

Playful Learning and Joyful Teaching in Preschool

[Video begins]

Child 1: This, this, this, and this. And then I shape it like this, this, and this. So that's how they go.

Teacher 1: Wow. Watch Alice. [Speaking native language] So yeah, so ... [Speaking native language] ... with my phone. [Speaking native language]

[Video ends]

Saameh Solaimani: Hi, everyone. We wanted to begin today's webinar with a beautiful moment from a classroom where we see the children and teacher engaged, joyful, and curious. This is what we'll be discussing and reflecting on during our time together today.

Gail Joseph: Yes, absolutely. Hi, everyone. Welcome to Teacher Time. It's so great to see people filling up our chat room, in our Q&A. I'm Gail Joseph, and I'm from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning.

Saameh: And I'm Saameh Solaimani, also from the National Center for Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. Today's webinar will focus on Playful Learning and Joyful Teaching in preschool. We're so excited to have you here with us, and we'd love to hear – if you can tell us in the Q&A – how you are feeling today.

Gail: Yes, we'd love to hear, check in first, before we start, with how people are feeling. I know I'm feeling excited and nervous, and I'm also feeling a little lonely because, usually, Saameh is right here in our Teacher Time studio with me. But she is presenting from her home office today. I'm really excited, though, because we have our expert producer today, Dougal, behind the scenes. He is keeping me company here in our studio.

Saameh: I miss you all there.

Gail: People are feeling good, feeling busy, feeling curious. Good.

Saameh: Excited.

Gail: Awesome. Keep those feelings coming in chat. We want to validate you, and we're so glad that you're taking a moment to be with us.

Saameh: During our time together, we are going to look at the Framework for Effective Practice, and how joy in play connects to the foundation. We're going to talk about what is meant by playful learning and specifically guided play. We are going to talk about how to ensure we are honoring families in our work, practical strategies for engaging in guided play in our New Teacher Toolbox segment, discuss ways to individualize supports for children in Small

Change, Big Impact. Then, we're going to check in with our Teacher Time librarian during BookCASE, where we connect our topic to books you can share with children and families. We're going to wrap up our time with some ways to promote your wellness in All About You!

Gail: Love that part. Now, we want to call your attention to the Viewer's Guide. You will find it in the Resource widget. Let us know if you have any trouble finding that. This season, the Viewer's Guide includes information from each of our segments, which is exciting: some note-taking spaces; some cutouts that you can cut out and put up in your learning environment; a wonderful booklist from our Teacher Time Librarian, Emily Small; and a resource list for further information. You can download this guide and use it throughout our time together today for taking notes, for reflecting, planning how you are going to use the Teacher Time practices in your settings. You can also share the Teacher Time Viewer's Guide with your colleagues.

If you were with us last season, let us know your thoughts on the change in the Viewer's Guide. We'd love to hear your input. We've changed it up a bit. We always want to be responsive to what you would like to see. Go ahead and let us know your input as well.

Now, we're going to start by giving us a little bit of a framework. I would love to know ... You can enter this in the Q&A widget. I'd love to know if people have seen this. We call it the House Framework sometimes. Sometimes you'll hear it called the Framework for Effective Practice, which is really what it is. But oftentimes we shortcut it to the House. I would love to know: Have you seen the House before? Because this is something that I think we put out in 2010, and we've put some important updates to it.

Whether or not you've seen it, I'm going to take you through our House Framework, because this is going to be how we're going to be framing our whole season. The DTL Framework for Effective Practice ... We use a house as a framework that really shows these six interconnected elements that we think are important for effective teaching and learning.

At the foundation – the royal blue part, not the siding, but the foundation – is providing nurturing and responsive and really effective interactions and engaging environments. Sometimes we think about the CLASS assessment as being a list of these interactions, and these are things that we would see at the foundation here: nurturing, culturally affirming, responsive, and effective interactions.

What you'll see on my left-hand side of the house is implementing research-based curriculum and teaching practices. We know that's part of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and it's important that all children have access to this. On the right side is screening and ongoing assessment. Of course, those things work together, right? Curriculum, teaching, and ongoing child assessment.

Then, at the roof, which is shaped like a pyramid, you'll see highly individualized teaching and learning. Of course, in the open door, you'll see that we have parent and family engagement. Whether that is a family welcoming in a home visitor or a center-based programming

welcoming in parents and families into that space, that is at the heart of what we do in Head Start.

Then a new element, which is so very important, is the strong siding. Something that teaches every aspect of our framework is equity-focused practices. That is a new and critical component. Throughout Teacher Time this season, as we said, we will be touching on each part of the House. For this session today, we're going to be focusing on the foundation, which is providing nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions and engaging environments and implementing research-based curriculum and teaching practices.

