



Teaching with The Brain In Mind - An Interview with Laura Fish

Episode notes: <https://prekteachandplay.com/podcast21>

Kristie: Hi fellow Early Childhood Solutionaries. This is Kristie, and I'm excited to have an amazing guest with me today: Laura Fish. In today's episode, we'll be talking about how to teach with the brain in mind. You'll not be surprised, but particularly when it comes to large-group activities like Circle Time. Before we get to all of that, let me welcome my very special guest, Laura, and she'll start off telling you a little bit about her own journey to date and how she is a part of the revolution. So, welcome, Laura.

Laura: Thanks, Kristie. The background is pretty varied, because I'm old, but the highlight- I've been working as a preschool teacher which was really the beginning in the early childhood field. I was loving that work, but then I realized that I wanted to do a little bit more with my psychology undergrad degree, so I went back and got my master's degree and had the opportunity to work as a mental health consultant in Connecticut. That job gave me so much experience, varied experience, providing behavioral health services for infant, toddler, and preschool programs. Things like private pay, Head Start, faith-based. I was everywhere. It was really, really nice. I just provided training and coaching to teachers as well as parents, along with direct services to children at risk of being expelled or those who were suspected of having a disability. I also brought center-based teachers to the table with Part C program teachers to discuss and plan for ways to support children who were splitting their time between the two programs. Unfortunately, they weren't fully included. They would come in the morning to one program and in the afternoon to another, but I'd bring them to the table at least, which was really nice.

Then, I decided I need to get back to California. I'm cold in Connecticut. I found [WestEd Center for Childhood and Family Studies](#) was doing work with a [Teaching Pyramid](#) framework. I had already been trained on it in Connecticut and was using it, training on it, to teach here. Luckily, they hired me. From 2009 to 2016, I worked with them adapting the framework here in California, training teachers, coaching teachers. I also was part of developing a training for coaches to become authorized as a Teaching Pyramid coach across the



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state of California. Now, I left WestEd, but I'm doing that work on my own. I'm also bringing in a broader focus with my work with interpersonal neural biology as a therapist.

Kristie: So if that doesn't have Solutionaries anxious to hear what you have to say ... I mean, you've touched on all of these key things that we talk about a lot in terms of the connection between early intervention in preschool and then the connection between neural and physical and spiritual and emotional, right? Then, hanging out with WestEd folks. Then, you've got all this, well, our perception often is all this testing, right?

Laura: Yeah. It was a great experience, as well. The work that we did with Childhood and Family Studies was all about promoting social/emotional development, preventing challenging behavior through that evidence-based framework of the Teaching Pyramid, but all this stuff that I'm doing just aligns so much with what you're talking about with the Revolutionaries/Solutionaries, because these are my core values in regard to the work I do with teachers and parents as both a consultant and therapist. I'm really grateful to be able to have had the background of being in the classroom and now being the mental health person so I could bring that nice combination to sort of ground this work, anchor it, in science. A lot of times, I know ... You know what it's like when you go in and teachers are like, "Well, is this just like the latest flavor of the month?" I'll say, "No, there's science behind this. Let's get in. Let's dig deep."

Kristie: That's what I've been loving about conversations that so many people have been having lately around brain research. It sort of gets to trump everything else. (Sorry, not to bring up controversial things with that word). Because brain research gets to supersede our preferences, our teaching style, our traditions. Even, to some extent, culture. Because while all of those are going to be factors, bottom line, is we're humans, we've got brains, and we know a lot more than we used to about them.

Laura: Yeah. It's been such a gift to the work that we do. And it can be if we frame it right, those of us who are leading the revolution, if we are framing it right, we're going to use it as not a way of saying, "Okay, get on board," but just, "Hey, this is a great gift." You have to be really careful, as a coach working with teachers, about not shaming and blaming, not saying, "Well, what you believe is wrong because there's science." It's like, "I understand what you believe. Let me show you the science, and let's find a middle ground."

