

Providing Culturally Responsive and Individualized Infant and Toddler Care

Everyone Belongs: Creating Authentically Inclusive and Equitable Infant and Toddler Care

Danny Torres: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the second session of our online conversation series, Providing Culturally Responsive and Individualized Infant and Toddler Care. Today's topic, "Everyone Belongs: "Creating Authentically Inclusive and Equitable Infant and Toddler Care." Thank you all very much for joining us to speak about this very important topic. Now I'd like to introduce Catherine Goins, division director at WestEd. She'll be introducing the session today. Thank you, Catherine, for joining us.

Catherine Goins: You're welcome. Good morning. Good afternoon. It was wonderful to see so many familiar names popping up into the chat. We are so thrilled that you could join us for this very important conversation. You know, I was reflecting and thinking that this year, Peter, actually marks the 30th anniversary since I first attended a PITC Institute and it absolutely transformed my practice, first as a teacher and an administrator, and seeing how so many infant and toddler lives have been transformed nationally and internationally through the PITC work has really been one of the highlights of my career.

And today's topic of belonging and inclusion is always an important topic, but it takes on particular significance during this time where we are reckoning with our twin pandemics, coming out of COVID-19, but also America's racial reckoning and what that means for our work. And it's a wonderful opportunity as we think about how we want to move forward in that space. It is my absolute pleasure to introduce one of my true heroes, Dr. Peter Mangione, who is not only the senior managing director at WestEd over Infant, Toddler, and Early Childhood Development, but he is also director of Early Childhood Strategic Initiatives. Peter.

Peter Mangione: Thank you, Catherine, for that introduction and for your kind, wonderful words about PITC. It is amazing to think that it was 30 years ago when we first met at a PITC training. I have the great pleasure today of introducing and having a conversation with Senta Greene. Senta is the founder and

CEO of Full Circle Consulting Systems, Incorporated, an international consulting firm specializing in the science of child and adolescent development, transformational leadership, community, and family engagement.

Senta celebrates a distinguished career of almost 30 years in education. She has a deep commitment to inspiring educators, school leaders, and policy makers to serve all children and their families with exceptional aptitude, excellence, and dedication. Senta is a frequent writer, speaker, and advisor on cultural humility, inclusive education, family engagement, and transformational leadership and reflective practice. She has testified before the United States Congress and has been recognized at the state, national, and international levels with awards for excellence in teaching and service. Her work has stimulated innovative curriculum designs in early childhood education, groundbreaking policy development in special education, and systems change in the United States, Austria, Finland, and Jamaica.

Senta has served in the role of teacher, home visitor, early intervention specialist, inclusion specialist, college instructor, consultant, administrator, and master trainer. She is one of the original members of the Early Head Start national think tank and a former disabilities and infant-toddler specialist in a Head Start region. And from my point of view, one of her most important roles is she has been a leading member of our PITC faculty now for several years. Senta, welcome. I'm very much looking forward to the conversation with you today. Senta, you need to unmute.

Senta Green:

I was sharing with you. Thank you so much, Peter, for the introduction and to be in conversation with you today. And I just think it's very powerful and wonderful that WestEd is creating a space for us to come together to think together and inform and inspire what's happening in our profession. So, I'm honored, and I'm delighted to be here and I can't wait to see where our conversation takes us.

Peter Mangione:

Neither can I. It's very exciting and also very important. When we started our work around infant-toddler care, it was always important to us that our work included everyone, included all children, included all families. And that's been a journey for us to understand the meaning of what it means to be included. I think as time has passed and as we've done more and more of this work and as our society has started to look at the idea of equity and inclusion much more thoughtfully and reflectively, we're growing with that, too. And today, when think about the idea of to be

included in an infant and toddler program, infants, toddlers, and their families, let's explore what that means, Senta. What are your thoughts?

Senta Green:

Hmm. I have many thoughts and I'm gonna do my best to couch it in a way that broadens and deepens the conversation. I'm reflecting on what you just shared, Peter. I think about historically, I've been blessed to be a part of this profession for close to three decades, and I've learned a lot. And initially, when we were thinking about inclusion, we used the words a sense of belonging, participation, membership. Those things have not changed, but I do believe that we have added more descriptive words and ways of being to really understand what we mean by participation, membership, and belonging.