Saameh: Before we jump into our content today, we want to hear from you. Please use the purple Q&A widget to let us know: When thinking about play and the preschool learning environment, what are some words that come to mind? You can add that using your purple Q&A widget. As you're doing that, I'm going to share one word that comes to mind. The first one immediately that comes to mind is "engaged." How about you, Gail?

Gail: When I think about the learning environment, I do often think about engaged. I also think about it as being joyful.

Saameh: Let's see what we have in our Q&A.

Gail: I'm looking for people.

Saameh: Oh, fun, discovery.

Gail: Discovery is such a great word. Joyful. Creative. Explore.

Saameh: Imagination.

Gail: So great. Happy, yes. Child-directed. Learning. Safe. Yes.

Saameh: Conversational. That's a great one.

Gail: Such great words coming in here. Adventure. I love that.

Saameh: Thank you. Keep on sharing any of those.

We are going to move on here. The Lego Foundation says, "Children achieve a richer understanding by connecting the concepts and skills they are learning with real-world examples. Playful experiences help engage in this type of deeper learning, applying knowledge to different situations and sparking new ideas at home and in school. Through play, preschool children are invited to continue exploring and experiment, making deeper connections across all areas of development in a variety of environments."

Here, we see this graphic is kind of a representation of what we're going to be talking about on the different aspects of childhood development that play benefits. As we can see here, play is

foundational. The act of play comes so naturally. It seems to be little more than simple, joyful experience. Research shows us that play is how children learn about their world. Play provides children with opportunities to learn about and master relationships, language, math, science, problem-solving, and their bodies.

Let's look more closely at a few areas of development that play contributes to. As we see here with the blocks, we have our relationships blocks. Going into that, with caregivers through back-and-forth interactions that support brain development, and with each other, with peers, and building relationships with that child or with each other. Close, responsive, nurturing relationships support children in exploration of their environment and development, across developmental domains through play.

With peers, play provides many opportunities for children to build meaningful relationships, collaborate, problem-solve, and learn with peers. Then, we see our social skills block here. Play allows for children to practice what they see the adults and other children around them do and practice new skills like language and communication, waiting, or taking turns. Then, we have our executive functioning skills closely tied to social skills. Play supports the development of executive functioning. These are skills like impulse control, problem solving, working memory, and flexible thinking, just to name a few. You can see our Viewer's Guide to read more about some of this fascinating research that connects directly to our everyday classroom experiences and how play is vital for healthy development.

Here, we have another representation of what we've been talking about. A growing body of behavioral research establishes relationships between children's play and development in several areas. That's including language, executive functions as we spoke about earlier, math and spatial skills, scientific thinking, social and emotional development, as we mentioned. Research tells us again that play sets the stage and is essential for healthy development across all domains of development. So why play? Because that's how children learn and grow.

Gail: I love it. I love when research reinforces what we think and know intuitively already. I'm sure that everybody out there would have said "Why play? Because we know that's how children learn and grow." This is such a great graphic to show that with all the domains around.

Saameh: Exactly. Now, we are going to watch an example of this very thing. As you watch the video, we'd love to invite you to share in the Q&A. It's a video of small group play in the block area. What do you notice? What is one thing you notice the children learning through this playful experience?

[Video begins]

Child 1: We need some more.

Child 2: Yeah, we need some more.

Child 3: We need two more blocks.

Child 1: Yeah.

Child 3: Middle of that one.

Child 3: These. We can move these over.

Child 1: You can see more. [Inaudible] more.

Child 2: Nice. Nice. Nice.

Child 1: Now.

Child 2: Look at that.

Child 1: Yay.

Child 3: Not now.

Child 2: Yes.

Child 1: Come up. Oh yes.

Child 2: Yay.

Child 3: Help. Help. No. Oh no.

[Video ends]

Saameh: We see here in the Q&A, all of your answers about what you noticed: constructive play, experimentation.

Gail: I heard math. I was like, one of the first things I heard was, "We need two more." Social skills, turn-taking, teamwork.

Saameh: Children are interacting with one another while problem-solving using blocks.

Gail: Absolutely. Science. Physics. Engineering. It's amazing, everything you can see in that small clip.

Saameh: Keep those coming. We are going to now move onto the next slide. We love to hear your thoughts and ideas. Thank you for sharing.

Gail: Now that we have a larger overview of play, we're going to take a closer look at what we mean when we say playful learning. In "The Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Early Childhood Programs," the fourth edition – there's a fourth edition out there, in case people don't have it, that's published by NAEYC – they define play and playful learning as "learning context," so the context in which children learn content while playing together freely, so free

play or self-directed play with teacher guidance, which is what we might call guided play, or in a structured game. This is from years of research done by Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Golinkoff, and many, many, many other members of the team, as well as, I would say, decades of research from anyone that's interacted with young children.

