

Teacher Time: Supporting Creativity in Preschoolers

Gail Joseph: Hi, everyone. Welcome to Teacher Time. I'm Gail Joseph.

Dawn Williams: And I'm Dawn Williams. We are from the National Center on Early Child Development, Teaching, and Learning. We are so excited to have you here with us today for the fourth preschool episode of Teacher Time.

I want to call your attention to the Viewers' Guide. You will find it in the resource widget. If you were new to Teacher Time, the Viewers' Guide is just for you. You can download the guide and use it throughout our time together for taking notes, reflecting, and planning how to use the Teacher Time practices in your own settings. This month's Viewers' Guide is full to the brim with reflections, printable resources, and information. OK, that's all for logistics. Let's get started.

Gail: Let's go because we've got a lot to cover today. [Laughter] We're very excited to be focusing this season of Teacher Time on supporting young children, self-regulation, and learning. Supporting self-regulation and learning is also referred to as approaches to learning, which as you may know is one of the domains in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework or as we call it ELOF.

Dawn: For this season, we focused on emotional, behavioral, cognitive self-regulation skills, and fostering initiative and curiosity. Today, we are focusing on creativity.

Gail: Yes. Now, let's dive a little deeper and learn about the creativity ELOF goals for preschoolers. This subdomain is made up of two goals. See them there. Today, we're going to focus on the first goal, which is the child expresses creativity in thinking and communication. While we focus on creativity today, it's important to note that the development of skills in goal 1 and goal 2 are very related, as you might imagine. By supporting the development of creativity, children often also then show new ways of thinking, problem-solving, and social skills.

Dawn: Creativity is an important skill for children now and later in life. Experts, business leaders, and educators identify several skills and abilities that today's young children need now and in the future. We need children to be creative thinkers, flexible, and able to adjust to an increasingly complex world. We need children to be problem-solvers and able to generate innovative ideas. We live in a rapidly changing world where flexible and creative thinking are key to taking on new problems that arise in creating new solutions and strategies for communication and collaboration. All of which young children have had to engage in over the past two years over the pandemic. Then creativity is also critical in celebrating each child's unique way of being, doing, and thinking as a core piece of who each child is and how each child expresses who they are.

Then finally, creative expressions can help children cope and express their emotions. It's also important to remember that creative expression isn't limited to the art center or dramatic play. Everyone is creative. Creativity can happen everywhere.

Gail: Oh my gosh. If we haven't had to be creative in these past couple of years, I don't know what else we would have to do. That's like perfect because as we've been doing all season with Teacher Time, we first when we're thinking about these skills that we want young children to develop, we first think about turning to ourselves, giving some attention to what it is that we do to keep ourselves curious or to keep ourselves creative. Get your fingers ready to type into the Q&A because what we want to know is for you as an adult, how are you fostering your own creativity? How do you get into your creative zone?

Enter your responses in the Q&A, and we're going to be sending those out. When you enter them, we'll send them back out so that everybody can see what those responses are. I think about like when I want to get creative, I like to get outside of my current work, and I explore other topics. I love seeing art and like different creative representations of that. But even just different ways that people are thinking about things too. I love to watch TED Talks, and I like to pick like things that are like totally not something I might have ever thought about watching but it just helps me think kind of different, creatively about my own work. What about you, Dawn? Anything that you do that gets yourself creative or fosters your creativity?

Dawn: Yeah, I do a similar thing where I try to expand my current way of thinking, right, and try something new that I haven't been exposed to. I also find it helpful to really clear my head for a little bit and get out and – especially during the workday – just getting out and taking a break and taking a walk. It just clears my head a little bit so there's some space to be creative. Being in nature really does that. Being inspired and looking around all the beauty that's around us. Then often, like when I'm really looking for some artistic inspiration, I go to art museums and get very caught up in the what's happening, like what's in front of me, and really being exposed to even the art that's just in our local community. But going to the museums is really ... I love taking my children because then I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, look at this." You could do this. Do you want to practice? Do you want art lessons?" It just goes down this path of ways to get inspired. It really is about looking for inspiration.

Gail: That is so true. I remember taking my daughter. Just a quick story. I remember taking my daughter to New York City. Shout out to New York City. You got all these kind of creative spaces. I remember taking her to this art exhibit and she really was exploring with art and ... but really kind of maybe pretty traditional means of expression. When she went to this one art exhibit, it actually incorporated like live birds into the exhibit. I said, "What do you think?" She was like, "I didn't even know this was allowed." I'm just totally kind of shook up into being creative. Look at all these ideas that are coming in about how people stay creative, be in the creative zone, things they're doing. We've got some very creative people out in our Teacher Time of your shift there. I'm excited that we're getting to spend time with them.

All right. Now that we've talked about for us as adults and being creative and because we know that creative adults can support creative children, let's move on to thinking about young children.

Dawn: Yeah, we thought about how we support our own creativity and why it's important. Let's think about what creativity looks like in preschoolers. Creativity skills like imitation, communication, problem-solving, innovation, and collaboration will develop throughout early childhood. When children have support, the developmental progression could look like what is on the slide. By the way, this information is directly from the ELOF. A link to the ELOF and the ELOF 2 Go, a mobile version of the ELOF, are in your Viewers' Guide so you can always have this developmental progression at your fingertips.

