

24 - Differentiation in ECE

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

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Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So today we're privileged to have a colleague here with us and she's already been on this show once and her episode was really popular. So, Dr. Amy Johnson's here with us today.

She's an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at UAGC. She enjoys connecting real-life experiences to classroom teaching and sharing those experiences with her students. And we really enjoy working with Amy also.

So, let's dive right in. Today we're going to talk about differentiation and does it really happen and how.

So, Amy, why did you choose to talk about differentiation today and why is it so important?

Dr. Amy Johnson Speaker: Well, it's important because it's a way to help each child learn and succeed. And it keeps coming to my mind because I used to be in the elementary school classroom but now, I'm teaching college, and my education students often struggle with the differentiation section of the lesson plan, because they think that differentiation means writing a whole separate lesson plan for specific students.

And I always tell them that that's not the case. Differentiation can be small, easy tweaks in a lesson plan. And then I tell them how this looks in real life, to kind of help them see how it would look in the classroom.

So, each morning I work out with three other women and it's horrible, and it's grueling but we keep coming back, because we have a camaraderie, and we like seeing each other get stronger. But the other women are much faster, and much more coordinated than I am. But to my surprise, I'm actually the strongest person there.

I was never an athlete, and I made it to midlife without realizing that I'm actually really strong, and that's been fun. And our coach switches up the workouts, and he will be the teacher in this scenario. So, the workouts might include endurance, or strength, or both and some are long, some are short, some he calls surprises and those are horrible.

And one day, as I was laying on the floor pretty much passed out after burpees, I realized that like a classroom teacher, my coach was using differentiation in the workouts. So, one thing he does, is he adjusts our time expectations, and we've seen this in the classroom, because students often receive extra time in differentiation. And that usually means that they finish after everyone else all the time.

So, what my coach did for me one day, because I'm the slowest runner by far, I always come in last place when we run the hill. Well, one day coach staggered our starts, and he let me go first and he kept everyone else back for a pretty long time probably, gave me a huge head start, and I finished first. Now, I'm smart.

I know that my time was slower than everyone else's, but I did finish first for the very first time. And with the small accommodation of that time frame adjustment in the beginning, I did the same work I'd always done, but I felt more successful because I wasn't finishing after my teammates. I actually finished before them.

So, for a teacher, when possible, try to reverse that time allotment, and allow them to start early and finish with the rest of the class. Another thing that my coach does is he partners us. So, teachers often partner students with differing abilities.

And when you do this, consider the individual strengths of your students, and group them in a way that those strengths can be leveraged to support other students. So, when my coach writes partner workouts where two people split the work, if these workouts always involve just aerobic activity, nobody would want to partner with me because I slow down their time. But I see coach take into account our different strengths.

So, one partner workout involved running and heavy lifting, which made me a commodity because I can do the heavy lifting. Another involved running the block for 20 minutes. And while one partner ran, the other partner rested.

Now, even though that was running, I was actually an asset that day, because since I take so long to run, my partner was able to rest more time than anyone else. So, those were just little ways that he partnered us up, so that I could feel successful, and I wasn't a detriment to my partner. So, just keep individuals in mind, keep their strengths in mind when you're partnering them in the classrooms.

And then another way of, sorry, another way to help your students find a measure of success is through assessments. So, do they know more today than they did last month? Is there something today in which they can take pride? And how are you celebrating these accomplishments? So, at the end of each workout, we use a tracking app and enter our completion times and weights used and the app automatically ranks us each day. So, on days that emphasize speed, agility or balance, I come in fourth place out of four people, right? It's out of four people, but the app still gives me a fourth place shout out and sometimes I get confetti on the app.

On days that emphasize strength, I get the first-place medal. We also compare our current times to our past times because workouts are often repeated. And so, we see how much we've improved, and we get excited when a teammate accomplishes something new.