Our own research demonstrates that play is such a great context for learning. Let me say a little bit more about this. Free play really includes child-led play. We think about that as really kind of unstructured child-led play that involves exploration, imagination, investigation. I would add adventure, which I think was one of the great words that we got from our listeners today, our viewers today.

We can see this in this first picture. We see two children that are exploring and investigating the cocoons. You might not know there is cocoons in those jars at this science table. Here, we are seeing examples of social and emotional development, even in this still photograph; language, as you can imagine. Children are discussing their curiosity, their discoveries. We see scientific thinking as they explore and experience. They're probably making some predictions and connecting it to information they have about the life cycle of the butterfly. All of that is in that free play experience, where it's really child-led.

Now, guided play, which we see in the middle, is where the adults or another child can interact with younger children. It involves allowing the child to lead where the conversation and play goes. Children are still driving that, but the adult is layering in opportunities for extension of learning. We can see this in that second picture where the adult is guiding the children's natural curiosity, their joy, their engagement, their excitement about dressing and creating props for the dolls.

The last little picture there is games. Gameplay or boardgames, group games, other rule-based play can really help children develop cognitive and social and emotional skills, also a lot of math skills, we also know. This type of play is typically seen in the preschool years, and since every child develops in their own unique way, in this third photo we see the children engaging in playing a game with each other. We see one child patiently showing his peer the rules – how the rules work, I should say. Through this play, these children are really practicing – each in their own beautiful unique way – turn-taking, supporting each other, math, spatial skills, social-emotional, language, just to name a few things that are there.

Saameh: Something to keep in mind as we're thinking about all that playful learning entails is the many different families that make up our learning environment and the many different values around play. Parents and family members are the child's first teacher. They shape a child's growth and development. That's why it's so important to create and maintain open lines of communication and welcoming environments that invite the families in to share about themselves and their values. That's also why it's so important to build relationships and partnerships with families from the beginning. Honoring that families are the first and most important teachers of their children, they are our partners with a critical role in their child's development. They are experts about their child and their family, and valuable and important

contributors. Honoring and engaging families is central to the relationship building that ensures the joyful teaching and playful learning with the children in our care.

Gail: Absolutely. Today, we're going to focus on guided play. That was the one in the middle when we saw the three frames there. We want to hear from you. Type into the Q&A what comes to your mind when you are thinking of guided play. What comes to your mind? I think we're waiting for people to come in. I think about observing because I think observing plays a big role in guided play.

Saameh: That makes me think about following the child's lead.

Gail: Support. That's a great word, supporting the play that comes in.

Saameh: Open-ended questions.

Saameh: That's a great one, one of my favorite ones.

Gail: Teacher-directed and child-directed. We're hearing both, and that's where guided play is. It's a little bit of both there. That's excellent. Great comments there. Teacher support. Helping. Interacting, Modeling. Listening ears, yes. We have to have our listening ears on as adults when we are doing guided play. Playing with purpose. That's a nice phrase. These are such great things coming in. Supportive play. Wow, we should just ... Our viewers should be guiding this.

They've got such great words. We are going to hear from Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, who is a professor of psychology at Temple University. She's also a Senior Fellow at Brookings Institute, and she is one of the most playful people I know. It's perfect that we're going to have her say a little bit and give a practical example of what is guided play.

[Video begins]

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek: I call it guided play, or active playful learning. What exactly does that mean? Well, I'm going to give you an example, and then I'll describe it.

Let's say you have a learning goal that you want the kids to learn how to count, and there's a pole outside in the playground. You go in the pole in the playground, and you put tape markers that says 1, 2, 3, 4. Now notice that the 4 is higher than the 1, and they're equal distant. So, all of a sudden, you intentionally put those little stickers on that pole. Simple. Didn't cost any money. And the kids are now talking math. They're counting. "Well, I got to the 4." "I only got to the 2. I'm going to try again."

Look what you've done. You've done the perfect example of what we call guided play. You knew as a teacher exactly what you wanted to achieve. But the kids got to do it by being active and engaged. They found something meaningful to them. They were socially interacting with one another, and it was joyful. That's incredible.

[Video ends]

Gail: Such a great example of ... We'll talk about the environment, but so important to set the environment, and then let children play. The environment there with the adults' assistance guides that play.

Saameh: Yes, and also as we heard in the video, some key aspects of the guided play include children being active and engaged, children being active participants in their play and truly engaged in the moment, play being meaningful to children – what's important to children in the moment, what are they genuinely curious about and interested in – children being socially interactive with one another, building language skills, creativity, and confidence. And last but certainly not least, joy.

Gail: Yes, certainly not least. We really want to bring joy into our classrooms, have more joy all day long. Joy is such an important part of our playful learning. Let's say a little bit more about guided play. Guided play is when the educator follows the child's lead and then supports that child's exploration through props and prompts and interactions that actually scaffold a child's interest and learning. Remember there is a distinction between guided play and free play. As our viewers were adeptly putting into the chat there, that guided play really has this adult direction, adult element to it as well, or adult supported, I should say.

