

14 - Teacher Tips

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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. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Twice a month, we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast for future episodes.

Let's get started. Today, we're here with Matt. Matthew Williams has taught in two rural school districts in upstate New York over his 14-year career.

He spent 12 years at Austell Valley Central School District as a primary third-grade teacher and is now currently in his second year teaching a fifth grade at McGraw Elementary. He has a BA in elementary education from Cortland State and a master's in Gen Ed Studies from University of New England.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Today, Matt is here with us, and he's going to discuss new tips for teachers today.

I actually had the privilege of visiting Matt's classroom for several years, and I really have noticed how dynamic he was as an educator and really just getting to know his children and families. And one thing I've learned about Matt is that most people hate Mondays. Matt really loves Mondays, and I really appreciate this about him.

Matt, can you tell us a little bit about why you love Mondays?

Matt Williams Speaker: I think one of the things is it wasn't always the case. When you're a new teacher and you're overwhelmed, Mondays can kind of be scary. But if you're invested in what you do and you want to be the best professional you can be, I mean, when you choose a career, you might as well enjoy it.

And I think one of the ways you can do that is you can be overwhelmed, and I think both of you, as leaders in education, it's a shifting tide. When I was younger, we were under the Reading First grant, and it was about stations and just a lot of different things.

And what leaders in education deem is the best bang for your buck changes all the time. And I think once you become a teacher and you're in the classroom and you do this year after year, you have to decide what matters most to you. And I think once you start to do that and you have the confidence and you work in a district that supports teaching that way, you can really prioritize what works for you as a teacher and as a person and your personality and what works for the kids that you teach with.

So, once you can figure those things out, well, then you get to come to a place that you make a decent salary at and you can make magic happen because you get to make a lot of decisions about how it happens. So that's why Mondays are pretty cool, because you really have to have the courage to say, that's not for me, but that is, and this is something that's always going to be an anchor in my career. And so that's just one thing why Mondays can be great and why they can't be.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: So, Matt, your Mondays on your end are exciting and you can really appreciate those. One thing I've always noticed about you is your children truly, they run into your class. They want to be there.

So not only do you look forward to Mondays, but your children do. And obviously that started with you building the bond with these children and building the bond with these families. Can you talk a little bit about how you can relate to your kids and how you start to build those really powerful bonds?

Matt Williams Speaker: Yeah, I mean, you really can't, you know, you're under a time crunch in teaching a calendar year, especially when there's, you know, state testing and, you know, all kinds of all kinds of mandates that you have to meet.

So, you have to you can't take too long to not jump into the curriculum. But if you don't take the time and it happens organically too, you know, for me, I'm not a big I'm not a big, you know, print off a bunch of icebreakers and, you know, play games and things like that. They're human beings that walk into my room, you know, just because their age is much younger than me, they're still made of flesh and blood like I am.

And I think when they come in and they see a human being that's there and they're looking at you with trusting eyes and you kind of what's the word you become vulnerable and you let them know, you know, things about you that they can really relate to that I'm a person that makes mistakes, that I'm that I'm a person that when I do make mistakes and it might affect somebody that it's important to say I'm sorry. They see a person that is willing to share things in their life. Like, for instance, this morning, I couldn't find my car keys.

And I had to, and my wife ended up having to bring me in. And I was about 20 minutes late. But I came in and they were just like, oh, you're here.

And I'm like, yeah, you know, I couldn't find my car keys, you know. So, it's just little things that they build trust with you when they when they just see you as, you know, just another person. And I really I really say to them as well, I'm like, you're going to teach me, just as much as I teach you, you know, you need to be a voice and an advocate for yourself, you know, and I'm a big guy, I kind of am a deceptive package because I'm really chill. And, you know, they're kind of they kind of, you know, you know, keep their distance from me for a little bit till they learn, you know, kind of who I am as a person. And then once we do, it's, you know, we're just we're just human beings trying to trying to learn something together that will, you know, help them, you know, continue to grow as students and help them in the next in the next grade level and help their confidence.

And, you know, what better way to do it when, you know, you get to spend, you know, six hours a day together, you might as well you might as well make it an enjoyable time. You know, that's the foundation of me first. If you're not enjoying it, then, you know, what are you doing it for? You know, and, you know, there's, you know, stress is not a huge part.