So, when I think about inclusion, I think about that it's an immersive experience and it begins with us. And I also think about that it's a vision that I hope everyone gets to experience, not just as an infant, but as a way of being, that it is something that is constant in someone's life. So, especially when I think about infants and toddlers as they are coming forth in this world to know that they're met with inclusion, so that means you are seen, you are felt, you are heard, you are regarded, you're understood, and you're known. So that's what I think about when I think about inclusion and the literature points to that as well. But there's something to be said when an infant or a toddler or a family member or a staff member feels seen, felt heard, regarded, known, and understood.

Peter Mangione:

And when I hear those words, Senta, what it makes me think right away is how are we relating to that? To be seen, to be heard, to be understood, to be valued, it's for who you are, how you show up. We don't have the expectation, I think. If we're truly doing that, if we're truly valuing and hearing and are listening and understanding, that we don't have any expectation that the person, that the infants, toddlers, their families, their parents are any different than they are. They come as themselves into the program. And that, to me, as I've thought about that idea that we want to understand and listen and not be agents of change, so to speak, but be receivers and be responsive to the infants and toddlers and families, that's a different way of relating, I think, from the way I was trained originally when I got into the early childhood field. We always had this understanding we had something to give, but over time, as we've thought about being responsive, it's really, we have an opportunity to learn and to be open to whoever shows up in any way that they do.

Senta Green:

Absolutely. And when I hear that, Peter, it speaks to who we are, how we're enrolling ourselves in the experience and listening and

understanding, those are skillsets that take practice and a level of consciousness. And so sometimes we could say, it's important to listen and understand your families, but if I'm at capacity, meaning I might be stressful or I'm trying to manage schedules and there's so much going on, it's easy to miss the opportunity of slowing down the pace, being present with an infant, being present with a toddler or that parent and saying, I'm going to fully enroll myself to listen to understand so that I can learn more about you and be more responsive to what it is that you're bringing to me.

And so, I love that you called out those two words, being able to listen and to understand, but that also signals to me a level of consciousness and practice and wellbeing in order to be able to do that effectively. So, I love that and those are two words that I think should be lifted and part of our vocabulary, but I want to keep going back to when you say relating, I think of being. How am I showing up? How am I messaging to someone else that I see you, that I hear you, that I may not fully understand, but I am attempting to understand? And so, I'm glad that you're bringing that into view, and I just want to underscore that it's a practice and it takes a level of consciousness and care to be able to do it.

That doesn't mean that it's difficult and that it shouldn't be done or that you feel like, oh my goodness, it's too much. It's actually something that we can practice every single day, just even right now in this moment, that I'm enrolling myself and I'm leaning in. I'm listening to you, and I'm taking note of what you're saying to me, and I'm giving back what I believe I'm hearing, so that we can open up and have a conversation. So, then you get to learn more about me, and I get to learn about you, and I could individualize care and do all those wonderful things that we need to do.

Peter Mangione: It's that opening up, and what I'm hearing is, as you're talking and in your words, Senta, and I really liked that you said, you know, we're learning together and I might be accurate or I might not, but we'll have a conversation and figure that out. What I'm hearing is we not only need to listen and understand that being, that quality of being, we not only need to listen and understand the families and the infants and toddlers, but we also have to listen to ourselves as we're doing that, to have that quality of being, that way of being with families, so that we know ourselves and can relate authentically to the families. And that takes, I wouldn't call it work. I think it takes attention and it takes reflection. It takes really getting to know yourself and who you are as you relate to others, as you're present with others, what messages you're giving as you're relating, how your way of being expresses to families or communicates to families.

Yes, I'm with you. I'm listening. I'm interested. I want to understand. Help me do that. And we can do that best if we really examine our mindset, really examine what we're thinking, really examine what it means to us if a family who shows up is homeless or what it means to us if a family shows up and speaks a different language and I have difficulty communicating with that family or what it means to us if a family shows up and they've experienced trauma in some other way. So, all of that is, I think we become more accessible, more present. We have that way of being if we can reflect on all that meaning for us and then use that reflection and carry on with that reflection as we relate to families.

