

22 - Crayons, Color, and Conversations

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to try new ideas.

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Today, we have with us Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick. Dr. Fitzpatrick serves as a lead faculty for the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education Leadership at the University of Arizona Global Campus, a program which emphasizes leadership, innovation, and social justice in early childhood education.

Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick is one of my dear friends, and I am so very honored to have her here today. The title of her session is Crayons, Color, and Conversations. Dr. Fitzpatrick, welcome.

Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Can you just tell us why this is near and dear to your heart?

Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick Speaker: Yes. As a parent and an educator, I am really passionate about the promotion of conversations, the conversations that share with others who we are as individuals at our core.

But I also realized that, like many of us, I was avoiding hard or heavy conversations. So, my desire is to help parents and educators build a solid foundation that starts long before those conversations become more difficult. But that required a paradigm shift for me, and like it will for so many people, it made me reevaluate who should have these conversations and where in a child's life they should occur.

I realized that culturally responsive leading is not just something that I do at work, but it's also a part of my role as a parent and a community member.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes. Thank you so much for sharing that with us.

Will you tell us a little bit in depth about what culturally responsive leadership looks like to you and what it should look like just in general?

Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick Speaker: You know, Dr. Shipley, that is a great question. And like so many people, especially educators, when we think of culturally responsive leadership, we think of those definitions, you know, things like the bringing the traditions of the community into the classroom, understanding history and culture, bringing the native language into the classroom, but also there's this component of family involvement. So, in my own definition, I couple those things with the need to be sure that the families are prepared to participate and contribute in those culturally responsive learning environments.

So, for me, that means that the important conversations are taking place in the home and at school. And while teachers are trained in culturally responsive teaching, the families that we serve may not know where to begin or even that they need to begin. So, we all know that in general, our culture, both our individual culture and the cultures that we are collaborative in are shared, they are dynamic. They're since systemic and they're symbolic. But we also understand that we're all capable of being culturally responsive leaders.

That's within our locus of control, both as parents and practitioners.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: One hundred percent. And I have to tell you, my first-year teaching, I came from a very small school to a huge school.

So, I knew that year I was going to have to be a lifelong learner and start doing research on my own and building those relationships with families and figuring these different cultures out that I didn't know anything about and then bringing that into my classroom. So, yes, I love I love that. Thank you.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Dr. Fitzpatrick, our society today is in such a in such a place where we can really kind of make power movements forward. And a large portion of our audience is ECE educators. Can you speak a little bit to them about how these leaders can begin to use steps, specific steps in their environment to be more culturally competent, culturally responsive, both themselves and also in a leadership position to to share with families and others, like you said?

Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick Speaker: OK, again, I think that is a great question.

I think so often we ask people to do things, and we don't tell them how or we don't provide them with directions on what it looks like. So, I think the first step is to realize, number one, that we are all capable of being culturally responsive. But again, for some of us, that requires us to change the lens.

So, when you talk about educators, when we are in that capacity, we tend to focus on school centric task and task completion. As parents, we focus on family and caregiving tasks. But when we aim to be culturally responsive, we must broaden our focus to include the relationships that exist in our environments.

And that's something that you mentioned. So, in my own journey, how did I do that? I began with self-reflection. I needed to learn about the cultures, and I say that plural, in which I exist.

And for me, there are several. I've got work. I have home.

I have my children's school. And I can't leave any part of my identity out of any of the cultures that I operate in. So, I know that can sometimes sound confusing when you say cultures, because for some of us, when we think of culture, we tend to think of things in very black and white.

So, we may begin to take what I call a physical inventory and possibly even check off boxes of various demographics. But if we take that approach, it really doesn't allow us to truly listen to others and build relationships, expand our current knowledge and seek authentic connections. But it also doesn't allow us to be curious.

And so, taking that approach will not allow us to understand what others live, value, and believe. It won't provide the insight into their lived and learned experience. But again, conversations allow us to gain that insight.

And I mentioned that educators are taught to be culturally responsive. We have the textbook definition. But we must be clear that there is no magic involved here, but there is effort.

So, we're all capable and our efforts can begin with conversations. So often, when we think of these conversations, people have this false belief that these conversations need to be heavy or formal, or that the aim is to change someone else's mind in that instance. But an early conversation, for example, with our young learners could be something like a box of crayons while you're coloring.

