

29 - ECE Digital Resource Exploration

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: 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.

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

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So today I'm so excited because Dr. Stephanie Heald, my co-host, is here with us, and she's amazing, and she does all the tech stuff with everything we have to do, and I've been working with her for about eight years. And we're not only colleagues, but we're really good friends. So, Dr. Heald's the title of your conference presentation at the Early Childhood Conference in August was *All Things ECE at Your Fingertips, a Digital Resource Exploration.*

So again, like I said, Steph is amazing when it comes to anything techy. Can you tell our listeners what exactly a digital resource is for those who might be unfamiliar?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I sure can. Dr. Shipley, thank you for having me.

I love being in this seat. It's quite different than asking a question. So, I am thrilled to be here today, and I am thrilled to share what digital resources are.

So, we know technology is here to stay, and for those of you that know, I often present on technology, and I'm very passionate about it. We know our kiddos spend two hours a day on digital media, and what we want to do is we want to make sure that we are using this time well, and that really includes some intentionally designed opportunities to engage our students in learning. It could be applications, apps.

It could be software programs. It could be a camera. It could be audio video simulations.

It can be anything that is actively facilitating creative use by our young children and encouraging social engagement. So, what it is not, and I think this is often why technology and digital resources gets a bad rep, is that it's not videos, and it's not DVDs, and it's not putting our kiddos in front of a screen where they are not being active, okay? So, we want to make sure our mindset with digital resources includes that interactive component, right, that back-and-forth component, which is really what we want for our kids, because why? That facilitates learning. So, I'm going to give you just four straight up research principles that just kind of allow us to wrap our minds around good use with technology.

So, the U.S. Department of Education, Department of Technology gives us four things. Technology can be a tool for learning when used appropriately. Technology should increase access to learning opportunities for all children, right? And number three, technology may be used to strengthen relationships among parents, families, educators, and young children.

And four, technology is more effective when adults and peers co-act or co-view. So those four guiding principles are really what the ECE conference was founded on, my presentation in the ECE conference was founded on, and really what we should use with our digital resources mindset going forward.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love this.

When I was teaching in my classroom, I didn't have a lot of digital resources because, I mean, that was several, several years ago, but, you know, I had just the normal things, a CD player, an overhead projector. So, things are always changing too. And that's what I love about you is that you stay on current resources, the hottest and latest things.

And I think that you have to do that out there in the world of education to make sure your students are getting the right things, correct?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, yeah, you do. Our families are so diverse today. And just like you said, you know, books and card catalogs and all those things were monumental and trailblazing at the time.

Well, today we have those digital resources that truly in this new era of learning, they play a foundational role because like I said, our kids, we know our kids are on devices and we know you're utilizing technology. So, thanks to our knowledge and our body of research that we have and what we know about children developmentally, how they grow, learn, and play, we can utilize the digital learning to, to expand what they have access to, to expand their opportunity. We can use it to empower them and to get them interested in learning.

So, you know, we all have our favorite author, right? So, we don't necessarily, we don't want to utilize every tech tool, but we want to be very mindful about how we're using this digital resources and how we're using these digital ages to transform how we teach, how we communicate with families and how we learn. You know, it used to be, we'd walk into classrooms and we see chalkboards. I visit a lot of classrooms and guess what? Those chalkboards have transformed to just like Dr. Shipley said, new devices.

It may not be the overhead where you had that transparent one that you wrote on and then you would dry erase it. And then you, you know, it's changed. There are several other, you know, tools in our classrooms to meet our diverse families and audiences.

And we want to make sure that we're not just switching from, you know, hard copies of a word document or hard copies of a guidebook or hard copies of a book. We're really being intentional in how we utilize that to make the learning something that's above and beyond.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes.

And there are so many things out there for teachers today, just right at their fingertips. You just, and some, some teachers are, you know, nervous or anxious or scared to jump in. You know how I am.

You're always sharing new things with me and you're pushing me to do it, but I have learned so many things. So, what would you tell a new teacher who is a little scared about trying something new? How would you encourage them?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, I think that's a great point. And I will tell you everyone, even those who are comfortable with technology have those pauses where they're uncomfortable, but guess what? Remember whenever we're uncomfortable, that's generally the position of growing and changing.

So, the first thing is just to start with baby steps. I remember I had an Elmo as a fifth-grade teacher. I had an Elmo in my classroom, and I thought I had no idea how to use it.

So, one day I just decided to turn it on and we didn't use it all day. We literally just turned it on. And then a kiddo went by and put his hand under it and then we could see like the handprints.

And then that developed into a conversation about the lines on your fingers, on your palms. And then all of a sudden, we put a piece of notebook paper there and we realized, oh, you can write on it. And then it portrays the screen.

So, it was these little baby steps that led me to the point of not wanting to move that mobile Elmo cart out of my room. And we have to be mindful of taking those baby steps towards the sense of integration of these resources. Now, again, there are so many ways that we can do that.

And you don't have to jump in and have the most interactive media experience, the most complex. You can really, truly start with using a digital camera to take a picture of a block sculpture in the block center of your classroom. And on that digital camera, you might upload that and send it via an email to a family.