Senta Green:

Mm-hmm. There's so much to what you just shared that it says to me that inclusion has universal implications. So, when we think of inclusion, like how you just called out you might be working with a family that is part of the homeless population, you might be working with families that are bilingual, multilingual, you might be working with families of children with disabilities, the conversation that we're having and where we start it, there's universal implications. So anyone can show up in our program and everything that we're talking about today has application to that life, whomever it is.

And so, I really appreciate you using the words attention and reflection opposed to work, because that, it is a mindset. And I also believe it's a mindset and it's a heart set. So what I'm loving about this conversation, Peter, and I'm really gonna try to contain myself, but seriously, I get so excited because what we're doing right now is moving the needle, once again, if you will, that we can read an article, we can read a book, we could take a class and we can take a training or professional development session, and we could rattle off things like listen to your families, understand their perspective, utilize reflective practice. And all of those things are incredibly important and real.

What I'm loving is in order to do those things, that's internal work. That's internal processing. That's internal attention. That's internal reflection in order to be able to do the exterior work that people see when they engage with us. And to me, that's where the change is. That's where the transformation is and that's where the joy is because now, we're not just saying, here's some things you need to do. Here's some statistics you need to look at. But what you're saying is let's talk about the skillset, the tool set, the heart set, the mindset that goes into this process. And to me, that's the joy of doing this work, to be able to enter into a space and be incredibly curious about the lives that are here with me.

I mean, that's joyful to think about I'm going to have, I think about Ron, Dr. Ron Lally. I think about curiosity of heart, like what does that look like? What does that sound like? What does that feel like when we're in the moment? And then there's the piece about a practice of self-compassion, too, that sometimes we want to get these things quote, unquote right and that can be a trap in of itself. I've never worked with a child with cerebral palsy before. I don't know how to do this. But if I have the heart set that I see this as a child, this is a child first, this is a child that has some different abilities and is doing development a little bit differently than what I know, can I get curious about that and find a way to want to learn about that and explore that experience?

The mindset, the heart set is so crucial to this work. You can have a beautiful center with all the things that are needed to care for infants and toddlers, but if the mindset and the heart set is not there, it is an empty building and there's not connection. There's not warmth. There's not individualization. There's not responsiveness. And so, I really enjoy having these conversations because I say that I don't want our workforce to keep having to repeat. It's worth repeating from the perspective of keeping it alive, keeping the legacy of the work alive. What does it mean to work or practice or engage from an equitable standpoint?

What does it mean to be fully inclusive? Those conversations will continue to come, but if we don't do the things that we're talking about now in this moment of our internal work and being able to be supported in our centers and that program leaders look and say every day that I turn the key to open up the building or to flip the switch to turn on the lights, in my central view, I'm always thinking about the children, the families, and my staff, and my staff. Often, we say children and families and we don't include the staff, but yet we're asking them to be inclusive of children and families.

But if they're not experiencing it in the day-to-day of a place that they work and represent, sometimes it's hard to do that in an effective, authentic way because you're not experiencing it yourself as a person who's supposed to be providing this level of care. So, when I say inclusion, there's that all means all. I truly mean all means all. And as I'm calling in, not calling out, I'm calling in the program leaders and I'm saying we have to be equally thoughtful and equally courageous and equally engaged about our children and families as we are about our staff. And so, I just want to open it up and just think about inclusion, that it truly means all. It's not just the children and families.

Peter Mangione: I think that's a wonderful idea. And you have stirred so many thoughts in me and reflected back a couple ideas. I want to go back a little bit to how you were receiving families and this idea that we keep learning and every moment is a learning moment and a moment of reflection, that being inclusive means being alive and being present and being willing to learn at any moment and take a risk and make a mistake, but also learn from that mistake. And as you reflected back to me, one thought that came to me was, we'd been working on this concept, I refer to families who are experiencing homelessness and it occurred to me, and in two weeks from now I'm going to have a conversation with Mary Jane Maguire-Fong and Marcella Clark, and in that conversation, we're going to explore what home means and that really, no family is homeless or is experiencing homelessness.

