's no one way to play with them, so everything they do with them will be creative.

Of course, safety is always our number one priority. Before bringing in any loose parts, beginning any activity with loose parts or open-ended materials, it's absolutely critical essential, a must that we make sure that those are not going to be choking hazards, so checking all those items in those tubes and things to make sure before you bring them in. If they're not choking hazards, you can get creative with the materials that you bring in. And remember, creative teachers, creative adults, foster creative children.

Another sure way to increase active engagement is to rotate materials out. Research has found that children play longer when there are fewer toys available to them and that the novelty of new toys can boost creativity. There's a strategy you can use called a toy rotation plan where you inventory all the toys in your classroom or in your site, and you divide it into high preference, medium preference, low preference, and then you're always having a few of each of those categories available in the classroom, but not everything at once. When you rotate things through, it is a great way to increase and boost that active engagement.

If you want to learn more about strategies and that research that we just talked about, you can check out your Viewer's Guide and the Research on the Go podcast, which is fantastic.

Now let's hear from a teacher. I'm so excited about this video. Let's hear from a teacher who brought loose parts and open-ended materials into the classroom. As you're listening – I think it's close to three minutes. As you're listening, think about how she increased children's engagement and supported their creativity. You might want to jot ideas down in your Viewer's Guide, but you can also share what you are hearing in the Q&A.

[Video begins]

Teacher: We decided to go with more of a loose parts philosophy as far as toys are concerned. Each classroom is geared to what the children are engaged in. I watched the children for a while, and then I decided to incorporate what their interests were into the rest of the classroom. Did you see this? I put out a Keurig carousel that would normally hold the Keurig cups, as more of an inserting tool. Last week, we were all about inserting. Now it's in and out. Now that they have the ability to remove the object, it's not just inserting. We've moved to that next step. I did the Keurig carousel in a variety of different size curlers. What are you going to do with the curlers? I want them to problem solve; I want them to figure out, "This doesn't fit. Well, what can fit?"

Yesterday, in fact, I took a picture with my iPad, because we document everything for our journeys of discovery, and they had put, one child had put a paint stir stick in their Keurig carousel, while another one was putting the curler, while another one was putting one of those

plastic tubes. They were all working together with all different objects. It was my validation that yes, they are into this, this is engaging, I need to continue this.

[Video ends]

Gail: I love everything on there.

Maria: I want to be in her classroom.

Gail: I know, or in her professional development. That's incredible. I'm thinking about garage sales, looking around my house for things to bring into the classroom, buying nothing pages, things like that. She was so creative with what she brought in, that really fostered it.

Maria: And intentional.

Gail: Very intentional I love the journey of discoveries and thinking about documenting those.

People are already typing things in, that the teacher brought in materials that support it. Somebody loves the Keurig container. I love that one, too.

Maria: That was so clever.

Gail: So clever. For days, you could probably play with that. Asked open-ended questions. "What are you going to do with the curlers?" Yes, that's key, those open-ended questions. Materials that support problem solving movement around the room, and the teacher's clearly very intentional, like you said, about everything that's going in there. It's not a random assortment, it's really thinking about what the next step in their creativity is going to be. Teachers can increase active engagement by adding in a light table, one of my favorite things in my classroom. So many infants and toddlers are fascinated by light play, and adults, too, I have to say.

Maria: [Inaudible] seen them in classrooms nowadays and in the science museums, they're getting more and more common.

Gail: Yes, they are. Have you seen an infant notice shadows for the first time? It's pretty fun. Or a toddler see different colored lights we cast in the room from colored cups and the windows. Light tables can spark creativity and allow children to take different perspectives on familiar objects. As we saw earlier, maybe you can set up clear colored objects on a light table or like in this picture; let the children bring items to the light table that they want to look at through the light. Bring in items from nature, building blocks or felt story pieces to the table. Things that are opaque, things that are translucent, you can just get creative, and this is a real treat.

We're going to show you – light tables can be pricey, but we're going to show you how you can make your own light table. This is our colleague DeEtta Simmons from the University of Washington showing us how to make a DIY light table.