That itself is a digital resource. You might take a video of a child using a mouse, right, or a keyboard to start to type their name. That itself is integrating in a digital resource, okay? So, we just want to make sure that we're utilizing these tools to create, again, opportunities and expand creativity for our students.

And for ourselves, when we're going into that level of discomfort, it shows we're growing. So, we can also utilize it to do those bigger things. We can also utilize it to create those classroom websites or to create digital or audio recordings for each child that we store on our computer.

That's really, really great too. But we want to make sure we know who we are as a professional and that we utilize these experiences in a forward manner, but not necessarily at a sprint pace, something that we do over time.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love that because over the last eight years, you have taught me so many different things about technology.

So, I know we all work with populations that might not have the access to these types of resources. What do we do then?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, that's a great point. We know a lot of our populations have some sort of smartphone.

I don't want to put a percentage out there, but it's a very high percentage that has access to that. And we want to make sure, again, we're not thinking just top of the mountain. We're thinking different stops along the mountain.

So again, going back to that camera, it might be something where we just have in our own classrooms, we record a child, maybe a dual language learner who is starting to speak in fluent English. We might record that and send it via email. Or we might record that on a tablet that's able to travel from our environment to the home for the child to show his family how to use.

We might do a virtual tour with a child of the classroom if their families cannot come into the classroom to see the technology. We might do that virtual tour and again, send it home with the child. We can also think about advanced ways that we might open our classroom up for parents to come in and utilize the classroom during volunteer opportunities.

So obviously, always having that safe mindset, but also always having that inclusive mindset that we're figuring out where our families are at and we're meeting them there. That might include a more mindful process of getting the technology into the child's home and some processes have to be in place with that. But I will tell you, I have seen it work very successfully where families have had no access to technology and the environment had a shared access to technology and it worked very well.

So again, think small. Think small things like setting the families up with an email that they might be able to check on their smartphone or sending home some digital pictures with the child. And it may just be something where you send them home with a dictation machine, one of those little mobile dictations and the child speaks at home using their home language with their family.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Perfect. I do want you to share a few of your favorite digital resources because this is always something that I learned from you is what are the greatest ones out there right now? What are you using?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, so I'm going to dangle a carrot here and I'm going to tell you that I have the most amazing resources for new and veteran teachers on my ECE conference, so you definitely want to go and check that out. But just real quick, we have those tried and true resources like Khan Academy, PBS Kids, Edutopia, Starfall.

We have those that really do a good job and as in being a tool that students go to, they're excited about, they're engaged in, they want to do more because it's that interactive, engaging, creative tool for them. And again, tried and true. So, we have those that we can always go back to.

The component of those that I like is it does offer students very often developmental levels and it also offers content area focus. So, if we know our kiddo is struggling with reading, we might send them to those sites at home so they can hear a story read to them. Modeling fluency and prosody and intonation.

And that we know, those are tested tools that they have access to. One of my new favorites, and again, I'm just going to give you a couple and dangle that carrot, is Epic. And that's like a huge e-book library and it has access to over 30, 35, I think it's 35,000 books that students can go and it has the read to me feature, which is so cool with our families because not every family is comfortable engaging in read alouds.

And the cool thing about it is a lot of these sites have those after comprehension questions, and some have vocabulary cards. So, all these literacy-based sites, which we find families want the most of, have that availability and access. Another cool one is the Hungry Caterpillar Play School and that's available for desktop and app.

And then another really cool one that we shared on an earlier podcast that has become a favorite bookmark for me is Go Kid Go. So, check these out. Check out the ECE conference video where you can find many more.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love it. I knew you would share some great ones. So, as we wrap up, what are three takeaways that you want our audience to know?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Okay, no matter where you're at, start small, but start.

You do not have to love every piece of technology that you utilize, but you be mindful, be that reflective practitioner, and just really kind of think about which ones will work for your kids. I'll tell you that I had to adjust in certain apps I loved for certain groups of kids and individual kids, and for other kids, they just didn't work. So, it is really okay to be selective on which high-quality ones we use.

And then the second one is, again, use it for yourself, use it for your children, and also use it for your families. It's really something that you want to make sure you're finding the best fit, and you're really finding a way to not make it something that's in addition to, but it's a supplement what you're already doing. And the third one is, remember, you're always going to be the teacher, and we never want to replace that.

And again, what you're doing is finding ways to enhance creativity, enhance exploration, enhance opportunities. So, if you're in that part where you're saying, oh, I've got to integrate technology in this lesson plan, flip that perspective. How can I include digital resources? How can I include technology to enhance what I, as an amazing, high-quality teacher, am already doing?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes, exactly.

I think we all just have to have the confidence to do it. So, one challenge that you want to leave us with.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: So, my one challenge for you today is to think about three ways you can use technology, one for your own personal growth, one for the growth of your students, and one for the growth of your family partnerships.

And again, with all those, come from that growth mindset that you're going to start somehow, but start small.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Perfect. Do not forget that Dr. Heald presented at the Early Childhood Conference in August in the notes section of this.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: In case I didn't mention it.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: In the notes section of where you found this podcast, you will be able to find her presentation and you will not want to miss it. Thank you all for being with us today.