Let's look at three-year-olds first. At three, we see a child respond to an adult's prompts to express creative ideas in words and/or actions. Of course, all children differ, so you might see some younger children more able to express their ideas than the older children or you might see differences day to day, depending on how a child is doing at school or home. This is a guide to keep in mind as you interact with the children in your care.

Let's watch a video of how a teacher prompts a child to express their ideas and how the child responds. Then as we watch the video, in the Q&A, go ahead and share the strategies you see the teacher used to foster the child's creativity. Let's take a look.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Can I do a pattern on this? How can I do a pattern on this? Let me sit here. This one can be a little difficult to hold, so let's try this. You did ... What I saw was 1, 1, 2, 3, 1. Is that a pattern? It is, yeah. Make another pattern. I'll try to copy you. You make one and I'll see if I can do it. Is that right?

Girl: Yeah.

Teacher: All right.

[Video ends]

Dawn: OK. Go ahead and put some things in the Q&A. There are some things I saw come up. I see the point when the teacher asked, "Do you think you could do a pattern on a few of these?" That was a good prompt to expand her, to have an opportunity to do that. There's also some imitation that the teacher provided the child to do. When she asked, "How can I do a pattern on this?" Brought in the second set of bells so that the child can even just be creative and explore how she might do that. I also really liked when the teacher said, "I'll try to copy you." Like such a good opportunity for the child to lead and determine what the next pattern was going to be.

Gail: Such great observations there about that kind of first developmental progression of creativity. Let's look at another age group now. At around four years old now, we see that a

child expresses creative ideas and actions on their own without prompting from adults as well as with some prompts. We're going to watch a video and watch the teacher. Get your fingers ready to enter some things into Q&A, watch the teacher and the children in this video and what do you notice about how the child is able to express their creativity. How does the teacher prompt their expression?

[Video begins]

[Speaking in Spanish]

Boy: Teacher I'm going to draw a baby for you.

Teacher: OK. I like your drawing! What are you drawing, Alex? What are you drawing?

Boy: I'm drawing a baby for you.

Teacher: A baby for me.

Boy: A baby for your son, teacher.

Teacher: OK. It's a baby for my son. I'm going to write, "It's a baby for my son."

Boy: Write it down.

Teacher: What's his name?

Boy: Hmm?

Teacher: What's his name?

Boy: What?

Teacher: The name of the baby.

Boy: Your son?

Teacher: You know, Miguel.

Boy: Miguel.

Teacher: OK. All right.

[Video ends]

Gail: All right. People are already writing in. They saw some really key things there. One of the ways that the teacher was able to support the child's creativity and creative expression was the use of open-ended materials, right? There wasn't something that they had to do, it wasn't a

prescribed thing. It was open-ended. It was blank pieces of paper and lots of different colors and different types of writing implements. That really kind of got the child engaged in some creative expression.

Let me see. What else? The child was able to draw and verbally communicate their ideas. We see that developmental progression around four years old.

Dawn: I also saw the teacher asked the question to promote deeper thinking.

Gail: Very good. Good observation. All right. We're ready to move on. We've gotten threes, fours, let's see what five-year-olds look like.

Dawn: OK. Then around five years old, close to when the child is going to transition to kindergarten, children approach tasks and play with creative problem-solving. They ask questions that show new ways of thinking and use multiple ways to communicate their thoughts, feelings, or ideas. Let's watch this in action. In this video, I want you to think about what you noticed about the child's creation and the ways in which he communicates about it. Let's take a look.

[Video begins]

Boy: I did it.

Teacher: Tell me about it?

Boy: We put toys in here. We put toys in here. Now, I'm going to place toys in her. As they get all of the smiley face, I'll give them a toy.

Teacher: Oh, like a prize box.

Boy: Yes.

Teacher: I love it. Are you going to use real toys or are you going to use materials to make pretend toys?

Boy: Toys. Real toys. Teacher: Real toys. Where are you going to find the real toys?

Boy: At home.

Teacher: Oh, it's going to be something for you at home. Who's going to get to use the prizes? Who's going to get to pick from the toy box? Just you? Or people from your family?

Boy: I have to bring toys to the school and when they get all of the mystery, when they get all the smiley faces, I'm going to give them a surprise.

[Video ends]

Dawn: Oh, my gosh, the best toy box ever.

Gail: I love it.

Dawn: It was so sweet. I mean, the way he approached the recycled materials with ideas. He had plans for the toy box he created. He was able to communicate their ideas through their creation, and through their own words when he told the teacher about it. He was also able to think deeper about the creation, right. When the teacher asked the questions, it was so exciting to hear the pride in his voice when he said, "I did it," at the start of the clip. I could really feel the sense of accomplishment.

Gail: I love it so much. What's kind of fun is that our examples are not all art examples or anything. When we think about creativity, we're always kind of going with art. It's really about creative thinking and creative expression and certainly, art is part of that, but like thinking about the different use for a box. That's creativity, right. I love that part too.