So, it really is, in a sense, to have that idea in my head, that mindset or even to say the word is a little bit of a misunderstanding. And how can I deepen my understanding and realize home can mean a lot of different things to people and how do I discover that meaning for any infant, toddler, or family, rather than make an assumption, rather than going in and thinking that I know already what a particular family's situation is or how they're understanding their situation, which is much more important than what I see or think, and then how can I understand that? How can I use that as a learning moment, have that curiosity?

Another term that Ron used, compassionate sense of wonder, which is just a compassionate openness, and not trying to change, just letting it be, letting yourself be and letting the family be and learning together. I also think about the way you started talking about a child with a disability or not. Again, that's a word, it's really different abilities. And how do we learn about those abilities and start with seeing what assets that child has and the remarkable ways that that child engages in learning, and the amazing developmental path or journey that that child is on, and how can we learn about that and join in and share that experience with the child and the family in a way that really helps us know ourselves better and not only relate to that particular family in the moment, but teaches us or helps us learn how the next family, we have some new, amazing discovery to make and continue in that process. It's that willingness to not feel that you've got it, that you really are getting it all the time.

Senta Green: Mm-hmm. Yeah. It's a constant state of being and we never just really arrive because we get the joy of doing this work for a really long time if we choose to. And every family that comes into our program is going to present differently. There's information that you can access from a previous family or children that you have worked with in the past that

gives you almost like a gateway or entryway to begin a conversation with a new family. However, it's positioning ourselves to be fully present to what this family is bringing and what their perspective is. And I just, when I hear you say this idea that what development looks like for each child, how it shows up for each child, there's something in of itself and just thinking about children from that lens to bear witness to how this child is going to do development.

And it may not look like how the child that is right next to him or her is doing development. It's like we all show up in our own unique way. And I'm not discrediting or devaluing or demystifying developmental milestones. I'm not saying that by any means. I'm just lifting up the beauty and the complexity of development and having an appreciation for how development unfolds for each life and to be able to see each child as a life, as an opportunity to see how they're gonna move through our program and how can I see life from that infant's eyes? How can I see life from that family's eyes?

And a lot of that comes from what you said when we said hello and welcome is being able to listen, to pay attention and reflect and observe and to make meaning from that. That's the other piece is to make meaning from it. So back in the day, we used to talk about practice a lot. We don't talk about practice anymore, but when you think about reflect, there's the reflecting piece, but what am I gonna do with that information? And if I'm challenged or stuck when I think about my program, who can I turn to for resource, information, guidance, or even a sounding board to be able to say, I'm challenged? I'm challenged. I don't know, but I'm curious and I want to learn.

And when I think about that, that's inclusion. That's saying your voice as a program administrator, as a coach, as a mentor, this teacher's voice is not diminished because they're sharing a hardship that they're having, but it's an opportunity. So, what I'm bringing forward, Peter, is that I don't want to cast a light and say that emotions are not real when people are trying to figure out, how do I serve this baby? And how do I serve this baby well? How do I do right by this child that the parents are entrusting me to take care of this life? And there's some gravity to that, especially if I don't have experience in working with families that are biracial, bicultural, that have newly come to the United States.

I'm limited in my knowledge scope in that, or I've never worked with a child with significant medical health needs. Can I divulge that without being diminished as a professional, to be able to say this is difficult, but the responsibility I have is that I want to own it. I want to learn from it. I

want to grow, but I also need help along my journey. I just want to put that out there.

Peter Mangione: Yes.

Senta Green: You know, and I'll talk about all the strategies and all the ideas and things like that, but I want us to be real because we know what our statistics and the research looks like in regards to our workforce right now in early care and education, and we talk a lot about mental wellness and building capacity and self-care. I know we're talking about inclusion and equitable practices, but for me, when I think about equity in early care and education, if we're not talking about the health and wellness of the workforce to be able to do the work like be inclusive, then we're not being equitable to the workforce.

We're not giving them what they need in order to be successful. So, I just, I think it's an important part of the conversation. Not always an easy part, but an important part.

Peter Mangione: Absolutely. It's essential. And we know that what we're asking someone who's providing care to an infant and toddler and care to the families to do requires so much of self. It does require an understanding of development. It does require an understanding of how to set up a program, how to support learning, all the things that we explore when we talk about the Program for Infant-Toddler Care or other professional development that people experience. That is all essential, but that's just the starting point. If you really are going to be effective of doing all that we say is what all infants need from us, that responsive relationship, if you're really going to be effective at that, you need to feel yourself, that you're being taken care of.