[Video begins]

DeEtta Simmons: Today we're going to talk about light tables. On this side we have a light table that I purchased for \$350, and over here we have one that I made for under \$100. This light table was great, because it came all put together and was very easy to just plug it in and turn it on. It comes with a little remote. This was also not that difficult to make. What I did was I

purchased some under cabinet LED lights. This set was great, because it comes with many different colors. It has more colors than the one that we purchased and it is just as bright, as you can see. What I did for this one is I purchased a plastic bin that had a flat top. I had to paint the inside of this container black so that the light wouldn't leak out. And then I used a – I set a cutting board inside and strung the lights throughout this container to make them even. I used a piece of tissue paper and a glue stick to attach the tissue paper to the top of the plastic container. And that was it. You plug it in and turn it on.

Light tables are great, because there's so many different activities you can do. A lot of times you think about it just for preschool, but here you can see I have some great materials that are safe for infants and toddlers to use on the light table. Another fun science activity is to have the kids collect nature items from outside and see how they look on the light table under different colors. I'm curious what you all will try with your light table. I hope you can post some pictures for us.

[Video ends]

Maria: That's amazing.

Gail: Love it.

Maria: Now I want to make a light table for my own house.

Gail: Just a dining room. Wouldn't that be awesome, just a dining room table.

Maria: I am feeling challenged. I will take up that challenge.

Speaking about challenge, the letter “C” in BASICS, we create or add challenge. We can add challenge for children by adding a tinkering center, a creation station or sound garden, or any space that allows for open ended creation and messing around with materials.

Please make sure to check your Viewer's Guide for resources on messy play, which we mentioned last episode. You can find it in your resources in the Viewer's Guide with infants and toddlers.

Let's take a pulse check. How many of you have a tinkering center or creation station in your learning environment? Let's see that pulse check. Many of you have. That's awesome. Maybe you decided to add an open-ended art center with toddler-safe materials like pictured on the left. It could include a large box for children to draw on, you can add puffballs or sticky foam shapes. Or maybe you created a sound garden on the playground like the picture on the right. With old pots and pans and spoons so infants and toddlers can create different sounds, maybe you can have a concert outside, songs of music. You can set up a space where children can be autonomous. Prepare to be amazed by watching them create it.

Gail: I love that sound garden. That is very creative. So wonderful.

Finally, the second “S” in BASICS is to provide specific feedback. This slide shows a few different ways to provide specific feedback while encouraging creativity and creating a safe space to take risks and try new things.

Remember that so much of what fostering creativity is about is creating that space, that ambiance of risk taking. We could say things like, for example, "I saw you wait for a turn at the easel. That's creating a nice, safe space. Waiting can be hard, and you did it." I like to talk to children about their waiting muscles, because it takes strength to wait, so "Nice waiting muscles." Or "You're making so many different sounds. It sounds like you're creating a song. Let's see if I can make those sounds, too."

When providing feedback, remember to be descriptive and specific enough to be motivational and supportive while also allowing the child to be creative and act on their own ideas.

Another way to support creativity and deepen thinking, problem solving, and imagination is to connect children's play to their favorite songs or books. Like "Whoa, you are hopping around and around, that makes me think about the book we read the other day, 'Come Along Daisy,' when Daisy was jumping on the lily pads." Make the connection, provide wait time for the child to process, and observe how the child responds and if or how they adapt their play once you make that connection to something that was familiar to them, linking that new to the familiar.

Well, there you have it, BASICS, all about encouraging creativity for children in your care. But don't go, we've still got a lot more on today's episode.

Maria: Yes. Now for our segment, Small Change with Big Impact. Here we're going to highlight a curriculum modification or adaptation that can help a child who needs a little bit more assistance to fully participate in the learning environment for group routines and activities.

We mentioned, there are several ways to increase infant and toddlers' creativity that relate to the environment. These included providing open-ended materials, adding a light table, which I'm totally adding to my house, or setting up a creation station. Sometimes children need environmental supports, like physical adjustments to the materials and space to promote a higher level of participation. This might look like a child having difficulty, maybe reaching the sensory bin that's on the table. A modification quickly that you could do is move that bin to the floor, like we see in this picture on this slide deck where the child might feel more comfortable, and it can access the bin and can participate fully. When you think about using the strategies of physical adjustments, we can consider perhaps changing the space, you could see that picture to the left, changing the space by changing the materials to be more supportive of where the children's skills are, like using adaptive scissors.