All right. Well, here we are. We're at our Teacher Time BASICS, which is something we've introduced this season and we're really kind of liking these because they just really fit with no matter what it is that we're trying to support and encourage with young children, these Teacher Time basic strategies are really I think some go-tos in terms of helping us to do that. If you haven't joined us before, let me orient you to the BASICS. BASICS is an acronym, and it's a collection of strategies that can be used really in any setting in which we're interacting with preschool-age children. We even have it for younger children. The BASICS are teaching practices that you can apply no matter what content you're focusing on. You might be teaching math or literacy, socioemotional skills, or creativity. It's always important to remember these BASICS.

The BASICS are this: "B" stands for behavioral expectations in advance; "A" is to attend to and encourage appropriate behavior; the "S" is to scaffold with cues and prompts; "I" is to increase engagement; "C" is to create or add some challenge, and "S" is for specific feedback. Today, we're going to provide some examples of how to apply our Teacher Time BASICS in ways that will foster and support young children's creativity. I'm going to kick us off with the "B" here. Let's start with this idea of behavioral expectations in advance. This is such an important thing for us to always remember. Here on the screen, you can see are some examples of providing behavioral expectations in advance that support children's learning.

When we support young children's creativity, we think of open-ended unstructured learning activities, some of which we saw in those videos. It's also important to create an environment where making mistakes and trying something new is encouraged and it's safe, where we can take a risk. Children can take a risk. Teachers can take a risk. That's a huge part of developing creativity. Stability in the environment is key to creating a safe place for risk-taking and to prevent losing some control over everything that's happening in the classroom. If that happens – I know from being a teacher, I'm going to guess you remember this too, Dawn, I mean ... In those moments where you kind of lose a little bit of control, it's harder to feel like, yes, let's foster even more creativity. We really want to kind of have some strategies that create some

stability, some prediction. A little bit of kind of control in the environment so that then children can feel; they feel safe, they can take risks. Teachers feel great about children taking some risks and being creative because there's a little bit more control.

It's important to provide some behavioral guidance in advance. The optimal word there is in advance or phrase is in advance. It's not just about behavioral expectations, it's about giving those behavioral expectations in advance. As some examples on the screen there. When we go to centers, a center you want to play at might be full and if that happens, think about a second center you'd like to play at. What I love is that phrase is given in advance, so a child is already kind of primed to be thinking about, "OK. Where else might I go?" Another example here, it can be scary trying something new. If you feel nervous about it, remember you can ask for help. Behavioral expectation in advance.

Then the last one there, if you start feeling frustrated, you can try using the calm-down corner before trying the task again. Because remember, when we are maybe trying creative solutions to something, we might get a little bit frustrated if it's not working quite right. I'm giving that expectation in advance of calming down. Then behavioral expectations in advance can also come in the form of visuals, some visual supports. You see a couple there. You see like a free choice plan on the left-hand side where a child can kind of plan where they are going to go in advance and can have the first choice, the second choice. Then you can also see on the right, I love this basket full of all of these things that you can use to kind of help regulate those big feelings you might have, it can help you stay calm because, again, remember like open-ended activities and creativity might lead to some frustration there. Behavioral expectations in advance is the B.

Dawn: I mean, it's so key to making creativity go well and smoothly in a classroom full of other kids, right. If they are prepared and ready to go.

Gail: That's right. That's so right.

Dawn: All right. Now for the A. The "A" in BASICS is for attend to and encourage appropriate behavior. Like we mentioned earlier, creating an environment where children feel safe to take risks, try new things, and make mistakes is at the core of developing and expressing creativity.

One way we build this type of community is to respond to children's creative problem-solving, thinking, and expression with acceptance. For example, on-screen, you could say, "You're trying different ways to get the ball off the ramp" or "Look at what you created." Not only does this support the child's creativity but it also helps to foster a connection with the child. You could also respond to a child's creative process with descriptive encouragement. For example, you could say, "I noticed you constructing with the clay, pinecones, and sticks. You rolled the clay, patted it, and squished it. I saw you try to stand the stick up in the clay a few times and it would fall over. Then you pressed the pinecone into the clay." You really were talking about each step that you observed and this was really about being detailed in our encouragement to show the child we are invested in their work, we're paying attention, and to help provide the language they can use to express their ideas, thoughts, and creations.

I also say remember your body language and tone of voice are just as important as what you say. One more thing. Finally, focus on encouraging the process and the effort that goes into creating, not just the product. All of that work counts because there's many a thing created but maybe fell down at the end, maybe then not quite turned out the way you want to. Sometimes kids are their own worst critics. Really there's so much about the process and effort that goes into it.

Let's take a look at this video of a teacher supporting a child's creativity with encouragement. I want you to write down your observations in the Viewers' Guide about the behaviors you see the teacher used that are encouraging.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Slippery fish. There's a whale that eats everybody. Oh.

Girl: No.

Teacher: No? What's wrong with that? Oh-oh. Oh-oh. That doesn't look quite right. Hmm. All right. Put that one on top. OK. Where is this one going to go? No. Oh, it can go on top if you turn it over. Good thinking.