Kristie: We've been saying lately, "Mindset before method." What you were just saying was sort of like let's get on the same page together, not through coercion or "mine's right and yours is wrong", but let's really learn to do this together. When you and I first met and started talking, we quickly landed on this [video](#) that you had shared on Facebook, which we'll definitely link to in the show notes for today's podcast, about Circle Time. As you know, I have this- I would call it a love/hate relationship with Circle- but I think it's mostly not so much love anymore. I think I just need to be honest and own it and just say I'm not a fan of it. Speaking of preferences, that's my preference. Let's talk a little bit about your experiences around large group activities in general, Circle Time in particular. Then, as you are ready, segue into this passion and this work that you're doing with the brain in mind, and kind of overlay that or interweave it with these issues that I have- and others- around large group activities or Circle Time.

Laura: Well, I share those issues. For me, Circle Time has become a place where the child's perspective seems to have been forgotten or marginalized. Not intentionally, of course, but if you observe in classrooms and coach teachers as often as I do, you can't help but see this. Circle is typically either a time that teachers do planned instruction- "I'm teaching now"- or it's used to just keep kids somewhere while teachers prepare the room or try to engage in a routine. So for Meal Time or for Center Time, to transition from cleanup to outside. Today, I saw they were in Free Choice Center Time, and then they said, "It's time for outside. Clean up." Everyone was like, "Woo-hoo, it's Outside Time!" But first, they had to go sit in a circle and read a book and then go outside. The teachers appear to need to "manage" the children to make the routine smoother, so they pop them into a Circle.

I have compassion for teachers. I was one. It's a lot about how to get through transitions. Transitions are challenging. For me, we need to be mindful of how we do this and how often we're doing it. What it might be like in those large groups for children. What's their perspective? Of course, it still seems to be some teachers believe that Circle Time is the time for direct academic instruction. Luckily, over the past seven years, I have teachers saying to me, "Laura, I don't try to teach them letters or calendar or weather or concepts at Circle. Many of them just can't pay attention enough to really absorb that info." And I say, "Of course not. Thank goodness you're realizing this." I'll often say to them ... I'll give you and I as an example. Kristie, to me, if you're trying to teach me at Circle Time, if I'm a child, it's like if you and I, as adults, you were trying to teach me particle physics at a Coldplay concert by reading to me

from a paper that you wrote. In this large group setting, I have a ton of distractions. I'm not really involved in the learning. You're reading to me and I'm receiving knowledge as all this other stuff is going on around me that's super interesting.

To me, it's like that a lot of times for children at Circle Time. Not every time, not everybody, not all the time, but a lot of time. I believe learning can take place in large groups, but for preschool children, it's way more optimal in self-selected small groups such as those in Free Choice or even Outside Time. That's a self-selected small group opportunity that can emerge many times. It isn't just my opinion. It's science. The science behind it is that during large group, the conditions for optimal learning are often not being met. Those are: Is the child engaged in focal attention? Is it novel? Is there repetition? And is there emotional arousal? Quite frankly, the Circles I watch, a lot of those are not being met.

Kristie: Let's pause there for a second, because those are so important. I want to say them slowly so the optimal learning, so that my neurons can fire and wire, no? You've raised two big issues, but we're going to go deep into one right now. The two issues were maybe there's too many large groups, right? Too many transitions, too many arbitrary times we gather just to manage. We're going to hold that for a side. Sometimes, we try to cover pretty high cognitive, skill-based, executive functioning skills, lots of comprehension and recall, right? The content, the pre-academics. We try to cover that in large group. Right now, what we're saying is it's not so much that large group is the problem. It's covering certain content during this large group. So tell me what was optimal for learning again.

Laura: Focal attention, novelty- what are the things that are going to be novel- repetition, and emotional arousal. Now, with emotional arousal, there's a window. We don't want children too emotionally aroused, then they're dysregulated, but we don't want them under-aroused. And emotional arousal can be curious, excited, hopeful, surprised- even confused can be emotional arousal that will keep them engaged in learning.

Kristie: Let's hold on that one for a second. The reason that I have an issue with large group is that you cannot customize or respond to that perfect- some people call it the Goldilocks level, right? It's not too hot, it's not too cold. But if any of us have been with a group of people, somebody's hot, somebody's cold, right? Somebody's over-aroused, somebody's under-aroused. And the more of those

bodies you have, the more likely you'll have variability. So for me, large group is really hard, as a single adult, to manage that arousal level. Somebody's going to be super excited about the weather bear, and somebody's going to be like, "Oh, for the love of God"...right?