Senta Green: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Peter Mangione: Yes.

Senta Green: And to me, that's not just from my life experience of doing this work for close to 30 years, I came into the profession with an inclusive mindset because that's how I started. And to a degree, I might be biased because in a lot of ways, that's all I really know. And so, when I think about inclusion, I think about just that. There's a skillset and a knowledge base that program leaders and teachers have to have. So, we talk about infant care teachers and their knowledge base and knowing how to set up an environment that's responsive to all the children that's in the space, that's developmentally appropriate.

And we could talk about that at another time, but developmentally responsive to the individual cultural dynamics that are happening and taking place in the center. And all of those things are incredibly important. I really want to lift up, expand, and then deepen the concept and the experience of inclusion. It's really understanding that yes, it is a concept. It's an idea. It's a construct in early care and education, but it's also an experience. And like I said when we first started, it's an experience that I wish for everyone to have, for everyone to experience that.

And so sometimes it's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day management of a program or the day-to-day being responsive in your classroom or when you have, you're blessed to be able to knock on somebody else's door and cross their threshold because you're a home visitor and you're there to provide service or you have families coming directly into your home because you're a family childcare provider. If we can just think, how am I enrolling myself in this experience? And to be conscious of it as much as we possibly can. And that's why I was saying it's a practice.

When we were talking in one of our many conversations, we were saying, there are things that we could do in ways that are tangible or physical in the environment that sends messages to children and families that you are welcomed, and you belong. And it could be something as simple, but we know incredibly important, as a sign that says welcome families, right? That there are things in your environment right now, and I'm engaging with you, Peter, but I also know we have an audience, that there are things in your environment right now that you can picture in your mind, if you're not in that environment right now, when you go back to it, that signal to you about inclusion.

I guarantee, there are things already in your environment that you can picture that signal to you, this is an inclusive space. You belong here. So, the question is, how can we use those things that are in our space to condition our hearts and minds as reminders? We might walk past that sign every day that says welcome families. But after today, if we could look at that sign and that's my conscious reminder to ask myself, what does that mean for me and how I'm showing up to work today? What does that mean for my children, my families, or my staff?

Every day that I pass that sign or every day I put my key and I turn the lock, to know that this is my opportunity today as I open my door to be inclusive, to include somebody else in my life and for me to be included in theirs. I think about those things all the time because we have so many

wonderful things in our environment and sometimes it's just on autopilot, if you will. We turn on the lights and we set up the environment and we do the day-to-day.

Peter Mangione: Right.

Senta Green: And what I'm sharing is, is there a way for us to slow down and the next time do an environmental scan or even after this Zoom call or tomorrow, do an environmental scan and see, what are the things in your environment that you feel connected to that signals that my children are seen, felt, heard, regarded, and understood? I'm not even talking about ourselves yet as human resource, but if we could just look at our environment. And I remember we used to say things like get down on your hands and knees, or get on your back and see life from the view of an infant, right? And just take in those things.

But if we can start doing that, it'll just be reminders to stay conscious. It's not a one-time event that we could say, yes, we enrolled 10% of our children and we have 15% of our children in our program that have disabilities or differing abilities or diverse abilities. The question is, how do we live that every day, that all of our families, including those families, are feeling like they're seen, felt, heard, understood, and have a sense of belonging?

Peter Mangione: And as you talk about the physical environment and the messages it sends and being conscious of it for yourself as you enter into it each day as if it's the first time you're entering it and wondering, what does it mean for the families who will be here today? And how do I relate to those families today? How am I with those families today? And I think of it almost as if, as you were talking, what I was hearing was how do I welcome myself into this environment each day and welcome myself to be with families and with infants and toddlers and create this environment together, that it's not so much I'm welcoming infants and toddlers and families to my environment, but we're welcoming each other, the children and the families and ourselves to our environment that we are creating together, to our space, to our life together here, the experience that we're creating.

And if we can truly do that, then it's inclusive because there's no ownership. This is yours. This is who you are and this is who I am. Or this separation, I have this role, you have this other role. But we are together and we are creating together, and I am offering you what I have to offer and you're offering me what you have to offer, and we're gonna learn by doing that together. We're gonna learn by each offering to each other

who we are and how we can be together and what we can create together.

