

Creative and Playful Learning in Family Child Care

Saameh Solaimani: Hi, everyone. Thanks so much for joining us for today's Family Child Care Connections episode on Creative and Playful Learning and Family Child Care. I'm Saameh Solaimani.

Virginia Tse: And I'm Virginia Tse, and we are both from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning. And in today's webinar, we will be exploring creativity through the creative arts and expression through everyday playful experiences. We'll talk about why they're important and how creativity promotes school readiness across all of the ELOF domains, and we'll also discuss practical strategies for nurturing children's curiosity, their interest, and their creativity to extend their learning.

Saameh: I'd like to call your attention to the Viewer's Guide, and you can find that in the resource widget. It's full of resources and note-taking spaces, and you can download the guide, and I actually have it printed out here. You can use it throughout our time together for taking notes, for reflecting, for planning how to use what we explore together during this Family Child Care Connections webinar in your family child care settings. So it's a really helpful resource and tool.

During our time together today, we're going to be building a definition of what creative arts includes. Together, we're going to be exploring why creative arts are important for all areas of learning and development. We're going to be gaining practical strategies to incorporate creative arts through play in family child care learning environments and looking at ways to ensure that all families in our communities feel welcome, seen, valued, and are recognized as partners in their children's learning and development. And before we get started, we want to invite you to take a moment to grab a piece of paper or a notepad and a pen, or any writing tool to have handy throughout the webinar. We'll give you a second to do that if you have something near.

Virginia: I know you have something already, right, Saameh?

Saameh: I do. I actually happened to have some art supplies on my desk.

Virginia: Wonderful. We would love to start off with something that includes you, something that lets you and us play together. Before we start, again, make sure you have a pen and a paper. And once again, you can find this activity in your Viewer's Guide. If you have it printed out, it's on the first page.

What we would like to invite you to do is continue this squiggly line that you see on the screen. You can kind of just copy the squiggly line onto your piece of paper. We're going to take about a minute for this. When the minute is up, we'll share our experiences in the chat. We will be drawing this alongside you. I'm going to set my timer for about a minute, and I'll give you about a 10-second warning. And I'm actually going to do it right on the screen. If you don't feel like

drawing, you could just watch what I'll be creating. We'll start right now ... a little bit tricky to draw with the mouse.

All right, so that – we have about 10 seconds left, and I know this is not enough time.

Saameh: I'm loving your drawing, Virginia.

Virginia: Oh, thank you.

Saameh: It's just so fun.

Virginia: I think in my head it was supposed to be a mushroom, but now that I look at it, it looks more like a tree, maybe an apple tree, I don't know.

Saameh: Yeah.

Virginia: You can see we have there – go ahead, Saameh.

Saameh: Are we showing our drawings? Oh, no, I got too excited and I was showing my drawing.

Virginia: Oh, no, you can definitely share. Somebody's asking if there's sound. And there was no sound when we were drawing. So if you're not hearing me now, make sure you maybe refresh your screen or make sure your sound is turned on. But, Saameh, do you want to share your drawing? And then for our audience, feel free to put in the chat what you created.

Saameh: Yeah, we'd love to hear about your experience with this activity. I automatically went to my go-tos, which are flowers. I kind of thought about it as a hill and put some flowers in kind of a garden, which is one of my favorite things.

Virginia: Nice. I love that. Let's see what our – some of our audience says they drew a beach. Samantha says she drew a beach. Ooh, I like that. That's very creative. My mind did not go there. Let's see, any other ideas? "A person." Carmen says she drew a person ... "An animal." Ooh, "a wave with a sailboat."

Saameh: Wow, that sounds nice. It's so hot here today, so that really makes me want to be there.

Virginia: Yeah. "A bat." Very creative minds. I love it. "Ice cream cone!" Nice.

Saameh: That's funny. "A cheesy baked potato." These are making me hungry now.

Virginia: I know. "The sky." Keep them coming. Keep them coming. And while you keep entering what you created, let's take a quick peek at what some others who have done this activity drew.

And keep in mind, though, that other people had a little bit more than a minute. So the images you see are a little more fleshed out. We see a snail. Kind of reminds me, somebody said a dinosaur. It could turn into a dinosaur. An elephant with the water. Love that. That definitely had

some more time. A cup of coffee. I've definitely had a couple of those today. A burger, I love this one. Lots of detail and so creative to think of how to use that squiggle line. This one is beautiful, one of my favorites. They turned it into a ribbon in this woman's hair. Thank you so much for engaging with us and keep entering your lovely creations. Ice cream dripping cloud, I love it.