The educator notes during a playful moment ... We know what the child is interested in or is playing with and then add a specific learning goal that matches the child's natural interest and curiosity while supporting them in taking their learning to the next level. It also is responding to children's interests in a curious, open, and playful way that supports children to further develop their own questions and curiosities, offering deeper exploration, engagement, and learning. The adult there is responding to the child's curiosity with some additional curiosity themselves, which keeps children more and more into their play. Guided play allows teachers to focus children's play around specific learning goals. For example, a goal connected to anything in the Early Learning Outcomes Framework, which we'll see when we look at a real classroom example shortly.

Saameh: Now, very shortly. Now, Teacher Gabe mixing the colors with a group of preschool children to see what guided play looks like in action. While watching the video, see if you can identify where the following four components of guided play are happening: setting up the environment for joy and engagement, following the child's lead, responsive interactions, and adding a learning goal. Here we go.

[Video begins]

Gabe: We were talking about love today, right, at circle time?

Child 1: Blue?

Devin: No, green. Hey teacher, don't want that green. Want this green.

Teacher Gabe: That's a wonderful question.

Child 1: Hey, look it.

Devin: No.

Teacher Gabe: No, no color in here, and Devin had a question. How did you make green?

Child 1: You stick it on this one and ...

Devin: Yeah.

Devin: Let's make green.

Gabe: How did you make it?

Devin: This one that, and with that.

Gabe: Different colors, you put some different colors in it? OK, let's see, so I'll try ...

Child 2: Yellow --

Gabe: I'm going to put some yellow on this page. Did you use yellow, Devin?

Devin: No, just blue and red.

Gabe: Oh, blue and red, OK. So, let's see.

Devin: I make ...

Gabe: Here's blue. OK, so I got ...

Devin: Mixed it.

Gabe: You did it too.

Devin: I mixed up.

Gabe: I'm going to do it right here. Here's red, and here is some blue. And let's see what happens in the middle.

Child 1: Did you guess?

Gabe: Yeah, what happened?

Child 1: Purple.

Gabe: Purple – that's just like Devin made.

Devin: Yeah!

Child 1: Now yellow, try yellow. Try yellow with green. Try with green.

Gabe: OK, so here's yellow.

Child 1: And red.

Gabe: Which one is green?

Child 1: No, red.

Gabe: Oh, so yellow and red?

Child 1: Yeah, red. And then let's see what happens.

Gabe: See what happens.

Child 1: Orange.

Gabe: Orange. OK, so let me write this stuff down.

[Video ends]

Gail: I love that.

[Laughter]

Saameh: I love it so much. When setting up the learning environment, it's important to consider engaging both the children and the educators. Setting up environments that reflect the learning community provides ample opportunities for exploration, interaction, and joyful experiences, like we just saw. Let's take a moment to discuss how Teacher Gabe has set up the learning environment. We saw an incredibly interactive and exploratory experience in the classroom that was prompted by the intentionality with which the environment was set up. We could see how intentional that environment was set up.

When we are curious and engaged in the environment, like we saw with Teacher Gabe, we are more likely to respond and interact with children in ways that nurture and extend the learning and the children's interests and our own interests as teachers. We could see how engaged and interactive the teacher himself was. We see the educator here intentionally observing play, listening to their words to inform his teaching practice. He notices what is happening and uses this information as evidence to show us where he went next to extend the learning.

Like researchers do, educators collect data by taking notes of children's play, interactions, words, and use that information to select, switch out, or set up materials in the environment that can support children deepening their learning through play. At the very end of that video clip, you can hear him say, "let me get my paper and pen. I need to write this down." When we are present, aware, and intentionally noticing, teaching becomes somewhat of a meditation

and opportunity to return to the very moment in front of us, and experience materials and surroundings with a childlike curiosity and joy.

This also allows us to better see and hear the children we are exploring alongside, also allowing us to follow the children's lead, as some of our audience members were sharing about earlier. We can experience so much joy through simply noticing what is happening here and now, and becoming genuinely curious about where we might go next to continue the adventure of learning. Speaking of adventures, what we would love to hear from you, if you could share in the Q&A widget: What is one way you noticed Teacher Gabe setting up the environment for joy and engagement for the children and adults in the classroom? Let's see.

Gail: We have had a lot of comments already. Rachel says, "Echoed students' ideas and questions to affirm them and let other students hear it too, which kids love." Grace is talking about teachers can also use these engagements and experiences as data for future instruction and activities. Thinking about how the environment was set up, starting conversations, asking questions. A circle table. [Crosstalk]

Saameh: I love that. We said the same thing at the same time, Gail.