Senta Green:

Absolutely. I heard some things that you just said that talks about the nuances of language that there's my and there's our. I think about the example that you gave for me to say to a family in my classroom, this is what we do. And in my classroom, I welcome you to come in and spend time with your infant or Sarah or Rachel in my classroom. And so, what is signaled is that there's an exclusionary element that we may not even be aware of because we love and own the space, as we should. We care about this space, so we use the word my. And then we may not even be aware of what we're communicating to a family, to a child in my classroom, but I heard you use an inclusive word.

You said our, right? In our classroom, we welcome you to come and sit and be with Rachel. In our classroom, we like to learn about our families, and we invite you to share a part of your life, share something that has meaning for you. Is there a certain blanket or a certain way you like for your child to be held? Is there a certain way that I can pass this information on to the next person? That in our classroom, we value our families, and one of the ways that we show it is that we like to know when Miguelito's upset, how do we comfort him? Because in our classroom, that's really important, our, our experience together.

And it reminds me of third space thinking in regards to, there are three things that actually emerge, and I'm gonna try to pull them all together and do the best that I can and do it in a way that feels coherent. And I love that we're having a conversation 'cause you could say, Senta, help me to understand what you just said.

Peter Mangione:

Right.

Senta Green:

But three concepts I'm going to pull together as we're reflecting on moving from singular ways of thinking to more of a collective way of thinking, I think about validation theory and validation theory is I see, hear, recognize you. It's born out of the work and the research of inclusion. And my theory, my state of mind is to say that I validate you. And how do I validate you? Because I ask you questions about your life and your child's life so that I can learn from you, and I can fold it in and that your child has continuity while they're with me. I'm not trying to replace you. I'm trying to give consistency for your child so that they can be comforted and cared for.

Validation theory. I want to learn from you. Is there a certain song that you sing to your child? Is there a certain way that you hold your child? Is

there a certain way that I need to be mindful because I know your child is sensitive to touch? When you go to pick your child up, where do you start? Do you do an underhand scoop starting from the back? Or do you gently, you know, hold the hands and then gradually pull the child up? I want to know these things. I'm validating, but I'm also being aware of what matters most. I'm individualizing. I mean, I could think of all the policies of PITC just from those moments, right, that's taking place.

And then thinking about what life must be like for families or for children when they're not in our care. Where are they? What are they doing? What's important to them? And how can that show up in the program so that there's continuity of community? And that's the reality pedagogy that I understand that my children, even though they're coming into the center and I'm responsible and caring for them, I know that they have a life before they cross this threshold, and I know they have a life that they returned to when they leave. And do we care enough to say, my inclusive mindset and heart set, I want to be curious about those experiences.

I want to know what life must be like for this child when they're not with me. Those kinds of things are really important, not to judge, but to understand, and even the types of questions that we ask on our intake or enrollment forms, I keep going back to language. Like, I know there are questions that we have to ask, but the next time we look at our forms, can we ask ourselves, am I helping myself and this family to understand, to be understood, to listen, to be listened to? All the things that we're talking about. It's almost like doing, some people call it an inclusion audit, but I don't particularly care for the word audit, but I mean, it's an opportunity for the words that you said earlier, to be able to pay attention and reflect, pay attention and reflect.

Can we be more mindful and conscientious about what it is that we're doing and why we're doing it? Can we validate the lives of families? Can we understand that their realities, that they matter to the inclusive fabric of what we do within our program? All those things are incredibly important, I think, to the dialogue and discourse, and to really understand that it's beautiful and it's complex, and it's certainly doable when we feel that we can do it together. And I don't have to carry that burden on my own to know everything and anything about the children and families that I work with, that I could resource the family.

I can resource that beautiful child by being still and observing them or coming alongside them and just watching and paying attention. I can go to my supervisor and say, I'm stuck. I can go to my coach and say, can I share with you a question that I have? So, to me, Peter, and I know we're

coming up on our time, to me, that's all-inclusionary work. It's not just adapting materials in the classroom. It's not just making sure that I have a ramp and access. It's not just making sure that I have things in the environment that's written in multiple languages. All of those things are incredibly important.