We wanted to just take a moment of creativity for you to engage in creativity, but we also wanted to recognize that you as family child care providers are creative in so many ways every single day. A bit of a reflection question is, what are some of the ways that you engage in creativity as family child care providers?

Our community today on this webinar consists of so many experienced family child care providers who have so much wisdom to share. I would love for you – we would love for you to put in the chat, "How do you see yourself as a family child care provider being creative?"

Saameh, while we're waiting for those chat comments to come in, what do you think about as you reflect on this question?

Saameh: Family child care providers are finding creative ways – you're finding creative ways to show your home every day while running a business. So, that's happening. You're creative when you're planning for mixed age groups. There's so many ways. Do you have some ideas, Virginia?

Virginia: Yeah, I think about how family child care providers are creative when they're planning their day that don't necessarily fit a typical 9-to-5 or 8-to-5 work schedule. And, also, providers are being creative when they are planning how to do a small group activity while also thinking about making lunch and transitioning all the children to nap time, all kind of at the same time, and sometimes it's only just you, just one person. So, you are exhibiting creativity throughout your day in everything you do. Let's take a – let's see what some of our audience is saying. "Playing." ... Let's see. Yeah, I'd love to hear – oh, go ahead. Sorry.

Saameh: Just doing – it sounds like doing plays, like maybe theater, theatrical productions. "Planning on-the-fly activities." Yep.

Virginia: Definitely. And then Karen is saying "When you can include parents in your activities." Yes, definitely being creative to incorporate so many different ideas.

Saameh: I'm seeing some – this "using scrap paper and recycled materials like bottle caps," which actually is so interesting because I was just telling the team here, our amazing, by the way, Q&A team and producer Ryan and our Q&A team Vanessa and Becky, thank you so much. We are all here as a team for this webinar. And I was telling them about these bottle caps that these earrings are made out of, so speaking of recycled materials.

Virginia: Definitely.

Saameh: With our lesson plan – we can be creative with our lesson planning, so as to work with different age groups, right? So many ways you're being creative every single day already, already, right? "Different ways to paint."

Virginia: And then someone also said "the way in dramatic play and dressing up in the housekeeping area," "painting," "reading books," absolutely. Well, thank you so much for sharing. We really just wanted to acknowledge how you as family child care providers are being creative every single day.

Today we really want to explore with you how you can jump into creativity and creative arts with the children in your care to express – to experience and experience joy alongside them. Oops. Thank you. Keep them coming. Again ... oops, sorry. All right. To help us think about creativity and creative arts experiences, we have these words from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which says that creativity "encourage[s] problem solving. It invoke[s] a sense of curiosity and initiative, it foster[s] innovative ideas. and include[s] open-ended materials that challenge children's thinking."

I just love that way of thinking about creativity. And when children are engaged in creative experiences, they are exercising or cultivating their skills in a variety of different ways. And some of the skills or outcomes that come from creativity can include things like problem solving.

An example of this in your family child care might be an infant who's trying to creatively stack nesting cups. Or when a preschool-age child is trying to figure out how to mix colors to get the one they want. Children are also practicing communication skills. For example, a young toddler might be practicing communicating what they want to play with in the dramatic play area, or preschoolers are deciding what role everyone should have.

Children are also practicing brainstorming. For example, a mixed-age group of children might be brainstorming how they can make a poster to welcome a child's new sibling. Children are also engaged in flexibility and innovation in their creativity. For example, maybe an infant and toddler might be discovering how musical instruments can make different noises when you hit it against something else. Or an example for older children might be figuring out how to build a structure so that it's balanced after trying out multiple ways.

And then, finally, children can be practicing their critical thinking skills. For example, analyzing what worked, what didn't work, and then engaging in reflection and evaluation on what they might be able to do differently next time. These are all skills that we want to nurture in young children for their lifelong development.

We'd love to hear from you. What are some of the ways that you encourage children to engage in creative experiences that touch on these? How do you creatively – how do you encourage children to problem solve, to innovate, to practice brainstorming? Please share those in the chat, because we know that the expertise lies with everyone here.

Saameh: Absolutely. We will see what's coming in through the chat. I love all those examples, Virginia. It's really reminding me of all of the ways that creativity shows up in early childhood settings.

Virginia: Absolutely. Samantha – oh, go ahead.

Saameh: No, I was just going to say, and all of the things that it cultivates. It's kind of really amazing to hear all of these things, even though – we know, but now that you're really specifically naming it, it's like, "Oh, yeah, it actually does do that."