Laura: Yeah, absolutely. You hit the nail on the head. Again, we're talking about 18, 24, even 28 kids in one small space. Even with three adults, you can't possibly meet everybody's needs with that for as long of a period time as you're hoping for. But the learning can still take place if the content is matched up with those conditions of learning. I know that you agree with these large groups that if you're doing something like music and movement, they're learning a lot from that, but it's a music and movement activity that's keeping them engaged. It's focal attention. It can be novel each time they do it, because they can move differently, they can play it differently. It's repeated, and they're emotionally aroused. The way that Circle Time is traditionally done- let's not fool ourselves- it's very much for the teachers, not really for the kids. I just want us to be honest about that, and get real about that, and have compassion for it... but realize that it's really not serving the children, so let's teach with the brain in mind.

Kristie: Then, on that note, and because I completely agree...I can preach a whole bunch of stuff that I could never practice, so for me, even thinking about having 10 kids or six kids is still a large group. I don't want people to say that having children gathered together doesn't have a place and a time. [Teacher Tom](#) has a fabulous blog about how this can build community and that kids need to learn how to be a part of a group. Part of the reason that teachers will share with me that they like they need to do large group- it could come from a couple of sources. Let's talk about external pressures. One, maybe there's a Head Start policy. In theory, let's just say, that you have to be in large group. Maybe, let's say, you're funded under a reading initiative and you must be in large group for 90 minutes doing da, da, da. Or let's just say you're getting a lot of pressure to get kids "ready for kindergarten." What could we tell listeners and Solutionaries when they feel that in their heart and in their gut they know that they are maybe not serving the brains the best by having this large group, but they're being pressured to, or they have to? How have you helped people push back or articulate this science as an antidote to the pressure?

Laura: It's a great question. I, like Teacher Tom, talk to teachers about large group as Community Time. So, if we can even just start with a shared language, that it's no longer Circle Time, it's Community Time, that really primes the adult's brain

for a different expectation of how to conduct that time. That's way more inclusive. That's way more children having shared decisions. That's involving versus didactic learning, so that's a really great place to start. Then I can bring in the science about the conditions for optimal learning and link that to that, right? They don't have to be worried about large group. Learning can take place in large group. It's the content of what we do. It's the amount of time. It's how we involve the children in the learning. It can happen. I'm not talking about calendar and weather. That is not my jam. I am not going there. That is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about things that they're lit up about, that they're interested in, that you've been inquiring and observing and reflecting with them so you know where your children are developmentally and what might be interesting for them as you have them gather together in the space of the community.

I gently, also, remind teachers that the children have only been on the planet two to five years, so it's my way of attempting to open them up to consider the child's perspective when planning for the classroom so that we can instill this love of learning, this love of being at school. Then, for also what Community Time can do (Circle Time formerly known as), is that children can start to notice what it means to be me as I join alongside another. In brain terms, we call this differentiation and linkage; discovering who I am by learning about my mind, my thoughts, my feelings, my sensations, dreams, struggles, et cetera. Then, how do I relate to or belong with others, getting to know their minds, what they like, dislike, feel, how we're similar and different. We're differentiated but linked, and this is teaching with the brain in mind.

Even if you're doing *Going on a Bear Hunt*, which is a great large group activity, and it's four conditions for learning...They have focal attention, they're doing it in novel ways, it's a repeated piece. When I watch it, a lot of kids are emotionally aroused. This is a way for them, afterward, the teacher can guide them in reflecting, "What were you feeling when the bear was chasing you? What were you thinking?" and her reflecting back verbally and non-verbally the children's perspectives individually and as a community, helping them see each other's.

Kristie: I can just imagine so many people listening to this going...Somebody wants to yell, "Amen!" at this point. Somebody wants to give you a high five, right? They're like, "Yes, we get it, Laura, but they're going to kindergarten next year. Next year, they're not going to have a community, and they're not going to be

allowed to sit as they want and squirm when they need to." What have you shared to help people be strong in these beliefs?