They're so important. And then I think, in order to really do the deep, rich work that brings the joy and the impact of early care in education is when we do what we're talking about, the interior work to be able to do the exterior work effectively with others.

Peter Mangione: I want to pick, we have used, we could go on and on, Senta, and I'd love to. I want to pick up on one point, and that is when you were talking about what the child's life is when the child isn't in the program, isn't in the classroom. And it made me think, it's the whole child.

Senta Green: Yes.

Peter Mangione: It's the whole life of the child and the family. It's our whole life. That's what we're meeting together in our programs. And if we think of that whole life and we think of development, and especially the very young child, the infant, the toddler, but even adults like ourselves and teachers and caregivers and parents and other family members who are caring for their children, that we're always trying to make meaning, make sense of the world, and that's a learning experience. And that's so fundamental. And if we think of that developing child trying to make sense of things and we only understand what that child's experiencing in our program, we're not going to understand that sense-making in that entire experience, that whole experience for the child.

Senta Green: The fullness, the wholeness, yes.

Peter Mangione: That's inclusion. That's inclusion. I wish we had more time, but we don't because we want to give folks the chance to ask us questions and hear our responses. And I'm going to invite Arlene Paxton, who directs our PITC Regional Support Network. She's been tracking the questions for us, and she's starting to cluster them together, and so she'll share some with us and give us a chance to respond.

Arlene Paxton: Thank you, Peter and Senta, for that very engaging discussion. So, in the Q and A, we have a question about the workforce and wondering if you could talk a little bit about the ideas you have for equity with the workforce when it comes to wellness. I think, Senta, you touched on this just a little bit earlier. Have you heard of what some folks are doing or providing for their staff?

Senta Green: I think that's an excellent question. Peter, do you mind if I?

Peter Mangione: Please, go ahead, yes.

Senta Green: So, there are a range of things that are happening right now that I can speak directly to that programs are doing throughout the state. One of them is doing wellness series where they happen over a period of time. So, you have programs that are opening themselves up, not just to their immediate early childhood program, but opening up to the community, to the district, and having everyone engage in wellness. And what's really powerful about that is that there's dedicated time that is being embedded throughout. So it's not, let's just do a staff development day where we're taking care of our staff and we're celebrating our staff and then come Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, we don't do anything else.

And maybe six months later, we do another. So, the idea is to embed it and then it's wellness over a period of time. There's a program that's doing life coaching using a reflective supervision model, which is super powerful, in the Northern area. And I think that that is incredible. So, someone who once upon a time served as a reflective supervisor or staff could come and share their gifts, their burdens, their challenges, and get insights and just be able to process what it means to care for children in high-quality situations. There are now people that are taking on a role of life coaching because of the communities in which these staff members are working in.

They also live in. And so, the ACEs, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and the impact of trauma and how that's played out for adults has become real. So, there's the professional learning and development that's being offered. There's in-staff people that is actually onsite now that provides wellness and care and support. There are a lot of people that are doing mindfulness and yoga for not only the staff, but also the children and the families. So, it's adopted as a wellness, a holistic approach when it comes to wellness. Those are just some things that are percolating right now that are coming to mind that, to me, is super exciting, and they're not one and done, but they're embedded because we understand that wellness is something that, it's a continual event that we're constantly practicing and doing.

Peter Mangione: And part of that holistic approach, and in the question that equity came up, and we know that folks who are providing infant and toddler care, it's a very diverse community. And we also know that infant and toddler caregivers are the least compensated group in just about any group of

workers that we have in this country. And that's part of the whole. That's part of the holistic approach that we have to, and that's not something that programs can do themselves, obviously, it is a public policy issue that we have to keep working on because we want to do all the things you talked about, Senta, and we want to make sure people are properly taken care of so they can take care of their own families in their own lives.

Senta Green:

Absolutely. And that's what I was speaking to earlier. That's equity at its finest for our workforce is exactly what you just shared. And more and more are trying to do it, and that's why writing to legislators, using your voice, understanding that, for all of us not to be spectators of our own lives, but to be actively involved and engaged and help people understand how important high-quality care is, but the workforce is a central part of that holistic perspective of high quality.