[Video ends]

Dawn: Oh, that was so good. I noticed that she asked open questions. When she asked, "What was wrong with that," to support a child in expressing their thinking. She narrated what the child was doing, described how she was probably solving the problem with an orange block. She had such a warm tone of voice and smiled the whole way through. Like I felt she was really into how she solved that problem.

Gail: Yes. That is the smile, like we talked about in the last episode of Teacher Time. The number of times a teacher smiles is related to the extent to which children are curious. I think that just probably also has to spill over to creativity too, right? Like having a teacher that's smiling a lot while you're experimenting and trying out new things and thinking new ways has got to contribute to that. Smiles.

Dawn: Right. Smiles equal safety. [Laughter]

Gail: That's right. OK. We have to move on to our S, scaffold with cues and prompts. An important part of helping children learn really everything is providing them with some scaffolding. Scaffolding is how we help the child learn by providing them with just the right amount of assistance to help them reach that next level, that next skill, that next developmental milestone. Scaffolding children's creativity can include things like asking open-ended questions.

We saw some of that already to prompt communication of ideas. For example, we might say, "Look at all these materials! You've been doing a lot of painting! Can you tell me about your

plan? What are you going to do with the bubble wrap?" That just kind of levels scaffolding to maybe like, oh, maybe they'll incorporate some more materials, do some mixed-media stuff, right. It can just help get them to problem-solve a little bit more, have some deeper thinking. We can also ask things like what would you do if your idea doesn't work – what you've tried out, it doesn't work. Another way to scaffold is by modeling creativity. A creative teacher can support creative children, which is why we started with asking people how they get in the creative zone. It's important to model creative thinking, problem-solving, and expressions of this out loud.

This might be something like, "Hmm, I wonder what will happen if we move this block here? It looks like that didn't keep the tower up either. Darn. Oh, I have an idea, let's try this block instead." Adult modeling might include other statements or questions that start with "I wonder" or "I noticed," and it can also be a time to talk about what it feels like to take a risk and try something new. Modeling creativity can also look like making up voices and sound effects or gestures when reading or telling stories, using recycled items, and new ways in problem-solving. There's so many different ways we can model creativity.

Finally, it's important to be intentional with the number of questions that you are asking children when they're working. I think we talk a lot in Teacher Time about asking questions, asking children questions to expand their thinking. But we also want to be aware of if we're kind of bombarding children with questions or kind of getting them caught in the question storm because sometimes a child can disengage – right? – because they can be like, "Oh, my gosh, I'm just trying to do something here and you're interrupting." Really be observant and see if your questions are maybe interrupting a bit. Then maybe just observe a little bit and ask a question when you want to scaffold them to the next level because we don't want children to disengage or shorten their creativity because we're just asking questions over and over again. Let's watch a video of a teacher and notice how they are using some scaffolding with cues and prompts.

[Video begins]

Teacher: What, Levy? What do you have here? Tell me, that looks like a shape. Does it look like a shape? What shape do you think that is? Close, it's a square. What could you draw with a square? What could you draw? Remember when we learned how to draw houses and we used a square and a triangle, and a rectangle. Mm-hmm. We did.

[Video ends]

Gail: Oh, I love watching that teacher.

Dawn: Me too.

Gail: I don't know, her accent took me back to growing up in Texas and in Alabama. Teacher Time viewers out there in Texas and Alabama. But besides that, I noticed some really lovely ways that she was scaffolding and prompting, using some cues.

Let's see what some of our viewers are writing in. The warm tone of voice, absolutely. Got down on the child's level. Again, really kind of like almost like scaffolding and cueing by just being warm and responsive in there. Definitely asking some open-ended questions about the child's drawing, "Tell me what could you draw with that." I loved that. I loved that question. She asked some questions prompting the child to think deeper about her drawing. That's a great observation. Yeah, gave her some ideas about what she could draw in a way that was motivating but not demitting. I love that. All right. Yeah, do you have more comments? Sorry, I moved us on.

Dawn: No, that's OK. I say it was just very encouraging the way that she was doing it, right. Like I'm sure those kids do not feel limited.

Gail: Exactly. They feel expanded and validated is how I would think they were feeling, even though they were getting a little bit of scaffolding. It's great. Another way to scaffold the child's development of new ideas, communication, problem-solving, flexible thinking is to ask them to revisit some task or play that they show interest in. This might look like asking two children to revisit the house they've been painting, and maybe it's saying something like, "Oh, I noticed yesterday you were really focused on painting the house. Tell me about your work. What do you want to try differently today?" That kind of like revisiting back with something that can cue them to think creatively about how I might do something different or even just longer times engaged in a project can really foster some creativity.

Another helpful tip for saving work for somebody to revisit the next day is to create name tags. I love that. My go-to strategy was children would write their name. I always had like paper and tape available so they could write their names, which was a nice kind of practice for emergent name-writing. Then they could tape it onto ... Maybe it was even a block building they were working on or maybe some clay they wanted to continue on or some DUPLOs, but it was just like a way and then a special place where they could move it so that it meant I'm going to come back and work on this another time. I know some teachers have had really great little "under construction" signs that children can put on there so just so that they can come back and practice it a little, continue kind of engaging in their creativity.