So that's something else to keep in mind. Do your students, even I'm differentiated for in workouts, but I can also see how much stronger I've gotten because I have a record of my progress.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Amy, that leads me to a great question.

So, you talk about your PRs and just being able to really kind of set individual goals and look at those comparatively for yourself. That's a great strategy to also use in the classroom. Do you have any suggestions on how educators might be able to document types of differentiation that they do with their children?

Dr. Amy Johnson Speaker: Yeah, definitely, put it in the lesson plan just so that you are organized, and you know what you're going to do that day or that week.

And then you can also put it in the student's records. You know, today I gave him 20 extra minutes to complete the assignment. And as you go on, you might find that he's needing less and less time added to that assignment or, you know, you can just see the progress throughout the year with each student.

And then when you come up against another student, and you're thinking, wait, how should I differentiate? You can often come, you think, oh, wait, Stephanie, this student reminds me of how Stephanie learned last year. Let me just refresh my memory and see what did Stephanie, what worked with Stephanie? Let's see if that will work this year with Tisha.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yeah, I think that the documentation is so important, not only for us and for the students, but our administrators and our teachers or our parents also so that we can show that what we are doing and how we have helped.

So, you stated before we when we had talked that there were three common ways to differentiate for students. What are those three common ways?

Dr. Amy Johnson Speaker: The ones that I spoke about?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes.

Dr. Amy Johnson Speaker: I said adjusting your time expectations, partnering students, and then formative assessments to see the progress.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Perfect. I just wanted to go back over those so that everybody had the three in their head. So, when they leave today, they can go and try at least one of those.

Dr. Amy Johnson Speaker: Yeah

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So awesome.

I love it.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: This gets me thinking. So, you have some great strategies for new teachers and veteran teachers, and it really sounds like that the partnership is built between the educator and the student and, you know, they are set up for success in the classroom. Amy, do you have any ideas about or really any feelings about how to talk to families about this differentiation and possibly bring them in on it?

Dr. Amy Johnson: Well, parents can use differentiation at home as well, because let's say your teacher sends home a worksheet with 20 math problems.

And, you know, sometimes the parent will come back and say, it took us three hours to do this, and it was such a huge battle, and it was the worst thing ever. So that's a great time for the teacher to say that was not the purpose of this worksheet.

So next time, why don't you work for 10 minutes with the child and then, you know, maybe that's enough. Just work for 10 minutes. Turn in the 10 minutes' worth of work or work for 10 minutes and then have him run around the backyard four laps and then come back in and do 10 more minutes and then you're done.

So, just teach them little ways to differentiate at home because, you know, if the, for instance, my two girls, one of them could sit on the couch and do multiplication flashcards and that's how she learned her math facts. Well, the other child, that's how I learned too, but the other child, that is not how she learns and it 100% was not working. So, I differentiated in that she jumps on a trampoline while doing her math facts because she needs the movement.

So just telling parents that everyone learns differently, and this is how to differentiate to make it more successful at home.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I love that.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Thank you, Amy.

So, as we wrap up a little bit, what are three takeaways that you want our listeners today to remember about your session?

Dr. Amy Johnson Speaker: I would say be mindful of the ways in which life differentiates for everyone, for you and that it's just little ways in life, little ways in the classroom. Remember that differentiation does not have to be difficult. It can be small little things in the classroom.

Even by making these small adjustments, you can help a child succeed.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Awesome. And Amy, as we wrap this up completely, give us a challenge that we can push out there for our listeners.

Dr. Amy Johnson Speaker: Through differentiation, you can help each student grow as an individual. You can create community in the classroom and set them up for success. So, what ways do you see differentiation in your life and what ways can you bring that into the classroom?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Dr. Johnson, this has been awesome.

I loved how you shared your experience. With exercise every day and working out because it is exactly spot on how we should be doing it in our classroom. So, thank you so much.

And we hope to have you on again. Everybody, thank you so much for joining us today. And we will see you in a couple of weeks.