Laura: You asked me one of my very favorite questions. I'm just super excited about that. I usually get somebody in my audience when I'm doing a training, and they're not high-fiving me at this point. They've got their arms crossed, and their head's askew. They're rolling their eyes, and they're thinking, "Look at this hippie Berkeley chick telling me that I got to just sing songs and we're going to do Kumbaya." I love that. Think that about me. That's awesome, but let me bring the science in for you. First, I am usually playful if somebody says that to me. I say, "You know, we don't teach seventh graders algebra because they'll need to be able to learn it next year. We teach them math that will help them build the skill that they need to advance to algebra." Same as with preschoolers. We don't have to have them sit and listen to the instructor teach for extended periods at a time in large groups just because they're going to have to do that in kindergarten. Instead, I'm committed to showing teachers how to teach from a brain perspective so we strengthen the part of the brain the child will need. The preschooler you have now, the part of the brain they will need in kindergarten to help them sit and help them listen and help them be a part of large group. That's the pre-frontal cortex.

So let me get specific. Many of the routines that children engage in throughout the day in preschool give them practice with what are called the executive function or EF skills, I'll just say. One way I like to describe those skills, if your Solutionaries don't recall, is the ability to plan, initiate, organize, and carry out tasks while regulating emotions, resolving conflicts as they arise, and shifting gears when necessary. There are so many routines we do and so many activities we do in the classroom that help us develop these executive function skills, which are believed to be largely housed in the frontal cortex but call on all parts of the brain to really be executed. By the way, they're not fully developed, it's believed, till the mid 20s. So we have to hold that space of...we can't expect them to be done by the time they're in kindergarten. Why would we teach them in a developmentally inappropriate way how to be kindergarten ready?

I really spend a lot of time, when I videotape teachers in the classroom, helping them see that's kindergarten readiness. Do you see how they went over to Dramatic Play, how the three of them decided they were going to, I don't know, make Thanksgiving dinner? That's planning. They initiated it by assigning roles. They organized it by gathering the materials. Then, when one

child had a pot the other one wanted to cook in, they resolved conflicts with the help of the teacher by deciding, well, I can use this other pan. They regulated their emotions throughout and shifted gears. They decided, "Well I was going to use this pan, now I'm going to use this" or "We thought we would set the table for six, but we only have plates for five". It's high test learning that's happening as the children are playing in predominantly executive function skills. You don't need to sit to learn to sit.

Kristie: Right. When we think about keeping the brains in mind, I love that you're trying to say to people take it all the way back, uncover, and look and say, "Which part of the brain are we really supporting and fostering?" Going through and covering the content doesn't ignite those neurons that will make those connections between past events, with emotions, with the ability to plan, do review (from an old High Scope way of thinking), executive functioning. I think for me, all of us that have maybe been out of school more than just a few years, need to find some go-to resources around the brain. I didn't ask you this before, but do you have, off the top of your head- and we'll put some in the show notes, too- what are your go-to resources that are for early childhood people? Like for me, [Dan Siegel's work](#)- who I'm going to guess you're going to say as well. He explains the brain in a way that my brain can understand it. But I feel like people need some go-to resources to really understand what's happening in the brain. Even for neuro-atypical kids, but certainly for kids who have only been on the planet, as you said, a few years.

Laura: Yeah, Dan Siegel is one of my major mentors, and that's [interpersonal neurobiology](#), what I do in private practice. I mean, I do other things, but I really, really bring that into the classroom all the time.

Kristie: What does that mean to you, Laura...if you weren't as smart as you? What would that mean?

Laura: Interpersonal neurobiology, in my mind, is looking at the connection among brain, mind, and relationships. So for a preschooler, we're talking about the brain, but the brain is different from the mind. The brain and the mind develop in the context of relationships. It's a recursive cycle, and they're interdependent. And the body's in there. When I say brain, I mean body too, because our brain is embodied and relational. We have to look at the whole child in context. We're looking at how the brain is the architecture, right? The structure, the actual neurons. We keep mentioning the neurons, the different parts of the brain. Then, the mind is our thoughts, our feelings, our emotions,

our sensations, our dreams. It's any mental activity. The mind actually monitors and modifies what's happening in the brain and in the body through the context of relationships. Dan Siegel is an amazing resource for that. Also, you'd be hard-pressed to continue doing traditional Circle Time if you spent any time at Harvard, at the [Center on the Developing Child](http://developingchild.harvard.edu).

