

11 - Culturally Diverse Environments

Original Air Date: 12/30/20

Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. URL at www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Hello everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Hill. Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development session that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to hear future episodes. Dr. Amy Johnson is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at Ashford University*. She has experience teaching culturally diverse elementary school students and learned much about different cultures when spending time in Cambodia. Which brings us right to her topic, cultural diversity in the classroom. Amy, thank you so much for being here. We're so excited to have you speak on this because it's such a relevant topic. And I know our listeners are here to hear all about your experiences.

Dr. Amy Johnson: Great.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So why is this topic on your heart and a passion of yours?

Dr. Amy Johnson: Well, I spent time in Cambodia. And while I was there, I worked with mothers and children. And I heard a lot of things that really didn't make any sense to me. They weren't culturally relevant to me. And so, I found that I needed to sift through which ones were perfectly fine for the children, or which ones might hurt a child, and they needed to be addressed. So, like for instance, I was in a childcare facility and the floors were all tile. And in Cambodia, the children don't have diapers. They just go to the bathroom wherever. And it was so foreign to me to watch the childcare workers wiping up urine or, you know, wiping up feces. And I wanted to, I even thought, I wonder if I could buy these kids diapers because this is not sanitary. But then as I spent more time with them, I realized that the mothers are very poor. First of all, they can't afford diapers. So, you know, where do you go from here? And then this was in a village where the whole village was very, it was not sanitary at all. So why was I expecting this one area to be sanitary when they would just go home and not be sanitary? So, I kind of started thinking about that. And then I realized that because the children don't wear diapers, they potty train really quickly. So, it's actually a cultural way of potty training. And so, I had to step back and think, well, who am I to say put diapers on the children? I'm just coming from it as someone who potty trained with diapers. But their way works for their country. And is it harming the children? No, it's not. It's a perfectly valid way for them to potty train in Cambodia. And so that was something that I actually encouraged the workers to say, this is very interesting to me. And you potty train a lot faster. The children are potty trained at about six to 12 months in Cambodia. You potty train a lot faster than in America. And so, I kind of lifted them up because once I thought about it, it was true. They had an efficient way of potty training in that country. So that was something that did not need to be addressed except for me to say, this is interesting to me. It's different than how we do it in our country. And I like the way that you do it. It's efficient. And so, it was neat for them to hear me, who I am the expert because I have a doctorate in child development. But I'm not an expert because I come from a different country. So, I wanted them to know that I appreciated their way of doing it. Another thing that I saw, this is my example of, is it harmful to the child? No, not really. But I could address it. So, in the small village, the mothers didn't nurse the children. And I was surprised because, again, they're really poor. So, they don't have money to buy formula, but they were. And then the water isn't sanitary. And so, I thought, golly, why aren't they nursing the children? It's so much more efficient. It's actually very healthy for the kids. It's healthy for bonding. Well, I found out that one of their beliefs is that if, now Cambodia is very hot and humid. One of their beliefs was after they give birth, the mother bundles up in multiple layers of clothing. And then she sleeps in a hammock over hot coals. And this makes her sweat profusely, which rids her of the baby weight. Well, it also rids you of your breast milk because you're sweating everything out. And so, I was able to tell them, you know, I know that you do it this way. But here's another way you might want to look at. If you breastfeed, it actually burns a lot of calories. It's about 600 calories a day, I believe. So that's an option that you're looking for that

weight loss. Here it is in nursing. And it's healthy for the children. So that was one that, you know, wasn't dangerous to the child. But it was still something worth mentioning. And then the third one. Now, I didn't see this, but my friend went to Africa. And she was in a small village in Africa. And they, when an infant, their soft spot in their head, when it became indented. Well, to us, we know that means the child is dehydrated. That's an indicator. But in this little village in Africa, they thought that it meant the child was demon possessed. And so, to get rid of the demons in the village, they threw the child in the river. So that is something that is highly dangerous. It's detrimental to the child, of course. And so, it was something to say, wait, wait, wait, wait. All it means is that child is dehydrated. Please, you know, try nursing first. Try water first. Try these things. Because we know what this one means. Don't take that step. And so those are just some instances of different cultures that you will encounter. Because they're coming into your classrooms with different beliefs. Some beliefs are highly interesting and can inform your practice. Some are on an equal plane with your practice. And it's just great to get to know. And you might see some that are actually a little bit harmful to the child. And you would want to address those. And so, I loved figuring out the difference between those.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Dr. Johnson, I love how in some cases you were able to just reflect on your own mindset and refine that a little bit. And then in other cases, you were actually able to communicate the knowledge that you had. That's super effective. Just a quick question. The cultural diversity in your classroom. Do you have any specific examples of how you were able to support, you know, cultural proficiency in your classroom while you were teaching?

Dr. Amy Johnson: I asked a lot of questions of both the children and the parents. For instance, one of my children was from a different country. And so, I looked on the internet and found a word that I could use with that child. And I just thought it meant something fun and a word of excitement. But then I started to hear rumors that, did you know that's actually a bad word in their culture? And so, I asked the child, wait, am I actually saying a bad word? And the child said, it depends on the context. And so, then I realized, you know what? That's not for me. I don't understand the context. Let's stop using that. So, when you try things, ask questions like, does this help you? Is this interesting to you? Or ask the parents, does the child, the child doesn't look me in the eye. Is that a cultural thing? Is he, you know, some cultures, it's very disrespectful to look you in the eye. So, is that a cultural thing? Should I not be asking that of him? So, I would really just keep your eyes open, ears open and ask questions.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Amy, I have loved listening to all of these things because it is relevant. You got that experience in Cambodia that a lot of us don't have. So, what are three takeaways that you have for our listeners about cultural diversity in the classroom and what you want us to know?

Dr. Amy Johnson: I would say culture affects the child's behavior in the classroom. Just know that. And then acknowledge it. Don't ignore it. Acknowledge those cultural differences. And then lastly, I would say value valid practices of other cultures.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: That's so valuable. So, Dr. Johnson, how about one challenge for our listeners as we close this podcast?

Dr. Amy Johnson: I challenge the listeners to acknowledge and understand the culturally diverse practices of your students, and that will enrich, not detract from the classroom community and environment.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Wow, Dr. Johnson, that was amazing. Thank you so much for sharing your background and your experiences that you've had.

Dr. Amy Johnson: Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yes, most definitely. And we look forward to having you on our show again. And please make sure that you subscribe to this podcast for future episodes. And we will see you again soon.

*Ashford University is now the University of Arizona Global Campus.