Gail: We had the same brain there. That circle table is really, really great. Open-ended questions and I think even open-ended materials really set that stage up.

Saameh: Absolutely. Open-ended, like the white ... You have the white paper and a few basic paint colors with brushes. Not too much, overwhelming. So intentional. Awesome. Thank you. Keep them coming.

Gail: So great. One way we can tap into joy and wonder of teaching is through following the child's lead. It provides a lot of joy. What does it mean to follow the child's lead? What does this require?

Following the child's lead requires being present, definitely being present. That's why I love that we started Teacher Time with just that slow breathing to help us be present because if we aren't present, if we're thinking about other things, it's really hard to follow a child's lead and to get that joy. Being present, being aware of what is happening, noticing what the child is curious about ... Teacher Gabe does this so well. What they are exploring and playing with – here, it's just watercolor paints and white paper. Being in the moment and pausing. Joining the child in their joy and wonder of exploring their surroundings – such a powerfully powerful, powerful teaching tool to help us get our joy.

Following the child's lead takes flexibility. That is definitely for sure. [Laughter] We can adjust our plans to match children's joy, their wondering, their ideas, and interests. This means listening carefully to children, being responsive to their cues and what they are motivated to do and play with. I notice, there is a moment there where Gabe is really wanting to help them make a certain color to follow that. The child then offers a couple other colors, and Gabe just follows that lead, to see what will that create.

Following children's lead also involves thoughtful and careful planning and ongoing observation and reflection on children's behaviors and learning. We saw our viewers are commenting a lot about that. Teachers just really build on children's interests by providing some additional resources and learning opportunities and further information that extend their children's thinking and learning. Listening and taking the cues from the children. So important.

We are going to watch the video of Teacher Gabe and the group of children another time. We're going to watch it one more time. It's so good, we have to watch it again. But this time let's focus on how he follows their lead. We already had some examples but see if you can think of all the ways that Gabe is following the children's lead. As you are watching it, put that into the Q&A. What do you see as the way that Gabe is doing that. Then, if you have some other examples of how educators follow children's lead in their play, you can put that in there as well. Here we go. Gabe, one more time, let's run it back.

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Gabe: Orange. OK, so let me write this stuff down.

[Video ends]

Gail: Oh my gosh, I love it so much. Let's see what our experts are noticing out there. Doing what the kids say to make – yes, yes, even though he was focused first on making green, he follows the lead, like red, OK. They are picking the colors. Go ahead.

Saameh: Repeat the child's idea, green, and extend the question to the group. With that extension of learning and that question to go deeper into that.

Gail: Yes, helping the child in the red sweater with language. Absolutely. Mackenzie, such a great observation that Gabe seems just as excited as they did. It's so true. It's so true. I got to teach with Teacher Gabe, true story, for a little bit. He was just always like that, so excited and just very interested in children and what they were thinking. I think that that makes for a great guided-play guide if you will. Teacher tone, yes. Repeating what the children are saying, absolutely.

Saameh: I just love it so much. Open-ended questions again. This video never gets old. I can't tell you how many times I've watched and every time I catch something new. I notice something new. Wonderful. We heard Teacher Gabe acknowledging and repeating questions, just as you were all saying, by saying, "That's a wonderful question," and "Devin had a question. How do you make green?" just as somebody said in the chat. Facilitating the children in working together and exploring this concept further. To deepen and extend that curiosity and that learning, and that critical exploration of that subject matter, color, right, color mixing.

The educator exciting play through responsive interactions, as we all were saying, by observing the child, being present with them in their play, and then commenting on what you see happening, you can gently guide play and extend learning. He's ... And gently, I think, is the key word. He's gently using a few things here and there, as far as open-ended questions are concerned, and then really taking a step back and seeing the beautiful learning and interaction and curiosity questions that are coming out of that. And discovery. Responding to children's interests in a curious, open, and playful way supports children to further develop their questions and curiosities, offering deeper exploration, engagement, and learning, as we saw here and were all saying together. Sounds like we're all on the same page.

Gail: We are. I want to say I love Rena, who is joining us today. Rena said she caught that at the beginning, he says "We were talking about love at circle time."

Saameh: I know.

Gail: What a great opening too, and great observation. Very keen. All of our experts joining us today have very keen observation skills, I will say. Wanda, following up with mouse paint. Absolutely.

Saameh: Wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing and keep them coming. Even if we move on, you can keep them coming in the chat. We have an amazing Q&A team to be responding to any of those.

Gail: Our Q&A team sends it out; sends out your ideas too, so these are great.

Another thing that guided play does, which I think we're already, we have experts that are already picking up on this and telling us this in the Q&A, is that it allows teachers to really focus children's play around specific learning goals. These could be goals from the ELOF, which can be applied to a variety of topics across developmental domains. It could be learning counting or which one is more, which is what Kathy gave us that example of, how easy is it to just add numbers to a pole when children are bouncing a ball to see how high it goes and counting how high it goes. You can embed the learning goal inside the guided play, which is so exciting.