Virginia: Yeah, absolutely. And I'm noticing in the chat, Samantha says, "Lead by example, question, and showing them." Grace says, "Asking open-ended questions or wonder with children." I love that. Wondering with children, and sometimes reminding myself, too, that, I, as an adult, I don't have all the answers and it's OK not to have all the answers. We can figure it out together. We can wonder together. I love that. Thank you for sharing. Anything else you're seeing, Saameh, that really jumped out at you?

Saameh: Well, I just saw "open-ended questions," which I love that so much. Really inviting the extension of ideas and creativity and learning through questions other than yes-or-no questions, right? Questions where people can – it's kind of mind-opening ... "Songs."

"Ask children about what they created," which I think also goes hand-in-hand with open-ended questions. "Tell me more about what you're working on." And I love that, instead of assuming what a child created, because sometimes it might look like something that we think it might be a certain thing, but asking and allowing for that space.

Virginia: Absolutely. And I love – I'm just going to read one more. Farrah, I hope I'm saying your name right, but they said, "When I let my students read the books to the students by imagining what's going on in the story and communicating that with their peers." I love that, just really encouraging their imagination and their sense of discovery in books.

Saameh: Beautiful. Thank you.

Virginia: Yes, absolutely. One of the ways that we as adults and children express creativity is through the creative arts. And often when we think of the creative arts, we're usually thinking or we often think about visual arts, such as drawing, kind of what we did in the beginning.

But creative arts are so much more than just drawing. It is – it can include building, it includes movement, it includes singing, dancing, sculpting, photography, cooking, storytelling, and so much more. We were going to explore some of that today with you all.

Saameh: Speaking of how creativity nurtures so many different areas of development, today we're going to explore how creativity and the creative arts fits into the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, also known as the ELOF, which describes the skills, behaviors, and knowledge that programs must foster in all children. While you may notice the ELOF does not have a domain or subdomain for the creative arts themselves, creativity and the arts are still an integral part of children's learning and they are found within subdomain learning goals. For example, we'll name off a few examples. I'm sure you can think of more.

The Approaches to Learning domain includes creativity, so this includes things like innovative use of materials, music, pretend play, like some of you were mentioning earlier, with singing songs. The Language and Literacy domain includes – here we go, singing songs to practice communication and early literacy skills. There's so much overlap between these, right? The Cognition domain includes patterns and music again. The gross and fine motor domain includes – and it includes so much more than these. We're just naming a few, right? Dance, drawing, painting, sculpture, as Virginia was just speaking about a second ago, building, right?

In that Social and Emotional domain, it includes things like building relationships with peers and caring adults, which can happen through creative projects ... like finger painting together on a large piece of paper or maybe working together to build a city in the block area. And so we know that when children are engaging in creative arts experiences, they're exploring and growing across all domains, across all of these areas.

This framework specifically is grounded – and why it's so important, it's grounded in a comprehensive body of research about what infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children are learning, doing, and exploring at different stages throughout their development. A lot of research went into the development of this framework. And it describes how children progress across key areas of learning and development, and it specifies learning outcomes in these areas. And what this information can do is help family child care providers better understand what they can be doing to provide effective learning experiences that support important early learning outcomes.

You can use the ELOF to support your work through day-to-day interactions and activities, to guide planning, so that intentional curriculum development, to understand more about child development, and to communicate with families. And we're going to go into that a little bit later on and have some specific examples. You can learn more about the ELOF in your Viewer's Guide. There's a lot of information about the ELOF in there.

We've reflected on, discussed, and shared about the "what" the creative arts are. Now let's turn our focus to the "why." Why is providing creative arts experiences for young children in family child care settings so important?

We know that children learn by doing, whether that's playing indoors or outdoors, expressing creativity through art or music, or investigating a problem. Children's hands-on learning experiences set the stage for new discoveries. And the creative arts helps children use their imagination to learn about the world around them. And activities, like we've already mentioned these many times so far, that involve art, dramatic play, dance, and music, help children learn across every developmental domain. I think we've said it in many different ways.

So now that we've done that, we'd love to hear from you. As we describe the three photos here on the slide – so we're going to describe them one by one in the next three slides – we'd love to invite you to think about the following questions. There are two questions. One is, what creative art experiences do you see happening in each scene? So, what creative art experiences do you see happening? And then the second question is, what is the child exploring and learning?

Those are the questions we will invite you to answer as we see these photos one by one, these scenarios.

Virginia: All right. In this first photo, we'd like you to think about what this infant might be exploring or learning. And while you're thinking and putting your answers in the chat, I can describe the photo a little bit if it's hard to see. In this image, we see an infant who's sitting on the floor, and the infant is holding a shaker instrument with various other musical instruments within reach and the provider has kind of put them near her. So what do you think this infant might be exploring or learning with this experience? "Music," "textures," "sound," "sensory."

