

25 - Play-Based Learning in the ECE Classroom

Original Air Date: 7/14/21

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. 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.

Dr. Heald Speaker: Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas and inspiration to use today.

Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast for notifications about future episodes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I'm super excited today because we have the opportunity to have one of my friends on the show, Rachel Cowan, and she is currently in her fourth year of teaching. She's taught second grade for two years and then took a year off after she had her daughter.

She then went back and taught first grade for a year and again is now teaching fourth grade. She has been part of the math, science, and social studies committees for the district in each of the grade levels that she has taught.

So, Rachel, welcome.

We're so happy to have you today.

Rachel Cowan Speaker: Hi, thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes, we're very excited and your subject today is play-based learning in the early childhood classroom.

That's totally where I'm at and near and dear to my heart. So, why did you choose to talk about this subject today?

Rachel Cowan Speaker: So, play-based learning is something that I'm very passionate about when talking with education people. It's very interactive with the kids and I really believe that children learn best through their play and it's not all just needing to be paper pencil, and I think it's really important to incorporate their socializing with language skills and things like that.

It will benefit them now in their early childhood life and it will also benefit them later in life when they are growing older with face-to-face socializing.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Rachel, you bring up so many great points. So, if we were to walk into your classroom, can you give our listeners a visualization of what they might see set up in your classroom?

Rachel Cowan Speaker: So, I'm currently teaching fourth grade.

So, I don't do a ton of play-based learning this year, but in my previous years, I've had a lot of activity centers, like little stations. I have a play kitchen where they can go and learn math skills with grocery shopping and interactive play. You can also have areas with blocks where they are building and making patterns. You might also have other manipulatives

stationed around your room in little areas. I would often have a little reading nook and places like that set up throughout the area or the classroom, where it's not just all desks in rows.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes, Rachel. I totally understand. When you walked into my classroom when I taught pre-K and kindergarten, I probably had 15 centers set up and I changed them out as I did my thematic unit.

So, we know that play-based learning sometimes gets a bad rap. So, what are some tips on getting your families on board with play-based learning? Because we know that oftentimes they don't understand it.

Rachel Cowan Speaker: Yes.

So, oftentimes parents are totally okay with playing play learning at first when their kids are in daycare and things like that and then when they come to a public school setting or private school wherever you're going, they really want academics to take a front seat and they really think academics are workbooks and paper pencil and cutting and sorting and things like that, which it is. It has a place in academics and education, but I really believe those early grade levels are super important to engage in play. So, I really try to start at the beginning of the year.

I start talking to them about what their child is going to be doing in my classroom, how it will look for their child. I explain to them the stations that I have set up around my room and how they can learn in each of those stations through their play and we don't need a workbook or a paper to show us that they're learning.

So, I also discuss with them the importance of language development with their peers.

They learn so much from their peers and not just from the teacher all the time. So, it's really important to get them familiar with what it will look like in your classroom so they have an idea of when their child's coming to school for seven hours what their child will be doing.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Rachel, that's such a great perspective.

The fact that our kids, when they are playing, they are indeed learning, and I think our society as a whole does have a large focus on assessment and assessment of the curriculum and assessment even in play.

So, can you talk to our listeners a little bit about how you do assess play-based learning in your classroom?

Rachel Cowan Speaker: So, for assessing, oftentimes I just do a lot of teacher observation. I like to walk around with a clipboard and use a running record and I just have on my clipboard.

I have their name, and I just jot down things that I'm seeing that those kids are doing. Are they counting? Are they making patterns? Can they, if they're having trouble, how are they problem solving? Is someone or other children helping them solve problems and learn the process of problem solving or is it just them frozen and they don't know what to do? So, I take a lot of teacher observations to running records. I also like to create a portfolio for each of my students.

I do that at the very beginning of the year. I assign my students numbers. So, I just create a number for them 1 through 20 usually and that's their number for the year and I create a portfolio and throughout the year if we do anything paper-based like craft or things like that that I think would make a good keepsake or a good form of assessment, I just slip it into that portfolio and I have that to look back on throughout the year to see what skills they've mastered and what skills they haven't and then I also just jot my running records into the portfolios too.