You know, I'm the type of teacher that I can plan something for an entire weekend. And if I do it for 10 minutes and it's not working, I can blow it right up. And you got to be like that flexibility.

So that went a little bit. That's that's that's one of my what's one of one of the things that I'm continuing to work on as a teacher. So;

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I love that.

I love the fact that you are truly, you know, and again, I've seen this in person. You are truly someone who plans. But then you can also make modifications when need be.

One other thing I noticed is that you really draw attention to caring about the kids and again, just building those relationships. And I know that you have a poster, and you actually speak to this a lot about words mattering. Can you tell me a little bit more about this message that you give to your children about words?

Matt Smith Speaker: I mean, I think especially with with this second school that I'm at, I really when I interviewed, I really kind of laid out what I wanted for a culture in a classroom.

And I kind of didn't have the opportunity to do that in the other place that I taught. But before I came in here, you know, I really, you know, words matter, and you can't overwhelm kids. So, you should have a handful of things that you know, drive who you are for the entire year.

And one of the things that we need to do, and this the first one is for me, you know, when I come in here, because, you know, it's important for me to do a good job, but I have to remember to breathe. So, one of the things and this actually I took from my my superintendent this year, she had somebody come in and she was actually a psychologist and she had the staff work on being mindful. And we do that in my classroom.

We do breathing exercises. We practice because it's easy to tell kids you need to concentrate, but you actually have to teach people to concentrate. So, I take a breath when I come and we breathe.

When we're stressed out, we have to remind ourselves to have gratitude. You know, this is tough. We're getting through this.

You know, you're behind on this assignment. But listen, it's important, but it's not the be all end all. OK, you have you have somebody home that loves you.

You have somebody home that's going to give you a snack when you come home. Most kids have that, you know, in some form or fashion. So, remember that gratitude we have.

OK, listen, look at each other. OK, I tell my kids all the time, when you engage me, when you engage each other, you need to take a second to recognize a person across from you. And when I say listen, that means you look at a person, look at a person in the eye, you give them their full attention.

So, you breathe, you have breathe, you breathe, you have gratitude, you listen. I'm going to put you in situations that you're going to struggle because that's how you grow as a person. And this is a this is a foundation for my life is I picked this up from somebody a long time ago was failure is fuel.

It's fuel. It's not final. Tomorrow's another day.

What did you learn from it? How can you how can you how can you pick yourself up, you know, and what can you do so the next time you might not fail and then grab your grit? You got to have grit. You know, life's not easy, even even as eight-year-old, you know, nine-year-old, you know, there's tough things in your life, real tough things. But, you know, find that find that thing inside you that, you know, it's tough and you get through it, and you got people around you that care about you, that believe in you, and you can make it.

So, you know, gratitude, listen, grab your grit. You know, we you know, and I don't have classroom rules either. I have I have one, two, three.

I have five words in my room. Respect, responsibility, integrity, empathy and patience. I think if you try to, you know, you know, do those things in your life, not perfectly.

Everybody has a bad day. But but if those are things that you remind yourself what you want to be, you know, you really don't have to have do's and don'ts. It's just how you live.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Wow, Matt. So my three takeaways, this conversation just really inspired me to make those connections. And really, you know, we're going to face challenges as educators.

But if we breathe, if we practice gratitude and grace, if we use our failures as fuel and if we grab our grit, we're really heading in the right direction. Matt, before we end, can you give our listeners one challenge? Our many of our listeners are educators. Can you give our listeners one challenge to walk away with today?

Matt Williams Speaker: Yeah, I mean, right now, I mean, our country is it's crazy.

It's crazy upside down. And, you know, I think one of the things that that's important is you have to sit down and kind of take an inventory of what really matters to you, because if everything matters, nothing matters. OK, that's something I learned a long time ago.

Everything matters, nothing matters. And you have to trust yourself that the things you choose to matter, it's the right direction to go. So don't don't don't be in this game to be a people pleaser.

Don't be in this game to achieve test scores. Be in this game to, you know, connect to people. And like I said, find what matters to you and make that your foundation.

And, you know, the things that we just talked about, those are the things that I chose. And, you know, they'll be a part of forever as a teacher till my last day. So, I appreciate you guys talking.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I love that. Matt, thanks so much for your time today. Listeners, please subscribe as future episodes will be uploaded soon.

Thank you so much.