Saameh: Texture – that's so interesting. I love that.

Virginia: Yeah. And we know for infants, that's a big part of how they're learning.

Saameh: "It's giving her permission to use her imagination and she's learning about different colors and shapes." Yes, Farrah, definitely. Permission. I love the word permission there.

Virginia: Yeah, I do, too.

Saameh: "It's all happy." Yeah.

Virginia: "Experimenting with sounds." Yeah, I know each of those instruments are going to make different sounds, different pitches, different tones. Definitely.

Saameh: I like – Carmen, I see you said, "Fine motor." Yeah, you see the way that the child is really holding that small instrument with her fingers.

Virginia: Susan says, "Effects of different instruments," so kind of cause and effect. Definitely. "Playing instruments that" – Yes, "textures, effects of sounds when it's moving." Absolutely. Thank you, Rocio. "Testing her curiosity," Deborah says. Oh, yeah, now they're coming in hot.

Saameh: Yeah, so many amazing, a lot of these things, it's so amazing. We've been looking at these slides and then, seeing all of these different ideas, Virginia, I see how this collective wisdom, things that we didn't even think about as we were creating this.

Virginia: Yeah, definitely. I see "different weights of instruments," and then "movement and speed." Oh, I love it. Such expertise and experience in this room. Thank you so much for sharing.

While you continue to put your ideas of what this infant might be exploring or learning, Saameh and I, we called out a couple of ones. And again, this is not a full list, but just some ideas related to the ELOF.

Within the approaches to learning domain, one of the goals or one of the outcomes that this infant might be working towards or learning is related to the Infant-Toddler Goal Number 7, which is about child showing "interest in and curiosity about objects, materials, and events."

Another one, which a lot of you already mentioned, too, is that motor ... within the Perceptual Motor and Physical Development domain of the ELOF, Infant-Toddler Goal Number 7, which is about the child using "hands for exploration, play, and daily routines. I think this list – we could have fleshed this out with the items that everyone on our webinar today listed. It's so amazing. But thank you so much for sharing. And I think now we're going to take a look at the next picture.

Saameh: Yeah. Now we have an example of a toddler engaging in a creative arts experience. So what might this toddler be exploring and learning? So the same questions, but now for this scenario.

We're going to – we see that there's a toddler here holding a paintbrush in each hand, using yellow and blue paint, and stumbling upon the color green. So, what do you see? Please share in the chat what this toddler might be exploring. I'm seeing so many great things from the last one. We're switching it up here. OK, "imagination," "mixing colors," again, "fine motor skills," "holding the tip of the paintbrush," "hand-eye coordination."

Virginia: "The touch and feel of paintbrushes and the paint itself," that texture.

Saameh: "Experimenting." Yes. So many great ideas. So those can – so as those come in, we are going to make some connections with the ELOF again. We see that Approaches to Learning domain under the Infant and Toddler Goal Number 8, "child uses creativity to increase understanding and learning."

And we see in the Cognition domain under Infant and Toddler Goal Number 1, "child actively explores people and objects to understand self, others, and objects." And let's see. "Free art." "Art that's not scripted." "The awe of making different colors." Yes.

Virginia: I love that. The awe. That is so – such a wonderful word to capture what might be going on in this toddler's mind. Definitely.

Saameh: As those come in, we are going to move on to one more example.

Virginia: Yes, thank you so much for engaging and keep populating that chat. The last image we have here, we'd like to think about if you had these two young children in your family child care program, what goals might you be supporting through setting up this opportunity?

In this photo, we see two young children, maybe older toddlers, young preschoolers, in the dramatic play or the family living area. There is a – looks like a play kitchen. And they're engaged in ... something. What might you be supporting when you – in this instance, if you were to provide an opportunity like this, or just in this photo? Karen says, "Being creative, caring." Absolutely, supporting that peer relationship. "Cooperative play," Heidi says. "Collaboration," yes. "Real-life experience with role-playing," "playing together." "Language development," "socialization," "pretend play," "supporting their idea of living." Oh, my goodness, just a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

All the things you all are saying are actually very similar to the ones that Saameh and I kind of pointed out. We also said within the Social and Emotional Development domain of the Early Learning Outcomes Framework, there's a goal for preschoolers within the social-emotional domain about children engaging in "cooperative play" with children, which we saw multiple times in the chat, and also the domain of Language and Literacy.