The teacher doesn't need to take over the play because then that becomes something else. That might become more of a direct instruction moment. We're not really going to take over the play, but either through setting up the environment or with our language and asking questions, we can guide children into specific learning goals. Gabe's example helped the child compare and categorize observable phenomena, such as sorting objects into groups based on simple attributes like color. Gabe actually deepens the learning in that area just by following the children's lead but asking questions. It means we really need to know child development and looking at that ELOF before we're learning so that we can with ease integrate that into it.

The learning goal is just naturally intertwined. I like how that's said on this slide with children's play. Again, children are provided with support. Either the role of the supporting environment is to set it up so that it's more likely that those learning goals will happen. Also, it could be through an interaction that I bring into the child's life. Again, adding that learning goal is really a distinction around that guided play. So important.

Saameh: Absolutely. Now, our segment that you all know and love: Small Change, Big Impact, where we share how small adjustments to the way we set up our learning environment, modify our curriculum or engage with children can make a big difference in the child's learning.

We know that children vary in their learning characteristics and how they engage with the people and materials in their learning environment. These small changes, also known as curriculum modifications, are made based on the individual needs of a child, to help promote their engagement and participation. We know that when children are more engaged, they have more opportunities to learn. Some children might need more highly individualized teaching to help them fully participate and engage, such as embedded teaching or intensive individualized teaching. Making curriculum modifications based on a child's individual learning needs can be a great place to start to support engagement. The two curriculum modifications we are going to be discussing today are embedding child preferences and making a play plan.

Gail: I'm so excited about this. Remember we started with the House Framework, and people were familiar with it. At the roof of the House is actually this highly individualized teaching and learning. These modifications might be some things that we start thinking about in the roof. But really, it's when we notice that a child is perhaps not taking advantage of a certain learning center or a learning activity ... How can we make a small change that might really help them so that they can benefit from the learning and the play that happens in that area?

Here is one of my favorite ones. This is so easy to do, and I think that our experts joining us today and sending things into the Q&A have already implied this as being a modification that they might make, which is embedding the child's preferences. When we set up our learning environments – and this is a very center-based perspective here – but when we set up our learning environment, how can we take something that a child is really interested in, a preference that they have ... The preference might be for a certain material, a certain toy, a certain person, even a certain theme or topic. How can we embed that into the learning environment so that a child is more likely to go there?

Here is an example. This is from ... This is vintage photos from when I was a Head Start teacher. You can see a picture on the left there. It says, "Let's travel." It says, "Let's ravel," but there is a T behind there. "Let's travel." This is the dramatic play area. We would change the dramatic play area on a weekly basis to keep it novel and exciting and following the child's lead.

There was one of the children, the child that had the engineering cap on there, that was not ... If you watched them during our free play or our choice time, they often would isolate themselves and not go to the dramatic play area. That was never a place that they would go. They would have very, very few social interactions. We really wanted to make sure that this child came to the dramatic play area and engaged in some play with others. Knowing that this child really loved trains – that was a topic and a thing that really motivated them; it was their preference, their preferred topic, and toy – we changed the dramatic play area into a train station.

What was really fun is that they were the one that would sell the train tickets to get on the train. This child went from never going to the dramatic play area to going there a lot of the time and going from having very few – like none, I would say – social interactions to having multiple social interactions because every child wanted to ride on the train. They got to interact every time with the child and sell them a train ticket. That was a way that we used their preference to get them to that dramatic play area, and then some of this joyful playful learning could take place.

Then, we took that outside even too because this child had some expertise around trains and train tracks. We just added some Duplo trains outside with some sidewalk chalk. Again, setting up the environment but embedding that child's preference. Now, he was actually drawing the train tracks, and the children would follow along. I think a really easy to implement ... What is the child interested in? Then embedding that into the play area so that you increase the child's experiences in that playful learning.

Saameh: I love that story so much, Gail. Thank you for sharing. It's so inspiring.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: We need a bag. What are we going to put in the bag?

[Video ends]

Gail: Oh, sorry. Sorry. The next one is Making a Play Plan. That is there. This is one to make a modification, again, to the curriculum. Sometimes children just need a little bit more guidance in terms of how to play in the learning area. Making a play plan helps the child. It provides them with a visual reminder of what to do during the interaction. It could be a visual pictures that you put up in that learning area, or it could be an individualized play plan. Sorry. Now, we're going to look at an example of creating a plan as a curriculum modification, and see what you notice.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: We need a bag. What are we going to put in the bag?

Child 1: What this say?

Teacher 1: This says "Put away. Give to a friend." This is Andy's plan in dramatic play, and we can play with him. He's going to get a bag, clean the table, put the food away, make a phone call. Let's do the first step.