Arlene Paxton:

Okay, thank you, Peter and Senta. I have another question, and Peter, I'm gonna let you start with this one. Will you discuss the multi-lingual environment and how we support families and create an inclusive program? So, what I'm getting from this question is that we have, you know, multiple languages in this program and we as a staff may not be able to speak all of them. So how do we, in that, create an inclusive environment?

Peter Mangione:

So, we are, next week, going to focus on supporting infants and toddlers and families who are dual language learners. I will sound a couple ideas. One is that we need to think about what our communication is and be authentic. And so, a lot of our communication is non-verbal with infants and toddlers. And we want to be aware of their communication and be responsive to it, read their cues. That's how communication starts, and we have the capacity as humans to communicate with every infant and every infant has the capacity to communicate with us. And it's through that communication that the child starts to learn how to use language to communicate. Now, if you don't speak the child's language and there are other children who speak even different languages, I'll talk about this in more depth next week, but I think that the most authentic way that we can be with children is use the communication style and the language of nurturance that we know.

That's what we're sharing, and if we can do that openly, and at the same time support the child and the family to use their language of nurturance and keep learning, that in each relationship, we can provide the means for the child to develop language, and we know that each relationship experience in which the child has responsive communication and the opportunity to engage in communication with language as the child

develops, and we adults can do that with every child, even if there are several different languages, that that child will develop well. That being able to have that experience in both languages and have both languages develop is really beneficial for the child. So, I could say a lot more about that. We'll share more information next week, but that's the general approach.

Arlene Paxton: Okay, I think we have time for one more question before we wrap up here. This is specific for family childcare and mixed age groups, which we know happens in the family childcare setting. And can you offer some information or thoughts about how to support inclusion when working in mixed age groups for the youngest, for infants and toddlers? You talked a little bit earlier, also, support and inclusion for those families who may be experiencing homelessness, as well. And that was part of the question, but really, how do we approach support and inclusion in mixed age groups and really focusing on the infants and toddlers?

Senta Green: Peter, I was gonna share. I think this is a beautiful time because I believe someone was also interested in knowing more about PITC in regards to policies, and I just think it's a beautiful time to bring those two together, so.

Peter Mangione: Okay. So, the PITC policies, we have these essential policies, primary care, continuity of care, small group, individualization, being responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity, and inclusive care. With those policies, we create the opportunity to be responsive to each individual child and each individual family. What mixed age offers, and with PITC, our philosophy is you can use PITC in a same age setting, you can use it in a mixed age setting, but I think one of the strengths in each... I'm sorry, each of those settings has a strength as you apply the PITC policies. One of the strengths of a mixed age setting is it communicates to the children and everyone else that age really is less important than who you are and where you are in development.

That there's tremendous diversity in that small group of children and how they're developing, and age is just one factor that influences that. So, we have an opportunity, and I was going to say this earlier when we were talking about developmental milestones. They're a starting point for us, not an end point. And I think sometimes in our field, they are an end point. We draw a conclusion based on what we think the child is, where the child is at with a developmental milestone. But if we stop thinking about it by such and such age the child is going to be able to do such and such, and instead start to see each child as an individual who's on a journey of development and has individualistic, unique ways of making

meaning and mix that meaning within a collective group and mix the meaning in the group that you're with and mix the meaning and the community of the family and the community that that family lives in.

And so it is, we see the individual and we see the individual making meaning, but we're relating to the community at the same time. And what happens in a mixed age setting is you have a community of children at different places in development and you can see how all that works together and be responsive to each. It's exciting. It really is. And the children will learn from each other, and the families will learn from each other, as well as the people providing the care. I think that we're at the end of our time now, and what I would like to do, Senta, is thank you so much for this conversation.

I also would like to thank everyone who's with us today for your questions and your interest. It's really a gift to us to be able to share with you our thoughts, and we hope that you can do the same as you engage with your colleagues and consider what we said and use it as a starting point and go from there. I hope that what we can do is be more inclusive of everyone working on this together in our field.

Senta Green:

Thank you so much, Peter. It was both an honor and a pleasure to share a space with you, to think with you, and I'm thankful for everyone who decided to sign up, listen in, and stand up, speak up, and be of support to children and what we call inclusion. So, it was my pleasure.