I remember I had some of these in my classroom where I could insert my fingers and the child could insert his or her fingers or their fingers, and we could both do the movements, and I could teach them how to cut at the same time. They felt equally independent and successful when they saw what they achieved, but it's giving them that small physical adjustment and modification to get to that successful feeling that they have at the end. Defining boundaries is another way, carpet squares on the floor for children to stand on while playing a group game.

Or, one of my favorites, adding visual cues, like pictures of different yoga poses so the children can have an idea of what to do in that space. You can observe a child and see how they engage in their learning environment. That observation can help you think about and reflect how to best support the child in feeling comfortable, in being – in fostering that creativity, and making

those small modifications to create that big impact in the environment that would be the best for the child and most beneficial and would foster that creativity.

Gail: Those are such great, easy to implement – just like you said, small change, big impact. Easy-to-implement things that can support not only a child that needs a little extra support, but my guess is it's going to support a lot of children in the program or that you're visiting through home visits. It's great.

And now in this is our – one of our favorite sections, such an important section, Focus on Equity. In this segment, we lift up the value of equity and consider how we can make our teaching practices more equitable. We reflect on what it is that we're doing, and how we can be more equitable in our teaching approaches.

Today, we've talked about how children show us who they are uniquely, through their creativity. By supporting creativity, we get to see the child's identity, which includes their culture, their language, their race, their ability, and so much more. And different cultures value different forms of expression and creativity, which are displayed in their traditions, their celebrations, and everyday life. Some forms of creativity that are honored and valued by different cultures might include dance, music, oral style, oral storytelling. Let me say that again, food, dress, and many more.

Learning about a child's culture always starts with the family. Part of supporting a child's identity, belonging, and creativity is welcoming them and their family to your program. The first step is to ask the family questions about their cultural traditions and values. Another way you can welcome families is to invite them to bring pictures, books, toys, items from their culture into the learning environment or to come in and visit to share some of their stories, music, and more. It's very important to celebrate differences within as well as across cultures, and to showcase those differences in the learning environment for all children to see.

Finally, and this is very critical, be aware and mindful of your implicit biases towards certain cultures or traditions. Time to be aware of it, get honest with it, reflect on them, and ask yourself, why do I feel the way that I do. This can be uncomfortable, no doubt about it, but it's a very important step to ensuring that all children and families feel welcomed in the community. It can be helpful to reflect on your implicit biases with a trusted team member, finding somebody that you feel like, “OK, this is our safe zone. Let me talk through this with you, a colleague, a coach, or a supervisor.”

Maria: This is very near and dear to my heart. Being myself from Dominican Republic, coming into this country feeling welcomed by my colleagues in schools and Early Learning Centers, but also as a parent, being asked, where do I come from? What do my children celebrate? What languages do we speak? Inviting that into the classroom and showing everybody else their identities and who they are. The relationship that we foster with parents, the difference that I've seen in how children respond in the classroom and to me as a teacher when I have a strong relationship with their parents is significant, compared to not having a relationship and not asking about their backgrounds and identities and cultures and celebrating that.

I've seen a child grow tremendously, flourish so much more and faster when I have that strong bond with their parents or caregivers. That's so important to consider when you're going back to the classroom later or tomorrow.

Let's hear how one infant-toddler teacher creates a Culturally Responsive Classroom. While you're looking at this video, think about it, reflect, and write down your thoughts in the Viewer's Guide or maybe in the Q&A. Think about what you're listening to and think about what Gail said and reflect.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Honestly, I think the thing that helped us the most in making a Culturally Responsive Classroom was during our home visits, talking with the parents specifically about what their culture is instead of assuming what their culture is. That was helpful, because that engaged the parents immediately into how they can help us in the classroom and to feel like they were a part of the classroom already right at the beginning. That engaged them immediately. It helps us to know, OK, these are the ways that we are going to respond, and these are the ways that we're going to set up our environment, and these are the ways that we're going to do things like singing songs in Spanish, and having all of our labels in English and in Spanish, and to encourage the kids to use English words and Spanish words. That's something that I think having parent involvement is helpful.