Goal 6, which is about child understanding and using a "wide variety of words for a variety of purposes." That imagination and imaginative play, dramatic play, is such a wonderful way for children to practice and use new words, right? Like, if you're cooking, there's sous chef, there's julienne, there's dice, and, you know, that's just related to cooking. I don't know if you could tell, I kind of like watching cooking shows. I know the words. I don't know how much I could actually do it, but, yeah. Just somebody again said, Sangeeta says, "Vocabulary building and pretending preparation of meals." Yes, absolutely.

Saameh: Yeah, "supporting them working together to accomplish a goal."

Virginia: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much, everyone, for engaging and sharing your expertise.

Saameh: Thank you so much. So many great ideas. This is very inspiring. I love hearing, like Virginia was saying, all of your wisdom and experiences. And that's what we're here to do. We're here to connect and share ideas and experiences. It's wonderful. We just saw three examples of children engaging in different types of creative arts.

When children are engaging in creative arts experiences, they're doing it through play. The word "play," we're going to really focus on, and the concept of play. All of these things are included in play, everything we've spoken about up until now. And we know from research that play is how children learn about their world. And play provides children with many opportunities to engage in creative and artistic experiences, providing opportunities to learn about things like relationship building, language, math, science, problem solving, and their bodies. Let's look more closely at a few areas of development that play contributes to.

Experiences in the creative arts through play is important to support children in building relationships with caregivers through back-and-forth interactions that support brain development and building a relationship with a child. Close, responsive, nurturing relationships we know support children in exploration of their environment and development across developmental domains through play, those domains that we just reviewed.

And with peers, play provides many opportunities for children to build meaningful relationships, collaborate, problem solve, and learn with peers. And I'm just thinking about the last photo we saw with the children in the kitchen, in the dramatic play area. And for social skills, play allows for children to practice what they see the adults around them do and practice new skills like language communication, waiting, or taking turns. So that self-regulation piece. And that goes into the executive functioning skills, and this includes things like impulse control, problem

solving, working memory, and flexible thinking. All very important skills for life success, really, as we know. And this is just to name a few things.

You can see your Viewer's Guide to read more about some of this fascinating research that connects directly to our everyday classroom experiences, our everyday family child care program experiences, and how play is vital for healthy development.

Let's see. The Lego Foundation says that learning through play happens when – what we have here is experienced as joyful; helps children and adults find meaning in what they are doing and learning; involves active, engaged thinking as well as experimentation, which one of you mentioned earlier; and social interaction. And so while The Lego Foundation was focused on play when they were outlining these specific characteristics, we just saw examples of all these through the creative arts in family child care settings and why the creative arts are so important.

Virginia: Absolutely. Now that we've discussed the importance of the creative arts and play for the healthy development of children across domains, we have the pleasure of watching an example of a playful and joyful creative arts experience at Saba's Family Child Care Program. And while you're watching the video, we'd love to invite you to share in the chat, what are you noticing in terms of both areas of children's development? What are children developing? What skills? And also, how are you seeing the children in this video clip being joyful? So we'll take a moment to watch that clip, and then feel free to enter your responses in chat.

[Video begins]

Teacher: [speaking Somali]

Teacher: Ok.

Teacher: [speaking Somali]

Teacher: Excuse me.

Teacher: [speaking Somali]

Teacher: OK. OK, can you make letter C? You can cut the Play-Doh and try to make it. Which letter do you want?

Child 1: Letter C.

Teacher: You want to make it?

Child 1: How do we make this? How do we make this?

Teacher: [Speaking Somali]

Child 1: We make it!

Teacher: C. We did that.

Child 2: I want to do it. I want to do it.

Teacher: Yeah, try!

[Video ends]

[Video begins]

Teacher: [Speaking Somali]

Teacher: You have 47 squares, right? Oh, one more?

Teacher: [Speaking Somali]

Teacher: 48. So 48. Yes.

Teacher: [Speaking Somali]

Teacher: It's almost halfway, 50.

[Video ends]

Virginia: All right. Well, thank you. That was such a wonderful clip. So, again, if you hadn't had an opportunity to put in the chat, what are some examples that you see children experiencing joy and how do you know? And Susan said, "They are yelling in excitement, and they're also learning about letters." "They're learning a different language, perhaps." "They're working on their fine motor skills and their communication skills."

Saameh: Yes, they're actually counting in Somali there, Virginia.

Virginia: I love it. Yes. And Monica says –

Saameh: So I was just going to say, there are a lot of children in that specific family child care program who are dual language learners. And so through that creative art experience, they're preserving and practicing their home language.

