



Listening to our Teachers: An Interview with Laleta Fingal, Infant & Toddler Teacher at Hurlburt Field Child Development Center

Kenya Wolff, PhD

What does it mean to teach a very young child? In this interview, we learn about the aspirations and work of early childhood educators caring for the youngest children. We meet Laleta Fingal, an infant and toddler teacher at the Hurlburt Field Child Development Center in Florida. With 11 years of experience, she shares her insights about teaching very young children.

Q: How long have you been an Infant/Toddler Teacher?
A: 11 years

Q: What is the most rewarding thing about your job?

A: The most rewarding thing is just to see them grow and bloom. One day they are at one stage, and then you see them blossoming so fast. At this age, they just, just grow physically, socially, and emotionally so rapidly.

Q: What is the most challenging thing about working with toddlers?

A: They can't express themselves. Because when they can't express themselves and they get into conflicts and they act out in ways that can be unsafe. So you have to anticipate what they are doing and be there to help because they can react in ways that aren't appropriate, and you have to teach them the right way.

Q: You went to school and obtained a four-year degree in Early Childhood Education. Was it helpful?

A: Yes, I wanted to keep learning and find out more about children. Strategies are changing, and the more knowledge I learn and the more I know, enables me to be a better teacher. So I'd encourage others, that even if you know the basics, there is so much new information and new knowledge that you gain as a teacher and it will help you grow and do things differently.

Q: What would you say to someone who says what you do is just babysitting?

A: I'd say, just knowing how to raise a child is not enough. You may have raised your own children on the information from what your auntie said, but as teachers we need to have knowledge on brain research and an education to help them grow.

Q: What advice could you give other teachers and caregivers about working with parents?



Laleta Fingal is an experienced early childhood educator. She has 11 years of experience working with infants at toddlers.

A: Have an open positive relationship with parents. Remember that parents are the child's first teachers. The ultimate goal is to help that child and help that family and the best way you can do that is to keep the communication lines open.

Q: You work on a military base. Is there anything different about working with military families?

A: For the military families who deploy a lot, we have to be the secure base for the children to help keep them emotionally stable. The main difference working in military child care is learning to be really loving and caring for the kids because when parents are deployed, we are the stability for the children. Also, we ask parents to tell us when they are going away so that if we notice they are acting out or being extra sensitive, we can help.

Q: Have you ever had a challenge with a family?

A: One time I had a child who wasn't reacting to their name when I'd call it. I advised the family to have their hearing checked out. The parent wasn't happy about this. I asked her if she could sit in the classroom and watch as I talked to the child and he didn't respond... for some time the mom was still in denial, but eventually took her child to a hearing screening. Well, it turns out that he did have a hearing problem and, luckily, we were able to catch it early so that it was remedied. We are there with them all day and you have to be very observant, and when you can help, it is very rewarding.

Q: Is there any advice you'd give to teachers during this time of the pandemic?

A: You still have to be the teacher that the children rely on. It's a stressful time and so you have to be extra loving and caring. Help children wash their hands more.

Kenya Wolff, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Mississippi and is also the director of the Willie Price Laboratory School. Her experience as a classroom teacher and administrator allows her to bring real-world knowledge to the students she teaches. Dr. Wolff's research utilizes qualitative methodologies and focuses on various social contexts of childhood. She currently holds a position of chair for the editorial board for the Southern Early Childhood Association Journal, *Dimensions*, and serves as board member for the Mississippi Early Childhood Association.

Copyright of Dimensions of Early Childhood is the property of Southern Early Childhood Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.