Child 1: OK, Sue.

Child 1: OK.

Teacher 1: Andy, Baru is going to help you set the table. Layer up. You're going to help put the food on the plate. The next thing you're going to do is ...

Child 1: Put your kitchen.

Teacher 1: And then what's the last step?

Child 1: Just put it up there, OK? You do it, OK?

Teacher 1: OK.

Child 1: It's my mom. Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad. OK, I'll be right back my home.

[Video ends]

Gail: I love that video. Let's see what people noticed about that in terms of making a play plan. Curious to know if other people are doing that in their spaces as well, making a play plan. We see that the child can easily follow it because of the visuals that are there. The teacher is doing a nice job of giving a little bit more directed but not taking over the play. Just helping support that child in their play, so that they would have an idea of what to do in that area.

Saameh: That was definitely the gentle direction we were talking about earlier. Gentle Guidance. Oh, here we go. We have some ...

Gail: Using visuals, teacher supported structuring. So great.

Saameh: I love how flexible the children and teacher are with including the child.

Gail: Board Maker. Yes, Judy has Board Maker. That is a software program that can help make visuals.

Saameh: Very cool. OK, keep them coming in. We're going to move on to our new segment, Teacher Toolbox, to make sure we have time. Our Teacher Toolbox today includes a practical strategy to ensure active engagement and guided play in the learning environment. This tool will support ... The tool that we have today in our Teacher Toolbox will support playful learning and joyful teaching in preschool, which is what we are talking about today, right?

Gail: That is right. I'll do this quickly. We have a lot of information about this in the Viewer's Guide as well. Zoning is part of our Teacher Toolbox today. Zoning is important when we think about guided play. Zoning is essentially this: It is ... Instead of having the adults in the early-learning setting follow a specific child, we zone.

We play the zone model, and that is that we might split the classroom into as many adults as we have during that time of the day, during our free choice time. If we have a teacher or an assistant teacher and an aid is often what we – or not often, but a frequent way that we see the staffing happen in a classroom. We'll divide the room into three zones, one for each adult.

Zone One would be that math and science and art area. Zone Two, blocks, etc. Zone Three is the Circle area, music, dramatic play, library. Then the adult that's assigned to that zone – so if I was assigned to Zone Three, I would know that I'm responsible for watching children in that area, actively engaging them, guiding their play. I'm also thinking about what modifications or play plans are required to help support children in that zone. If I only have two adults, then I have two zones.

The idea here is that it prevents clumping, and it prevents a teacher getting too distracted and being in just one learning center and losing sight of everything else that's happening in the classroom. Zoning can be helpful for that. The other way that we can support zoning is by creating a staff schedule. I know that when I was teaching in my Head Start classroom, the staff schedule was incredibly helpful. We would love to hear if people are using these.

Essentially, what you see across the top is that we don't have teacher names. We have staff person A, B, and C. This could be the lead teacher, the assistant teacher, and a parent volunteer. It could be the co-teachers A and B, and C is the speech-language therapist that comes in for a certain part of the day. You can divide that up. Or the high school intern, whatever that is. If you only had two staff people, you would put two staff positions there. Basically, it looks at every aspect of the day, and it assigns a task.

What do the adults do to help the classroom flow easily during arrival? Staff person A is going to greet children and parents. Staff person B is already over at the cubbies, helping children put their backpacks away. Staff person C is ready to get the children's hands washed and sit them down for breakfast. You could see that right from the beginning, everybody knows where they

are supposed to be and what they are supposed to be doing. At the breakfast time, staff person A knows they're at the red table, staff person B knows that they're at the blue table, and because certain children sit at the blue table, I know I need an adaptive spoon there so that the child can start eating independently right away. Staff person C is at the green table. You can just see how this would really help.

When it comes down to the Center time, we know which zone the person is in and any special modifications that might be needed to help support children's play and learning in that area. Again, more information in the Viewer's Guide.

If you have a schedule, let us know. Yes, Grace is asking if there are two teachers present. You just make it two people. The other thing I would say that was great about this as a teacher is that if somebody calls in sick that day, you can say, "OK." Maybe the director comes in to support you until the substitute can be there. Or now you're going to pull in a volunteer from another classroom. You can say, "You're going to be staff person C." They can quickly see what it is that they are responsible for. Really helps with running a classroom more smoothly.

Saameh: Now for our segment, the BookCASE. The BookCASE is where we highlight books related to our episode's theme. I'm so excited to hear about the books this month, from our Teacher Time Librarian, Emily Small, in conversation with Gail Joseph. Here we go.

[Video begins]

[Music]

Gail: Hi everyone, and welcome to our segment, the BookCASE. I'm here with Teacher Time Librarian, Emily Small.

Emily Small: Hello, again.