Kristie: Yup, exactly.

Laura: Yeah. If you go there, it's developingchild.harvard.edu, if you check out their papers, their work there...I encourage teachers to do it a lot. I'm about 50% successful with that. Then, of course, getting some kind of training, coaching. The coaching, for me, is really where the magic happens. So many people go to a training of mine, and then I come into the classroom and the application's really hard. It's hard to take it from the seat to the classroom. Getting someone to help you really reflect on what you've learned about the brain and mind in the context of your work.

Kristie: Let's talk a little bit about that. I mentioned [the video](#) that we'll put in the show notes about some coaching you were doing in a preschool classroom. Maybe just for those who haven't seen the video yet, maybe just describe for us a little bit about what work you guys were doing together and how that group activity got conducted in a way that had the brain in mind.

Laura: Great, yeah. First of all, talk about Solutionary. This teacher's name is Ana Segura, and she's in Chula Vista, California. She was brave enough and courageous, vulnerable enough to say, "My Circle Time's not working, Laura. I've got 24 kids. We're an inclusion classroom. We're dual-language learners. I've got to do something a little bit different." We talked about mindfulness, and we talked about what that means, paying attention with intention, non-judgment, and self-compassion. So how can we try to teach that to children? Really, what it translates to for people in the field of education is self-regulation, impulse control, focal attention. Those are the things we want in kindergarten, kindergarten readiness skills. Ana, I talked to her about deep breathing, which she was already doing, and I talked to her about placing one hand on the heart and one hand on the belly below the belly button and teaching the children to breathe through their body and to get that feedback of the hands. She started there.

Then, she added in a component where she wanted them to spread the love that they were feeling as a result. When she first had them start to breathe

like that, they would say, "I feel happy. I feel loved." They would start to share that. Community Time became about them figuring out how they were all feeling. Then they wanted to spread that out, down to Mexico, out to New York where their families were. Then she came and said, "They want more. They want more." I thought, well, I've never done this before, but I'm a yogi and I know alternate nostril breathing can help balance out the left and right hemispheres of the brain, so I thought I'll show her alternate nostril breathing. It requires a lot of fine motor development that I realized as I started to teach her...Just on the spot, I adapted it. I said, "Give this a shot." That brave teacher went and did it, and like two days later, I went and got that video. Had no idea it was going to happen. The kids were doing it. It was incredible.

What's really incredible for me in the video is watching their spontaneous sharing. Typically, when I watch a Circle Time, if the teacher pauses for a second, someone raises their hand, and she'll be like, "Jacob? Yes?" He'll say, "I had pizza for dinner." Somebody else will say, "Oh, my sister has toys that she doesn't let me play with." It's non sequiturs, right? When this woman stopped, they were like, "I feel great. I feel ..." They shared what was happening. They were fully present. Mindfulness.

Kristie: Connect a few dots here for us, because I'm right there with you, and several people I know that are listening practice yoga, totally know what you mean by...You guys can't see Laura, but we're on video, and she just did the hang 10. It's kind of this thing you do with your thumb and your pinky finger to close one side of your nose and then the other. It's this funky thing that we do. Let's just say that in this day and age of high-stakes testing and accountability, we don't all hang out in southern California in a way that's very open, right? So this idea of mindfulness, or hearts, or that there's a mind and a brain. We've got several things going here that my Solutionary friends are going, "Kristie, I hear shark music," or, "I'm okay, but I'm going to guess my parents are going to hear shark music." How do you talk, in a public education sense, around mindfulness, and how do you keep taking that back to the science and the brain?

Laura: That's really nice. I feel like in this field, we have to be flexible and adaptable. The same thing that we're asking our children to do, to have that flexibility. Luckily, my therapeutic training comes into place, and right away, I can read the room if those people are thinking, "Oh yeah, hippie southern California girl." So I just change my language. Mindfulness is self-regulation. It's impulse control. It's focal attention. It's emotional regulation. It is all those things. It

will help with all those things. I'm from a small town in upstate New York, and I worked in Connecticut for seven years, so I certainly was in places where they were like, "No." Even in that ... "No, I don't know what you're talking about. That's ridiculous." I get a lot of it, and I still get it here. I still get it here. So we have to be able to...I have to be able to alter my language.