Virginia: Absolutely. Yes. And Monica says, "They're fully engaged, they're interactive, they're smiling." "You heard one of the children say, 'Wow!'" "They're also building math and literacy skills," all in that activity. Thank you so much.

We'd love also for you to reflect. We saw a wonderful way of using that open-ended material, especially with that Play-Doh. And we can see that the provider is following children's natural interests, especially when the girl at the end decides that she wants to see how many little dots or little squares she can fit onto that little piece of Play-Doh. Such a wonderful example.

So we'd love for you to put in the chat, "What are examples of ways that you provide open-ended play and learning experiences for children in your family child care program?" Because again, we know we have so much knowledge and expertise. So we'll take a moment and see what people are adding in the chat.

Saameh: Yeah, I'm still seeing some things coming through from the last – from the video. "Equal opportunities for all children." "Their body language and their interaction with each other and their caregiver." Yes, very free and comfortable and creative.

Virginia: Definitely. Yeah, "lots of Play-Doh," "following children's leads," "communicating positively." "Water table." Yes, that's a wonderful open-ended opportunity for children to play and learn. "Different costumes," absolutely. Yes, "blocks." One of the things I think about with open-ended materials sometimes, and I know for me it's true, is that sometimes we, as adults – me included – sometimes can get in the way of children's opportunities for their use of their creative abilities.

For example, sometimes we might have a preconceived idea of what children should be making with the Play-Doh or how they should be playing in the dramatic play area or how they should use the blocks or where certain materials can be used. I just really encourage you to think about if and how we're allowing children to truly express their ideas with the open-ended materials. I see some more examples, "shaving cream," "sand table," "magnetic blocks," absolutely. Anything else, Saameh, for you that you want to call out?

Saameh: I like "pencil, markers, pens," something as simple as that can be an open-ended experience, depending on – maybe it's just a blank piece of paper. And so that in itself is an open-ended experience, right?

Virginia: Yeah. Absolutely.

Saameh: "Accessible." "Flexible." "Sensory boxes."

Virginia: Yeah, absolutely. And Monica says, "Material being accessible," right? That's a big – that's very important to have materials, but they also need to be accessible.

Saameh: I see, yes, and "things through cardboard," so recycled materials, which children can find so many – and I've seen them find so many fascinating things to do with, right? And I know we're going to talk a little bit about that in the next few slides.

Virginia: Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you so much, everyone, for sharing your ideas. Next, we're going to talk about some strategies for nurturing learning through creative arts experiences. And these strategies can support us in remaining flexible and responsive, ensuring that creative arts experiences that children are engaging in are truly creative and that we're being responsive to them.

The three strategies we'd like to talk more about are planning the environment and the materials, following children's interests, and observing and adjusting.

Planning your environment involves careful consideration about the materials to ensure safety, especially for young infants and toddlers if you have a mixed age group, or infants and toddlers, in general. And this can include checking on any choking hazards and making sure that materials are safe and easy to clean.

It also means considering how children's use of materials may differ based on their age and their ability. The way an infant interacts with the egg shaker or scarf may look very different than the way a 4-year-old might use that same material. And then some materials you can bring out just for your older children, such as the scissors or maybe small things like buttons. And then other materials can be part of the environment for all children to use and explore.

And again, those open-ended materials are items that really encourage their creativity, investigation, problem solving, and creating intentional environment does not have to be complicated. And sometimes adding items from your home, such as empty tissue boxes or yogurt containers, can really create those additional open-ended opportunities.

Let's take a look at some of the photos that we have here. We see in the first photo on the upper left corner, we see some egg cartons that have been added to the block space. And if you have infants, you can help the infants maybe lay on their belly and have these in front of them to explore how the texture of the cardboard is maybe different from the carpet, or maybe one of the smooth blocks. And these recycled materials, as many of you have noted in the chat already, really invite children to use their imagination, create, collaborate, problem solve, and not to mention the use of recycled materials is also very cost-effective.

And then, in the photo on the bottom left, we see an example of a cozy corner in a family child care where the provider thoughtfully included the addition of different textures on the floor and on the wall so that children can rest and use their sense of touch.

And for younger children, the family child care provider might include scarves or bandanas to play peek-a-boo, to feel, to snuggle, or to maybe dangle above for an infant to track and bat at or maybe even grab. And then older children can use the same scarves or bandanas in a music-and-movement experience or pretend play. I know I've seen lots of scarves used as capes and long hair and other things. Yeah. Saameh, do you want to talk about the next pictures?