Maria: Take a moment now and reflect in your Viewer's Guide; think about how you support each child's culture and identity. In my case, I was saying that my son's teachers sang a song in Spanish. Sometimes just a few words in Spanish helped. And he was immediately with a huge smile on his face because he recognizes the language and was able to crawl around and explore his environment as he felt like, "Oh, these people know me. I can do this. I feel good here."

Think about how you support each child's culture and identity. What do you do to welcome families, their creativity, and celebrate their differences? How do you honor their cultural traditions? How do you display that? How do you honor their displays of creativity? Like we said, creativity looks different across different cultures. How do you honor the celebrations of everyday life for them? What would you like to do differently? What would you like to do more of?

Challenge yourself to think deeply about, where or when do your implicit biases show up? Remember, like that teacher said in the previous videos, maybe ask. Involve them instead of assuming would be a good way to start. If you're comfortable, you can share your ideas in the Q&A, and we'll try to push some ideas out for all to see.

Gail: I want to share this little example I heard of from a program that I love, where during the home visits, the teachers would ask the parents, the families, about the gift of their child's name. They would hear the story of the gift that they gave their child with their name. They wrote down the stories, and somebody in the program with lovely handwriting wrote the story of the child's name. They made a big display outside of the classroom, and it had different envelopes with different children's name on them. You could open the envelope and pull out and read about the story, the gift of their name. So much about their culture, their family, what they valued. It was lovely. Loved that one.

Maria: Gosh, that's special.

Gail: It's now time for The Bookcase. The Bookcase is where we highlight books related to our episode's theme. With the featured books, we always try and make the case. And the CASE is an acronym, as you can see there. When we think about books, it's just when you think about the CASE. It's about being intentional.

We've used that word a few times, being intentional about the books that we select to share with young children. "C" stands for connect. Can you think about a way that the book connects to the learning that you're supporting? For us, we're thinking about the way that the book content connects to the ELOF goals that we're supporting. "A" stands for advanced vocabulary, books are always great ways to find and support children learning advanced vocabulary words, especially when we think about an advanced word and pair it with something, a word that's familiar to the child or a definition that's familiar. "S" stands for supporting engagement during book reading, so that children are active participants in the book reading. "E" stands for extending the learning beyond the book. These might be fun activities or questions we can ask, things that we can plan that will help children make the connection to the content in the book. It's a way to repeat those advanced vocabulary words and build concept development.

Let's look at a few of the books on our bookcase. This time we are including, "Hey, Baby!" That one is super fun. Trying to give you a little like, whoo. "Hey, Baby! A Baby's Day in Doodles." This is so much fun. Some of these books – it's like hard to tell if it's more exciting for the baby or the adult. But this, you will not run out of things to look at. There are bright beautiful photographs of this beautiful child and tons of doodles. You could go on and on and look through and find all the doodles. You could have the child find different items in the picture. You will have so much fun with that book.

The next one is by Julie Flett, "We All Play." This is a lovely book, beautiful photos in it, very – a lovely nature-based book, and it includes the Cree names for each animal in the glossary. It's also a lovely book to support different language and culture.

The next one is "Daddy Calls Me Man" by Angela Johnson. Love this one. Looking at our time, so I'm going to go through these pretty quick. You can find more about these in the Viewer's Guide, let me say that, and I love this one. "The Life of Basquiat." This is a bilingual picture book biography about Basquiat, the artist. I love this one. I love this artist and I love this book, being bilingual about – I love all these, thinking of these infants and toddlers being introduced to this brilliant artist.

The one that we're going to make the CASE with is a book called "What If..." – there we go. This is this lovely book called "What If...". Trying to give you a good picture – written by Samantha Berger and illustrated by Mike Curato. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing that right, but Mike, if you're watching, make sure you tell me if I pronounced that right or no. I love this book. It is a love. First of all, I love the character's beautiful purple hair. I'll read a couple pages so you can get the singsong bit of it. "With a pencil and paper, I write and draw art to create many stories that come from my heart. But what if that pencil one day disappeared? I'd fold up the paper 'til stories appeared. And what if that paper was no longer there? I'd chisel the table and then carve the chair."