You can use that as a great teachable moment. And while those young learners are not necessarily developmentally ready to understand words like diversity, equity, and inclusion, a conversation about how a box of eight crayons will allow you to color a beautiful picture, that could be a good start. And then you can expand on those with follow-up questions.

So, what do you think we could do with a box of 16 or 96? Could we add more detail to our picture? Can we make the grass look like it does outside during certain seasons? When it's not all green, but maybe a little brown. And so, when we think about these conversations, we know that if you've ever colored with a three-year-old, you likely know that these conversations are one-sided. And since you may be the only one verbally communicating, when we think about it as a culturally responsive leader, that conversation that you're having is giving you an opportunity to improve, to understand the dynamic, to use multiple perspectives, to make strategic decisions, and to ask the right questions.

But let's be honest. For a lot of people, we know that can be scary. You know, in this climate, what if I say the wrong thing and offend someone unintentionally? So, when I go to, you know, relying on conversations, this is where conversations with others can help you avoid potholes.

But that means that your conversations have to be had with a variety of people, the right people. And having a diverse group of thought leaders who you share your ideas with and who are not afraid to serve as critical friends can provide you with a safe place to avoid potential problems. You know, I think in terms of for a lot of people, this is new work.

You may be doing this for the first time with your students or with your own children. And it can seem overwhelming, in which case there's a really handy acronym that you can use. It's called USAGE.

The U is for understand. Understand there is no prescription. The S is for seek.

Seek first to understand. Assume. We usually say don't assume, but in this case, we're going to make the A assume.

Assume we can't resolve any perceived problem alone. The G is go. Reflect.

Observe your environment. Try to look at things from a different lens. And then the E is for explore.

Again, we talk about not feeling like you need to do this work alone. And the explore. Explore what work has already been done and how you might contribute within your own locus of control.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Tameka, those are great tips. And you kept answering all the questions that I had. So, I hope that as people are listening, because I think teachers need these tips and tricks on how to start conversations with children and even with the families.

So that was perfect. So, as we are wrapping up, what are three takeaways that you have for our listeners today?

Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick Speaker: OK, I would really say I think the first takeaway is to kind of dispel this myth that culturally responsive leadership is the responsibility of someone else or that that the term leadership in and of itself does not identify us as individuals. So we are the people who are going to be the leaders.

You may be a leader in a classroom, a leader in your home, but really dispelling who the work lies with. The next would be the suggestion for safeguards. So, when we think of having conversations and how people will say we live in a cancel culture, one safeguard against that is to have a diverse group of thought leaders.

So have people who you know, who you know, are not going to simply tell you the things that you want to hear a group of trusted individuals and use them as your sounding board. And then and then the third thing I would say is really kind of scaffolds your conversations. A lot of parents, a lot of teachers are concerned about when is it developmentally appropriate to start having these conversations with children? And I think one of the myths is that there is a starting point and an ending point.

And no, I don't think there is a starting point. I think there is a developmentally appropriate approach to having these conversations. But the conversations should be interwoven into your curriculum or your home conversations just as they are, you know, math, reading, all of that stuff.

So, scaffold those conversations with children, but also be sure that you're having those conversations with other thought leaders who can help you avoid potholes.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Dr. Fitzpatrick, I love how this really leads us to those authentic and transparent conversations that do make a difference. As we leave today, as we wrap up, can you give us just one more time really quick that acronym that you gave us? And we want to challenge our listeners to take this forward in your practice today.

So, could you just speak to that acronym just real quick?

Dr. Tamecca Fitzpatrick Speaker: Yes. So again, the acronym is USAGE. The U is for understand.

This is really important. There is no prescription. If someone tells you you can solve the problem, it's probably not accurate.

So U is for understand. The S is for seek. Seek first to understand.

The A is for assume. Assume that you cannot and will not resolve any perceived problem alone. The G is for go.

Go reflect, go observe your environment and be sure that you're looking at that with a different lens. The E is for explore. Explore what work has already been done and how you might contribute to that work.

What is within your locus of control?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Okay, here it is. Thanks so much, Dr. Fitzpatrick, for really inspiring us to move forward with crayons, colors, and conversation. We'll see you again in a few weeks.