You just need to be cautious that you aren't including other children's names in their portfolio, but yeah, teacher observations and running records are some of my bigger forms of assessment.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, I love that. Portfolios are my favorite way to assess learning across the board.

So, how do you actually, do you document your standards and your skills to show what your, you know, your state standards and like Common Core PASS skills or how do you show your principal that you're actually?

Rachel Cowan Speaker: So, yeah. So, I on my running record, I at the top, I list the standard. So, I'll put the standard that I'm really looking for.

Maybe it's one or two standards a day or if I know I have certain things out in my stations, I will just pull those running records and it just lists the standard at the top and then their names are just listed 1 through 20 or whatever and I just go through it that way. So, I have my standards covered and also in my lesson plans, I have what stations I have and what standards should be covered in those stations.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, you have to be highly organized for this.

Rachel Cowan Speaker: Yes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Okay, yes. That's what I was kind of getting at.

So, for someone who is brand new going into the classroom and they're wanting to implement this play-based learning or somebody who's been in the, you know, the education world forever who's wanting to start doing this, do you have just a few tips and tricks to get them started?

Rachel Cowan Speaker: So, start by making learning an adventure. It doesn't need to be sit here, listen to me lecture and then go do a worksheet independently. Just start by making sure that learning is fun.

It is engaging and you want the kids to be excited to come into your classroom. So, throughout the summertime and all year really, I look for things on Facebook Marketplace, garage sales, wherever I can find things that I think would be would enhance the learning in my classroom. Could be the play kitchen, could be magnetic tiles, Play-Doh, things like that that really are going to build your stockpile for you to choose from for your stations and then just engage with your students while they are playing.

Follow their lead and most importantly, let them fail. It is okay to watch them fail. They will learn from that and hopefully the students around them who are also playing with them are going to see those failures and lessons and watch what the student does to succeed the next time they are might be encountering that problem.

Also, if they can't figure out how to re-engage, make sure you go in and step in and support that. They don't need to fail, and you just completely watch it happen. You can go in and support them and re-maneuver them into something that they should be doing and if it doesn't work the first time, try it again.

It may not work with a certain group of kids but maybe it does with another group. So, try it again. Don't give up and just put it to the wayside.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Rachel, that's so great. You gave us so many ideas. Can you give us three takeaways for our listeners today that might want to go ahead and try this play-based learning in their early childhood classroom?

Rachel Cowan Speaker: So, there are three big takeaways that I like about play-based learning.

Children learn so much from social and language skills with playing with others and this doesn't include just math, doesn't include just English, Language Arts, and reading. It really includes a variety of subjects. So, engaging with your students and providing them the opportunity to learn through social and play.

Also, play-based learning provides a really great experience later in life. Students who have been around play-based learning oftentimes have better social skills later in life and are just more emotionally stable because they can work well with others or figure out how to problem-solve with others in a group effort. Most jobs these days involve working with others, so it's really important to have those skills and establish them early in life.

And it's also really important to know that play-based learning is not just free play. It's very teacher-led and teacher-engaged. You are supporting them through the process and providing them feedback when it's needed.

Yes, they are playing, but it's not just here, welcome to my classroom. Here's a bunch of toys. Have at it.

It's very organized and very structured, but also very engaging for the students.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Rachel, I'm so glad that you justified that it's free play and play-based learning are two different things. And we have to make sure that we understand that and that other people know that.

So, thank you for reiterating that. So, as we wrap up, what is the challenge that you have for our listeners today?

Rachel Cowan Speaker: All right. I challenge these listeners to incorporate play-based learning into their classroom.

Use it in your everyday curriculum. It doesn't have to be the whole day spent just doing play-based learning. You can do it, you know, here and there, especially when you first want to start implementing it.

Try it at maybe a math station or try it at maybe, you know, making patterns or something like that. But don't, and you don't, you can totally just jump right in, but that is going to be a lot more difficult because you're not going to have a lot of the materials you're needing. So, I challenge you to just start incorporating little pieces each day or each week, maybe each month, and really start implementing that in your classroom.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: That's perfect. Yes, we all need a starting point. So, Rachel, thank you so much for being here with us today.

We appreciate you.

Rachel Cowan Speaker: Thank you. I've enjoyed it.

Thank you so much.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes, and listeners, thank you so much for being here with us, and we will see you in a couple of weeks.