One of the reasons I started writing about executive function skills when I worked for WestEd was the same thing would happen when I would talk about social and emotional development, and that was in a preschool that was housed on an elementary school campus. The principals would just kind of roll their eyes and say, "Ugh." As soon as I would start saying, "Executive function skills," they sat up. That sounded scientific. It's just framing it. Just learning to frame it.

Kristie: Yeah, totally agree. I know that even social/emotional still has this soft feeling to it. It's one of those soft things. However, we all know it's the absolutely necessary thing. It's trying to get people to understand those. Many Solutionaries are familiar with a lot of stuff around self-regulation, so that's a helpful bridge for them. Let's kind of round out our conversation, thinking of our Solutionaries and keeping them in our minds. What suggestions do you have for them to either begin a journey...So, we started off with large group, and then we got to a little bit about mindfulness. They'll see the video of the teacher in action. But if somebody is ready or has started their journey towards thinking about large group differently, kind of give us some places to begin or where to continue your journey. I know those are slightly two different questions at you, but just...how can you help us all move to a next step, knowing that we're all in slightly different readiness spots?

Laura: Well, the first thing that I'd like to encourage, people who are brave enough to try to take on change, is to start with self-reflection. A lot of the times when I meet with teachers, it's the child, the child, the child. It's that one finger pointing out, and I always have them actually do that and then look at the four fingers pointing back. Three fingers, actually. Oops. Really, we have to start with self-reflection. Again, give that same loving, compassionate gaze towards ourselves. Not in a critical...People feel like self-reflection means you want me to criticize myself. I so entirely do not want you to criticize yourself. I want you to try to engage in open, reflective awareness, and it's really hard, because I always say we're in the movie. It's hard to see the movie. That's why I video tape. If you want to get video-taped, I highly recommend it, because it's a great equalizer. Even when I sit and watch video tape with teachers, I'll sit and

watch it with three teachers, and all three will see different things. That's how difficult self-reflection really is. It's very, very challenging.

We might think we do something. We might think we don't do something and then be incredibly surprised. While you're reflecting, I encourage you to uphold the mindset of what are my values, perceptions, and beliefs when it comes to teaching children? Do I believe that as a teacher I need to use large group time to teach academics? Why do I think that? What evidence do I have that this works for children, and what evidence do I have that it doesn't? Often, the evidence that I have that it works is that I was told to do it, but the evidence that I have that it doesn't work is I watch everybody rolling around when I'm trying to read the second...Just now, I was in a program that was only three hours. In the space of an hour and a half, they had read two books at large group time. At the second book, the kids were just rolling around. Please, in your reflection, consider how often you need to stop Circle to get kids on track, or your co-teacher has to sit by children to help them "pay attention."

Finally, are those children, who you do have to stop for or bring back or circle in, are those children who are already at risk of challenges with school, children with disabilities identified or suspected, children with challenging behavior, children who have been taken from their homes due to neglect or abuse, or those living below the poverty line? Really, as you're thinking about making this brave leap into the change, consider that you don't want to do anything that's going to make school more challenging for all children, but for these children especially.

Kristie: Then, you raised it earlier, if they want to think about coaching to get some support through their self-reflection and/or small group reflection, what's a continuum? It's not something that we see in early childhood. I guess we see it a little bit more, but I still see it more like this is the coach for the district, but then the coach just comes and puts out fires. Or, we don't really think about investing in a coach, because that's what people do if you're a tennis player, right? Where could people think about supporting them through self-reflection by having a coach?

Laura: Can you clarify for me? Supporting them? Where do they start with a coach?

Kristie: If they wanted to start on self-reflection but get stuck, get lost, get off track, don't know what to reflect about...a coach is a perfect thing to have. Who could that coach be? Could it be...

Laura: Great, great. Yes.

Kristie: Could it be your district-assigned mentor? Could it be you, right? That kind of continuum.

Laura: Okay, I got you. Sorry about that.

Kristie: Sorry, I had like eight thoughts at once.