Then finally, asking a child to revisit work and describe their ideas with different mediums can help children use multiple ways of communicating their thoughts, which is another way of creativity. For example, children who have created a chicken coop with recycled materials and you can ask them to revisit their work and then maybe draw the chicken coop that they created or created with clay or out of play dough. I love that.

Dawn: I am inspired by that creativity right there in that picture. OK. Increasing active engagement is a critical support to developing creativity skills in young children. By providing open-ended materials allows children to decide what the materials will become. With open-ended materials, there are no wrong ways and instead, endless opportunities to test out new ideas. One example of an open-ended material is blocks. Children can build any structure they can imagine, turn the blocks into phones, pets, babies, or rocket ships that blast off to the

moon. Cross-area play is another way that encourages children to mix materials from different areas of the learning environment.

For example, in this photo on the screen, the children have added animals into the block area. These novel items expand and extend the ways in which the children play with materials. Perhaps the children built a zoo or an animal apartment complex. What is certain is that the opportunity to add new items to the play space sparked imagination and collaborative peer engagement. Having access to a variety of materials supports more and more opportunities for creativity.

Let's take a look at this video. In this one, we're creating spaces for small group work. It can also increase active engagement. In small groups, there can be less pressure and stress to get something right or do it right away like there might be in large groups. Let's watch this video clip, the children creating in the block area. Please share in the Q&A what you're noticing about how creativity is being supported and how they're expressing it. Let's take a look.

[Video begins]

Boy: That's OK. We can use them. We need some more.

Girl: This! This! These!

Boy: Yeah! We can use these ones too. We need two more. Yeah, we need two more.

[Video ends]

Dawn: Love the sound effects, right.

Gail: It's so fun.

Dawn: I'm seeing some of these comments coming from the Q&A and I feel like you often see children playing together but I think it's still helpful to point out like what's really taking place there. I love this example. You see children working together and building off each other's ideas and actions. Here, we see some peer collaboration. Children are talking about what they need to complete their creation. For example, when they said, "We need two more." They're verbally describing what's going on and what their needs are and communicating those. There's problem-solving and trying different ideas about the ramp. That child adding in another piece.

I see someone put in the chat that there is enough space for a small group, which is great – right? – to actually have the space to do that within that area of the room. There's also multiple types of blocks and accessories so there's small and large cars and trucks, dinosaurs, and road signs. Again, having all those additional materials help expand the opportunity for creativity.

They also seemed very comfortable with each other and trying different things to get out. To me, it also seems that those behavioral expectations were set in advance, right. Like those children knew what to do in this situation. Lots of good things in this video.

I'll also say some more on increasing active engagement for the adult as a partner in play with children, you can do that as well. When you are an adult engaged in play, you'll need a balance of supporting a child's imagination and problem-solving and creating instead of taking over. I know especially as a parent, it's hard to do that. But in a classroom, you don't want to get in the way of what children are doing because of what you're thinking about. It's about being engaged and present and active. Seeing and listening to what a child is saying and doing. Being focused on their process.

Like we see in this picture, the adult is present with the child and focused on what they are working on. This will help you understand what the child's plan is, getting an idea what questions to ask to deepen their thinking, and follow the child's lead. Remember, they are the leader in their play and in creative expression. Sometimes it's good to just sit back, observe, and be engaged with them as they're going through the activities.

Gail: Colanders and pipe cleaners like create a so open-ended fun creativity. It's pretty fun.

Dawn: That's the kind of thing that makes you want to get in and play, right. I want to know what's going to happen here. You know, another thing teachers and family childcare providers could increase active engagement is by allowing for longer blocks of time to play and to work on tasks. If your schedule is flexible, maybe you can extend certain blocks of time that will allow for children to engage in more trial and error or imaginative play and creativity.

Now, if it is possible, it might be helpful to have those name tags to save work like we mentioned earlier. Then we also encourage you to create yes spaces. Hearing no, especially multiple times can put a stop to creativity very quickly. Then, of course, safety is a No. 1 concern and priority. Some behaviors may need to be stopped. But if safety isn't a concern, reflect on your comfort level and ask yourself why you're saying no to the behavior. Then you want to pause, step back, and observe the behavior. It helps to model creativity and curiosity and ask the child why they're engaging in the behavior and wonder with them about other possibilities instead of just shutting it down and saying no. Maybe having a lot of materials out overwhelms you. Pinecones, grass, bark, and glue may all feel like too much. Let us know in the Q&A what are some solutions you can come up with to feel comfortable with saying yes. Creating a yes environment can be inspiring to both education, staff, and children.

Gail: I love just that picture of all those materials from nature being brought into what a like open-ended creative piece. I think some of our viewers are writing some of those things in too. I love that.

Dawn: Yeah.

Gail: Yes. Yeah. It's so great. But it's so important. I love that way that you phrased that like creating yes spaces because just too often, I feel like as a teacher, as a parent, we say no but there's no real reason to it, it's just maybe a habit. That idea of like, wait a minute, why not? You know. If they're going to be safe, maybe it's going to be a little messy. But I love that. Pedagogy of yes.