Saameh: Yeah, in the photo in the upper right here, we're seeing colorful plastic cups and eggs on this light table. And I love the way it's set up with a mirror here. This is – for infants, you can bring in clean cloth napkins to play peek-a-boo with or to feel or to dangle above so the infant can track that and grab. And consider bringing in kitchen utensils, like large measuring spoons, measuring cups, and silicone muffin liners, those little crinkly muffin liners, or small metal – the ramekin cups.

And last but not least, we can see in the photo on the lower right here, we see a basket full of blocks. And we know that family child care programs may have limited space. This idea of blocks in a basket might be an alternative option if you still want a block area but don't have a large open space to dedicate to blocks. It's important to remember that there are many ways to

include materials that support and nurture the creative arts. Sometimes that in itself requires some creativity and it's kind of a callback to in the beginning of the webinar when we asked what are ways that you're being creative as family child care providers, and we know that there are many.

While we mention a few more ideas, we'd love to hear in the chat about ways that you include materials for creative arts experiences in your learning environment. If you can please add that in the chat. And while they're coming in, we'll just maybe mention a few other ideas here. For infants, maybe using empty food containers like powdered drinks, Parmesan cheese, or water bottles to roll around as a shaker and noise maker or fill up with smaller objects and dump out.

For toddlers, maybe bring in clean, empty food containers like powdered milk. Again, similar things for infants, the cheese containers or large spice containers. And water bottles, they're great to roll, again, and to fill and dump out for infants and toddlers.

For preschool-age children, we can use collections of household and natural objects like buttons, keys, shells, stones, leaves, and pine cones to explore, count, and sort in a variety of ways. And you can use egg cartons with children to count, show one-on-one correspondence, and sort sets of small objects. And this is reminding me of the math domain, right? An intentional setup for exploration and experiences with open-ended materials.

So many amazing examples and ideas. And then let's see what the – your ideas are coming in. "We go for a nature walk. We use the leaves and pinecones for science and art, coffee cans for drums." I love that. Let's see.

Virginia: Yeah, and Christine has a great point about for infants and toddlers, sometimes maybe limiting the items since they're still in that exploratory phase and not to overwhelm. Maybe limit a few and then rotate them out or introduce them slowly. That's a great point. Thank you, Christine.

Saameh: "We do tummy time for infants." "Different textured blankets." Love that. "Measuring spoons at the water table," "cardboard boxes," again, those recycled materials. "Rock collections." "Nature." "Nature items." Nature and children go hand-in-hand, right?

Virginia: Absolutely.

Saameh: OK. Please keep adding your comments, and as you do that, we're going to move on. And now that we've discussed the intentional environment and are hearing all of your ideas and experiences with open-ended and creativity-provoking materials, let's discuss the next steps.

And here are the next couple steps. We know that children are constantly showing us what and how they know, as we've mentioned several times today, and where they are curious and where they want to explore more. Once we set up that intentional learning environment, it's important to take a step back to look and listen. We can understand more about where a child is, their

progress, and what they're curious about, and what they might need extra support with to continue engaging and participating.

Here we see an example in this picture on the left. The children are playing and dancing with ribbons. Movement and dancing, as a creative arts experience, is a wonderful opportunity to follow children's lead. We can ask ourselves, "How are they moving in their space?" And where might the family child care provider go next to nurture the children's natural curiosity with this activity? So that might be something to think about. And observing and understanding how children are engaging with their environment.

Peers and materials can support us in knowing where to go next with what adjustments we want to make to support the extension of learning, discovery, and play within the creative arts experiences that children engage in. Here in this example we see on the right of a family child care provider with a notepad in her hands as a tool to help her as she observes and takes notes during the children's water table experiences. And I know we talked about the water table earlier on. Somebody had that idea.

You can check out your Viewer's Guide under Online Resources for tools to support this step. And here, speaking of observe and adjust, we're going to revisit these environment pictures and discuss a couple examples of how to observe and adjust – how this step might look in a family child care setting.

Let's, for the purpose of time, we're going to talk about one of them. Here on the right, you've noticed in the cozy area that the older children are bringing books to read in the space. You add a basket of books. You notice that the toddlers are also enjoying the space, often sitting next to the preschoolers who are reading. You expand the space with more pillows to encourage more children to use the space comfortably. It's a great idea to adjust after you've observed how the children are interacting with the space.

Just quickly, I want to touch upon observation is also a powerful tool when it comes to documenting children's individual and group learning throughout a span of time. So through observing and documenting children's learning, through collecting notes about what they're working on, what they're saying, their interactions, work samples, photos, we can better understand how children are developing over time. And the creative arts experiences are a wonderful way and place to document the children's learning.