Laura: I wasn't in your brain.

Kristie: Yeah, right.

Laura: I've seen it work really nice as something like...when I worked in San Francisco as a consultant for a while with San Francisco Unified. It was a peer support facilitator, they talked about it. They had some sort of [First 5](#) grant. Sorry, that's a California term. First 5 is a funding source here. They had money to be able to free up what they called the lead teacher, and she would go to different classrooms, and they would, as peers, reflect. That worked really nicely. That was really nice to use. I've seen the director or the supervisor do it. Of course, I'm sure everyone's thinking the challenge, and it's a real challenge, is the supervisor has a supervisory hat and a role. For them to step into the coaching space, you've got to ditch that hat, because that is not what coaching is. It's not telling teachers what to do. It's helping them come to the space and to learn what to do. Sure, I have expertise. Sure, when I'm coaching, I make suggestions, but my main goal is getting them to make the suggestions, getting them to see it. I'm teaching them, through watching these videos, how to reflect, how to observe, how to plan.

I think that if you can't afford a coach, if somebody's not provided to you outside, pop up a video camera. Take time to reflect about what you were doing, and you start with your strengths. My coaching approach is always to

start with the strengths as the teacher. Again, the *teacher's* practices. When I show the video, the first thing teachers want to do is to look at the kids and what the kids were doing. I bring them back to what were you doing? What were you doing in response to that, or to bring that change into effect? I like the idea of using peers. I like the idea of having a video camera if you don't have any peers or any coach. Then, of course, bringing someone who's trained in the strength-based teaching/coaching practices. We did a lot of this work in California in the last five years, building a cadre of coaches who are authorized to be coaches, in the Teaching Pyramid, in particular. We also just used, really, universal coaching competencies to see that teachers were building reflective capacity, not just learning a bunch of strategies and then having a plan written for them. I'm not in support of that at all.

Kristie: As you were talking, I decided what we should have as our download for this podcast, for sure. We should have some guidelines for how to start your journey towards self-reflection and some, "How do you do this? If I'm going to get a video and be brave, what do I look for? What do I ask? What do I consider?" Then, maybe a few little tips for some coaches. So, Solutionaries, stay tuned. We're going to have some fabulous stuff to help you continue this journey, because I know many of you are already super reflective.

Laura, just to end this out, we know we're going to put a bunch of show notes together so they can see [the video](#) of the teacher practicing with the brain in mind during her Circle Time. We know that we're going to put some resources about brain research and so forth, but if people want to follow you or learn more about you, where's the best place for them to go? We'll put that in the show notes, too.

Laura: I'm at laurafishtherapy.com. That's my website. That's my therapy practice predominantly. If you hit Resources, you'll find more resources about the brain, about the mind, about mindfulness in children. Then, you'll also find a link to my consulting site. In there, it's all ECE stuff. It'll take you to another website, and you'll see the trainings I offer, the coaching, and a lot of the articles that I've written or co-written are there. You can also, please, join me on [Facebook](#). I just started a Facebook page, Laura Fish Therapy. Then, I'm on [Twitter](#), which is ... I just laugh every time I say it, because my daughter, who's 27, is going to be 27, is on Twitter. I'm sure she's embarrassed that I'm even on it, because I have no idea how to do it. That limitation of those characters is totally challenging for me, but it's @LauraFish333.

Kristie: Perfect. All right, so we will put all of those ways to follow you on Facebook and to follow you on Twitter, because we have several Solutionaries that do both, and then, certainly, we'll have people check you out at Laura at laurafishtherapy.com to learn more.

Laura: I forgot to say I have a [blog](#), too, that you can access through my website, as well.

Kristie: Yeah, and I've been sharing some of those, so hopefully people have read a few things already and had a little preview to what they would hear today. I hope that Solutionaries find that our conversation today really helps you keep the brain in mind, whether it's a large group activity or not, during these early years, how we can really use this lens that Laura has talked to us about in terms of interpersonal neurobiology. Then, be looking for today's free download, where we will give you some tips to get started on your self-reflection journey around mindfulness, as well. All right? Well, thank you, Laura. I appreciate you so much.

Laura: Thank you, Kristie. It was fun.



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