All right. We are to the C. We're almost to the end of our word here of BASICS. You might be wondering why in the world you're looking at a picture of a guinea pig. But let me tell you. It's because C stands for create or add challenge and that is really important around creativity. We can add challenge for children with design challenges as a way to get creative. I love this idea, design challenges. We do those all the time at work and it's really fun to do it with the young children too.

Design challenges are really just problems to solve. For example, in a family childcare, the children noticed that the pet guinea pig really wanted out of their cage more often so the family childcare provider asked the children to design a solution: How could they create something that would allow their pet guinea pig to explore the room safely. What a design challenge for these young children.

They so got into it. The children worked together to create all kinds of solutions, like sky bridges, gates, traveling spheres, and more. The project just kind of really kept going. Design challenges like these can get children, can get them thinking, can be thinking like engineers. One thing we know about engineers is that they're always creative and innovative about finding solutions. Don't you agree? Yes.

Mary Resnick is an early childhood researcher. Some people might be familiar with her work. She talks about providing design challenges and I really love this. We have this on a slide too. Design challenges with a low threshold, with a high ceiling, and with very wide walls. What she means by that is that the low threshold means it's an easy way to get started.

Think about those places where children are a little bit familiar and they can enter into that dilemma or that design challenge, such as starting with this guinea pig and the thing they've noticed about wanting the guinea pig to have more of an opportunity to roam, then starting with materials that they can actively explore on their own, right? When we have these open-ended materials that children can start on their own and kind of this entry into the design challenge with something they're familiar with, that's that low threshold, which is also a great way to make sure that it's a universal design that all children can participate.

Now, the high ceiling means that there are just really many ways that you can expand the challenge. There's not going to be just one solution, there's going to be so many different solutions. The guinea pig challenge is a great example of that, it's just open-ended. That project, that design challenge could have gone on and on and on.

Now, the wide walls. The wide walls means that there's a multitude of ways to explore the challenge, as well as to integrate other learning from other domains into the design challenge too. Thinking about wide like ... Wow, we can really ... This is not just about like a cognitive matter, there's many other learning domains that could be incorporated into this challenge. When we go back to our little pet guinea pig design challenge here, you can imagine that children are working together to build that sky bridge. By the way, the guinea pig never walked across the sky bridge but the children built it. No guinea pig was harmed in this design challenge, but they still built something. But while they were doing that, they were using math

skills. They were measuring some wood. They were using scientific thinking about making predictions about what would happen. They were using their language skills and their socioemotional skills to work together in a group. That was a really great example of having those wide walls for a design challenge. I just think design challenges are such a fun way to get children to think creatively, to incorporate other domains, also to be so open-ended that all children no matter of their skill or ability can engage in those. He's so cute. I hate to like go to the next slide. But I'm going to because of our time.

One more book that we're hoping you check out at your local library. This was a NAEYC member benefit at one point. If you don't have this book currently in your possession, look around, ask some of your teaching colleagues if they might have it because it was pretty widely disseminated at one time. But Cate Heroman has authored this lovely book about design challenges for young children with a lot of making and tinkering involved. If you're kind of, you know, inspired to do some design challenges, it's a great resource. What I love about this book is that she uses children's books as a way to kind of start these design challenges. She talks of the characters to develop a design challenge, she provides suggested design challenges that might go with different children's books and the materials that you might need that would really create a wide range of children kind of solving the problem. The design challenges meet that idea of low threshold because you start with the children's book as a way to enter high ceiling because there's lots of ways, open-ended ways to solve these. Then there's wide walls too.

Again, if you don't have the book, definitely check it out from your local library. We've also included a link to a webinar about Making and Tinkering with STEM in the Viewers' Guide. You can be sure to check that out there as well.

All right. One more way to create or add challenge is with tinkering stations. We want to do a little pulse check here and find out – pulse check – if you have a tinkering center or a creation station in your learning environment. We want to see how many people are out there doing some making, tinkering, creation stations, these places where you can have open-ended art or design challenges kind of like what's pictured here. You know, these spaces usually have accessible bins, accessible art materials, different types of materials, chalk, beans, strings, tissue paper, pipe cleaners, bendy, bendable like wiki stick things with the wax on them. All kinds of ways usually.

All right. All right. We do, we have some viewers out there that are doing some tinkering stations. I think these are great in quite a few family child care programs we've been in. We've seen some of these tinkering stations because they don't take up a lot of space, but you can really address a lot of learning domains with them. Anyways, think about adding these as a way to create or add challenge. Maybe you can use loose parts, recycling materials. You can ask families if they have things to donate to the making and tinkering spaces, bottle caps, pinecones, things from outside – bubble wrap. I can just go on and on. Anyway, set up a space where a small group of children can work, where you can say yes more than no and watch children be creative. All right.