Here, we see that some children are working with dot paint. On the left, we have a photo, so that's a piece of evidence of how the children are working with this and what we might do and where we might go next with our curriculum. And on the left, we have a teacher wrote the child's words about their drawing on their paper. And you see that the child has written on their artwork and the child has written her own name. Let's see. Documentation is also a very effective way to engage and include families. And we're going to talk a little bit about that.

Virginia: Absolutely. And before we do, we're going to take an opportunity to watch a video of a family child care provider facilitating an art experience with a group of children. So we'd love

you to think about what you notice and maybe what are some ways that this family child care provider might make adjustments based on how the children were interacting with the open-ended materials. Let's take a look, and then enter your thoughts on how we might be able to adjust this experience.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Do you want to try a little more, Natalie? It looks like you used some of the blue and some of the red. I see two big piles of paint. Do you want to leave them there? Jalen, you need to use what you have on your paper. There's a lot right there.

Yeah, I see, Marty. Your hand has paint on it. Yeah, look at that. You're moving up and down and back and forth. You're all done, Maya? Do you want to give your smock to Caleb? Do you want to give your smock to Caleb so he can have a turn? You're done, too, Natalie? Let's put these away to dry. You guys can keep working. You don't have to be done yet. Maya and Natalie say they're done.

I'm going to put them up on our drying rack. And then, later, we can hang them up like we did with our other paintings. Can you take off your smock? OK, we have to untie it. You're done, too, Sophia?

[Video ends]

Virginia: All right. We already see some things in the chat. Susan, again, the question was, "What are some ways we can adjust this creative arts experience?" Susan says, "Maybe not to suggest a certain color." That's a great suggestion.

Some other things we maybe thought about were, we see that two of the children weren't really interacting with the paint. So perhaps maybe we could increase their participation by providing some tools to use with the paint. So maybe paint brushes, sponge, or maybe toys with wheels so that the children can kind of roll the paint across. Maybe they have a texture thing and don't really want to touch it.

And another way maybe we can increase engagement might be to intentionally set up some seating placements, so maybe sit those two young children next to a child who might more be willing to get their hand in the paint. And that way – one way to engage the children is by, with that modeling. Somebody says, "More smocks," yes. "Offering toys and modeling." Exactly. Absolutely. Keep those coming. Thank you for sharing. Love that.

Today we have talked about how children show us who they uniquely are through creative arts experiences and their engagement with them. And we can support creativity. When we support creativity, we really get to see a child's identity, which includes their cultural identity, linguistic identity, race, ability, and so much more. And different cultures value different forms of expression and different forms of creativity, which can be displayed through their traditions, their family traditions, celebration, and everyday life.

And some forms of creativity that are honored and valued by different cultures can include their dance, their music, oral storytelling, their food, dress, and so much more. These are just important to keep in mind as we think about all the different experiences that can be considered creative arts.

One more thing about families, welcoming families, is some ideas about how we can encourage and engage families. And pick-up and drop-off times are a wonderful built-in opportunity for interaction and connection with families, maybe having a designated place to share children's work and pictures. You can also welcome families by being curious ourselves and creating opportunities for families to share about their culture or their family traditions. And then, finally, inviting families to bring in pictures, music, clothing, or maybe other objects that they can use – that you can use in the dramatic play area.

Saameh: OK. Here are some examples of what it might look like to create a place to share children's work and invite families into the curriculum, like we started talking about earlier around documentation.

On the left, we see drawings and collages with children's descriptions of their collage work and their drawings. And the documentation provides a quick glance for parents to understand more about what the children are learning and exploring and making that important connection between your family child care program and the child's home.

On the right, we see a board that can be one way to communicate with and invite families into the curriculum with whatever is being explored at the moment. So here we're seeing that they're learning about the family child care program and community is learning about sea life. We can see children's creative expressions and they're looking at related vocabulary words like "fish," "scales," "gills." And it supports family members by providing information about where they might want to nurture that connection and extend the lessons and conversations at home.

This would also be a great place for family child care providers to include additional notes for families to make visible all the ways the children are learning and thinking back to the ELOF, all the domains that are being explored through this creative arts experience and so supporting families to really understand how much learning is happening through the creative arts.

And I see that, unfortunately, we are out of time. We had such amazing interaction. We're going to end with this quote here from Loris Malaguzzi, founder of Reggio Emilia approach, "Creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known." Yes, what a beautiful quote.

And thank you so much, everyone, for your participation and engagement. Join us for our next episode, "Exploring Social Studies in Family Child Care Settings," on August 16th. Friday, August 16th. Thanks, all. Such a pleasure.

Virginia: Thank you.

Saameh: Bye, everyone.