Anyways, it goes on and on. Let me quickly make the CASE for you. Connection. In this story, the main character finds a way to create her story no matter what materials are available. The author reminds us that even when there is nothing, we always have our imagination, we can always use our creativity. Advanced vocabulary, plenty. I love some of the words in here. Words like disappeared, chisel, sketch, ignite, sculpt, and you can imagine as you read those words, you can ask children if they know what the words mean, you can encourage them to share definitions. Always remember to pair it with a child-friendly definition, something they already know. That's how we build those vocabulary skills.

You could support advance – support active engagement, clearly by asking open-ended questions, encouraging children to share their ideas of what they would create if they were building in the sand or playing with light and shadows, then extending the learning. “What If...” provides so many great options for you to get creativity going in your classroom. Pick a page and set up a small table with materials from that page and watch the children create. That's all you have to do, stand back and watch. For example, you could put out different types and of pieces of paper for the children to explore and create with. Dried leaves and flowers to use with play dough, that's pretty fun to do. You can put different items in front of the window or on that light table that we're probably all going to make now. DIY light table so that children can play in the shadows, there are so many possibilities. Get inspired by the pages. Let your imagination go. Let me also say that you see the photo there of the artist and illustrator. That's who you see in that picture.

Alright, Maria.

Maria: Yes. It's all about you, let's turn our attention to you. We do our best caregiving and teaching when we feel well ourselves. Engaging in self-care practices can help educators build greater social-emotional capacity to deal with some difficult times.

Here is one quick strategy that you can use to get back into that calm, Zen space. Stress and feeling out of control can have a huge impact on your creative capacity and those around you. I don't know if you've noticed. I've noticed that sometimes.

One tip is to try and focus on the areas of the situation or aspects of a situation, events, thoughts, or feelings that you do have control over. These areas could include, for example, your ability to prioritize work requirements and personal obligations, or your reactions to events and other people, your thoughts, your behaviors. Focusing on areas in your control can help you feel empowered and provide a sense of relief.

Maybe one of the toddlers you're caring for needs extra snuggles one day and wants to be held more than normal. This can feel a little overwhelming, because you have so many other children to attend to. But take a moment and reframe your thoughts. Focus on what might be happening for the toddler. Maybe they're up all night. Maybe they aren't feeling well or going through some different situation at home or transition.

Think about your feelings and how you can reframe your reaction to the behavior from stress or frustration to empathy and compassion for this toddler. Much of working with children is not in our control, and it can be helpful to take a deep breath like in the picture and pause and think about what you are in control of and how to reframe those aspects. In your Viewer's Guide for

some – you can check out your Viewer's Guide for some of these resources. There's also a few other tips on how to handle stress. Super important.

Gail: So important.

I can't believe it. Just like that, we are out of time. We want to tell you that if you missed a Teacher Time webinar, if you're curious about the inclusion webinar series, we have got you covered. Go to PUSHPLAY DTL On Demand, where you can play recently viewed – our recently aired webinars at your convenience. We've made it easy to find exactly what you're looking for. The more views you have, the more customized experience you get. Just like any streaming service, we get to know what you're interested in and start suggesting more things along that line or that genre.

Make sure to bookmark that site, save it, but you can also find it on MyPeers, which is where you'll find the questions you've been asking that we haven't had time to get to. We will find you on MyPeers. You will find us talking about those questions on MyPeers.

One more thing – we're including certificates of completion, even when you watch on PUSHPLAY. Click on the link after the webinar and check it out, we've also included the link in the evaluation.

This is it for our season. It's been so fun, Maria, to be a co-host with you. Thanks to our producer Ryan, thanks to all of our support in the Q&A. Thanks to all of you for joining us. For those of you who have joined us every time, I want to hear about it, put it in the Q&A. If you've watched every Teacher Time with us, we want to celebrate you and know who you are.

Thanks for joining us. We're going to see you next season. One quick last thing, we want you to join us next season. We want to get a little bit of feedback. We have a little poll, just let us know. You can either put it in the Q&A or you can respond to the poll and let us know, what would you like to hear more about in Teacher Time next season? Would you like it to be social and emotional development, interactions, engaging environments, or would you like to focus on positive behavior supports?

Again, put this answer into the Q&A. Would you like us next season to focus on social emotional development, interactions, engaging environments, positive behavioral support? Give you some time. Put those in the Q&A, because we are going to use that to plan our next season. And with that, we want to say thank you and goodbye.

Maria: Gracias. [Speaking Spanish] Adios.