Dawn: OK. The last "S" is for specific feedback. With this one, you're really looking for the educators to provide some kind of descriptions and specific ways to notice what children are doing. Again, it's similar to what we've mentioned earlier before when you are giving that detail back, it really helps children to feel like their work is being acknowledged and seen but also the opportunity to expand and be creative around it. Here are some examples of things you could say. You could say, "I saw you notice that the tinkering center was full and went to the science center instead. That's a great strategy." Or you might say, "I heard you playing the drums and singing. Tell me a story about the song you were playing. I wonder what other instruments you can add your song?" Because there's just an opportunity to expand to the music area there. Or maybe say, "You tried so many ways to figure out the scissors. Can I help you? I wonder if you tried putting your fingers here. What do you think?" That could be a way to add some specific feedback that could help give them just a little bit of extra support to be successful with that task. When children approach with the question, try asking them questions to support deeper thinking, problem-solving, and new ideas.

Gail: Great. There we have it. There are the BASICS about encouraging creativity for children in your care.

Dawn: All right. Now for our segment Small Change with a Big Impact. Here we highlight a curricular modification or adaptation that can help a child who needs a little more assistance to fully participate in the learning environment or group routines and activities.

Gail: That's right. We mentioned several ways to increase young children's creativity that relate to the environment. These included providing open-ended materials, creating spaces for small groups, cross-area play, and creating yes spaces. Sometimes children need environmental supports like a physical adjustment to the materials and space to promote higher levels of participation. This might look like a child having a tough time sitting at the table and staying with the group during small group activities so an adjustment you can make is you can just move the small group activity to the floor where you can be a little bit more wiggly. It's such a great way for children to ... quick physical adjustment, small change but the big impact in terms of engagement.

Another example is that if the child is very focused on what others are doing and having a tricky time focusing on their own work, provide a separate container or workspace, like their own box of birdseed, can help the child focus on their space and their work. When you think about using these strategies of physical adjustments, you can consider a few things. Changing the space like adding a cozy space for one child to sit at in the reading area, defining boundaries, so changing the space, defining boundaries is like placing materials on work trays. That was my go-to strategy because it just provides a little bit of visual information about where my things are. Then add visual cues like maybe there's a necklace with different roles the child can play in the dramatic play area. Observing a child and seeing how they engage at each center can really help you think about how to best support the child in feeling comfortable and creative in the environmental space and which modification might be most beneficial.

Dawn: I love that. It is a truly small change, big impact with that one.

Gail: It's so easy, yeah.

Dawn: Right? [Laughter] Now it's time for our focus on equity. In this segment, we lift the value of equity and consider how we can make our teaching practice more equitable. Today, we have talked about how creativity helps us to think, act, and do in unique ways. It's also important to acknowledge and talk about how our parents make us unique. Children are curious and ask questions about racial differences. It's never too early to talk about race and it's important that we do. Research shows that by age two, children show a preference to people of the same race.

Between the ages three to five, children start to categorize people by race and express biases based on race. This might look like children excluding or including specific children in their play based on skin color or assigning roles in play based on skin color. By ages five to six, children show the same level of implicit bias as adults do. It's crazy but yes, evidence they do that. If you want to learn more about the research, check out our Viewers' Guide for links and more information about that.

Gail: Yeah, it's important to talk about race so children understand it's OK to talk about race. Staying silent really reinforces racism and might promote uncomfortable feelings around conversations about race. I mean, we wonder like why are we uncomfortable sometimes? Well, we probably weren't raised to talk about it. We also want to promote positive racial identity by talking about race in positive ways and celebrating what makes us unique.

Remember, your tone and how you say something is just as important as the words that you're saying. As we learned, young children might exclude others based on race, and it's important to acknowledge when this happens and to talk about how hurtful and unfair. You know, "DJ, when you told Jess she couldn't play with you, it looked like that hurt her feelings." We want to help children learn what to do like how to be a good friend. Talk about what it means to be good friends and acknowledge how it feels when everyone plays together. It feels so good to play with friends. I heard you laughing and I saw everyone smiling.

Finally, when children make statements about race, ask questions to learn more about their thinking. Can you tell me more about that? Why do you think that? I'm wondering how you came up with that idea. Finding out more from the child will help you understand their thought process and what information you can provide to help them understand differences in a different way.

Dawn: Right. Like we already mentioned, talking about race is important because silence can reinforce racism and biased thoughts or ideas. Get in the habit of talking about racial differences just as much as you would talk about differences in the weather. Be ready for comments and questions about those differences from children, supporting the adults so they're comfortable too. Emphasize and celebrate our differences. Everyone should be proud of who they are inside and out, no matter what color your skin or hair is, we're all important. No one looks the same, we're all unique are some examples of some of the things you could say.

You can model positive ways to talk about differences. "Yes, your skin is light like the beige color." "Yes, your friend's skin is dark like the shade of brown." Or you can say, "We all have something called melanin in our bodies. People who have more melanin have darker skin than people with less melanin." What a wonderful novel word. I'd love to see a bunch of preschoolers knowing how to say melanin and knowing what that is. It's fabulous.

Differences do not create bias. Children learn prejudice from prejudice, not from learning about human diversity. That's from *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. I'm sure you all know about Louise Derman-Sparks and Edwards books. It's also how people respond to the difference that teaches bias and fear. Those are just important lessons to take from that.

Now, reflection is always an important action step after we talk about our focus on equity. Take a moment now in your Viewers' Guide and reflect. Think about how you respond to children's questions and comments about race and differences. Do you respond? Write down your reflections. This is just for you.