Gail: Let me explain what the BookCASE is if it's your first time joining us. So CASE is actually an acronym that we like to use to help us be very intentional about selecting children's books. C actually stands for Connecting the learning objectives to what we see in the book. The A is for Advanced Vocabulary, seeking out some advanced vocabulary words we can teach young children. S means Supporting Engagement while we're reading the book. E stands for Extending the learning beyond the book. Now, we have – looks like you brought a great collection of books. I think you're going to walk through some of them and then make the case for one of them.

Emily: Yep, and there's cases for all of them in your Viewer's Guide, but we're just going to briefly touch on a few of them.

Gail: I love it.

Emily: Our first one is "Wonder Walkers." This one has two children that decide to go on a walk throughout close to their home. They're just thinking and wondering out loud about the experiences they're having.

Gail: I love it.

Emily: It will definitely make you think a little bit differently about the world around you.

Gail: Aw, nice.

Emily: "They Say Blue" is both a book about the color blue and colors in general, but also thinking more deeply about colors and how we explore them. Beautiful illustrations.

Gail: Gorgeous illustrations. Oh my gosh. I can't wait to look at that one.

Emily: Then we have "Milo Imagines the World," which is a great one about little boy Milo who is on the train with his sister, and how he imagines other people's lives and how he illustrates them on his journey.

Gail: I love this illustrator, too. One of my favorites. This is great.

Emily: So great. And then we're going to make the CASE for "Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood." This is actually based on a true story. Yeah, down in San Diego. It's connected to our ELOF of the approaches to learning, specifically creativity. We see Mira here, a young artist who wants to bring beauty to her neighborhood. She meets a muralist and then there's color added and vibrancy added to the neighborhood.

Gail: I love that.

Emily: We've got some great advanced vocabulary in here with words like sparkling and glow. Pizzazz. Great word. Yes, so definitely read this one ahead of time to think about how you're going to explain those words to kids, because some of them may ...

Gail: I love that. That's a great tip, to think the advance vocabulary word and then think about how I'm going to explain that word to a child so I can connect this new word to something that might be familiar.

Emily: Exactly. For supporting engagement, ask kids to think about what they would want to draw a mural about, and then maybe after you've read the story together. Record that all on a large piece of paper. They can see each other's ideas and then create your own mural. You could do this inside; you could do it outside. Bring some more beauty and creativity to your learning environment.

Gail: I love that. "Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood," and how we can be thinking about how art can transform our early learning settings.

Emily: Exactly. I should mention this also comes in Spanish.

Gail: Oh, great. Thank you, Teacher Time librarian, Emily.

Emily: Thanks for having me. It's always a joy. Bye.

[Video ends]

Saameh: Thank you so much. Those are such wonderful books to hear a little bit more about. We're going to turn our attention to you. We do our best caregiving and teaching when we feel well ourselves. Engaging in self-care practices can help us build greater social and emotional capacity to be present in the moment with the children in our care and experience the joy of teaching and learning. Here's one quick strategy that we can use to get into that calm present space.

Gail: I'm very excited. We're going to go quickly. You probably wondered why I was just dealing with paper over here. I wasn't being rude. I was creating a telescope because today's tip is moving your telescope. If you've joined Teacher Time before, you've heard this one before. Because we love it so much, we're going to repeat it. Basically, we can all get stuck on the negative of the situation. It's like our telescope gets stuck and we can't move it. All we can see is the negativity of the situation. Maybe it's a policy change. Maybe it's that you're stuck in traffic. Maybe it's ... Just whatever it is, all you can see and persevere on is the negative. You're just fixed.

This little strategy is to move your telescope to recognize when, wow, all I'm seeing is the negative about this situation. I'm just fixated on the disappointment or the stress of the situation. I'm stuck in traffic. What moving your telescope is saying, "Is there anything positive I can see in this situation? Can I see anything outside of the negative?" Maybe if I'm stuck in traffic, the opportunity I see is that, "Wow, I'm actually going to get to listen to my favorite song and sing along." Or I'm going to – I've got hands-free, and I can actually call a friend. Maybe I'm stuck in traffic in a bus. Then I can call a parent or a friend and have a conversation with them. That's something positive I can see. If you want to have a little strategy, it's just to move your telescope.

I've got a great friend, and she loves this strategy too. If she hears me getting a little too spiraling down in the negativity, she says, "Hey, telescope up." I say the same thing to her. You can share this with your teaching teams as well to remind you when you might need to telescope up. Remind yourself and remind others. We are so glad that you joined us today.

Saameh: Thank you so much. Join us for our next webinar in February. February 1 with Becky Sugam and Mike Brown. Thank you so much all. This is wonderful. Thank you for your sharing and your engagement.

Gail: We will see you on My Peers. We'll see you for our preschool version back in March. Thank you so much.