Then next, I want you to take a moment to reflect on what you hope to add, change, or keep the same about how you respond to comments and questions about race. How can you add and having more positive conversations about race throughout the day? You might have to challenge yourself to take a thoughtful pause and engage in the conversation with the child about race. If a child asks you a question you don't know the answer to, it's OK.

Model your wonderings out loud with the child and ask them what they think. If you're comfortable in this moment, share your ideas in the Q&A, and we'll try to push those ideas out for all to see.

Gail: We absolutely will. We love people taking a risk and doing that. It's a safe space. Do it.
[Laughter]

All right. I know we're keeping people a little bit longer. It's an extra special Teacher Time because it's our last one for preschool of this season, so we're going to be just a little bit longer but not too much longer. But now it is time for our segment, The Book CASE.

The Book CASE is where we highlight books by racially diverse authors and illustrators related to our episode's theme. With the featured books, we can make that CASE, which is another acronym. We love the acronyms around here. The CASE is how we can use books more intentionally in our teaching. "C" stands for connect, and here we want to connect the book to the ELOF goals. Here we want to think about creativity as our ELOF goal. "A" stands for advanced vocabulary. Books are always wonderful ways to introduce novel words and produce a child-friendly definition to build children's language and concept development. We look into books for those advanced vocabulary words. "S" stands for supporting engagement so thinking about how am I going to keep children engaged and excited about this book that I'm reading. "E" stands for extending the learning beyond the book. Again, kind of that like a design challenge, right. Here it is our low threshold using the book to kind of enter into some new

learning and activities where we can continue to advance the concepts and advance vocabulary.

We have several books, and these are all in your Viewers' Guide. You see them. We're not going to go through them all today. We have "Where Is Your Creativity?" I love that book. "Kamala and Maya's Big Idea," you want to tune into that one. "My Rainy Day Rocket Ship," "Abby Invents the Foldibot." Each of these books tells stories about creativity, problem-solving, invention. You can read more in the Viewers' Guide.

Then today, just really briefly I want to make the case for one incredible book that I have come to love. It is "Radiant Child" by Javaka Steptoe. What is so fun about this one is that we actually featured Javaka's stepfather's book, a classic on one of our infant-toddler episodes a while ago. This might be the first time we've had a father-son pairing on Teacher Time as our featured author. Let me just tell you that "Radiant Child" is a Caldecott award-winning book. It is about the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

After you read that, you can think about the ways in which you can build the CASE. In this story, the author talks about how Jean-Michel used creativity to express his emotions and to heal, which is lovely. The author also talks about how creativity helped him show who he uniquely is by creating a soundtrack of his own. I love that. Advanced vocabulary. This book is just replete with great words like slurp, dwells, patchwork, sly, barrage, and composition. As you read these words, you'll be kind of building children's vocabulary by thinking about a child-friendly definition.

You can support active engagement with those open-ended questions we've talked a lot about. You can extend the learning. Radiant Child provides a great opportunity for children to engage in a lot of creativity and expression. Have children create art that tells a story, shares a feeling, or brings an idea in their head to life, get inspired by the work of Basquiat and Steptoe (the author and illustrator of this book), provide children with different types of colorful mediums, chalk, pastels, paint, markers, all kinds of ... You can even have chalk spray bottles, which would be really fun to put up on the wall. Offer opportunities. We can go on and on and on. Check out the Viewers' Guide for all these ideas.

Dawn: I want to talk about Basquiat.

Gail: Yeah. OK. All right. We've got to wrap this up though.

Dawn: OK. Now, it's all about you. This is our segment It's All About You! We do our best in caregiving and teaching when we feel well ourselves. Engaging in self-care practices can help educators build greater socioemotional capacity to deal with challenging times. Here is one quick strategy that you can use to get back into that calm space. Stress and feeling out of control can have a significant impact on your creative capacity and those around you. Yes. So true.

One tip is to try focusing on areas of the situation, event, thought or feeling that you do have control over. These areas can include your ability to prioritize work requirements and personal obligations, maybe your reactions to events and other people, your own thoughts, and your own behavior. Focusing on areas in your control can help you feel empowered and a sense of relief. So much of working with children is not in our control. Children bring everything that they're experiencing within every day. It can be helpful to take a deep breath, shown here in the picture, and to pause and think about what you are in control of and how to reframe those aspects. You can check out the Viewers' Guide for some resources about other ways to combat stress.

Gail: I love it. Folks, thanks for hanging with us. We are so excited that you stayed with us for this last episode of Teacher Time for preschool. Before we jump, we want to let you know that you can watch this and all other episodes on-demand with PushPlay. You might find some other resources that you like there as well. We just want to say thank you for joining us. For those that might be interested in creativity for infants and toddlers, you can join us on June 2nd for that. But I just want to say thank you, Dawn, for being my co-host this whole year on Teacher Time. It's been so great and lovely, and I know our viewers think so too. So ...

Dawn: Gail, thank you. Teacher Time is in my heart. I'm so glad to be back.

Gail: All right. We'll continue the conversation in MyPeers. See everyone over there. Take care.

Dawn: Bye.