

3 - Family Forums

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

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

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

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Twice a month we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can easily listen to to obtain quick and fun ideas that you can use in your classroom today. So be sure to subscribe to this podcast for future episodes and let's get started.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Dr. Shipley has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, a master's degree in elementary administration, and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. She is currently a professor in the early childhood education department at Ashford University* and has been in education for 18 years. Dr. Shipley's topic today is using Family Forums in the classroom and online to build relationships with family. So, without further to do, let's get to it. Dr. Shipley, can you tell us what a family forum is?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Definitely. A family forum is a way to build relationships with families. It's to keep them updated and to even teach them about topics that you're using in your classroom. So, I used family forums every year when I was teaching. This is a face-to-face practice where you invite the families in for an evening each month and that's the key, it's every month. This can take place in a cafeteria, your gym, the outside of your building, in your classroom, honestly, wherever you have permission from your administration to hold these. It starts from the first month of school. That doesn't mean that you can't start right now. So, if you're listening to this podcast right now and you want to start and it's October, you can get started this month, but it needs to be consistent, well-planned, and organized. Because when families are making time to meet with you, their time is very precious. So, what I did is I mapped out each month. So I figured out the topics that I would cover, the food that I would have donated, and that's the key, the prizes that I would give out, how long each part would take, and then I would always prepare them for the month ahead for what we were going to study or talk about the next month. So for example, in August, I might be just showing them around the classroom, teaching them about the play-based learning that we would be using and how their child is going to be assessed, the different developmental stages that children at this age could be going through, and what we will be learning that month. So, I may have pizza donated from the local pizza restaurant. I might ask my local Walmart to donate a small game that would help with the child's development, such as fine motor right then, and then provide fine motor activities that they can work on that are at home that are easy for them. So then for just another example, real quick, in October, I may invite a local eye doctor to come in and talk about how important it is to have their child's eyes checked. I would bring in guest speakers throughout the year whenever I thought it was appropriate, and this can be anyone that you feel confident that could contribute to the family's knowledge. So, it could be a food bank. Each year, this is going to be different because your families are different. So, in October, we might make pumpkin pie in a baggie for the dessert. I would give out a pumpkin for each family to be able to take home and carve for the month. So, I always tried to promote that family time and how important it was to spend time with their child, hence the term Family Forum. I wanted them to learn how to teach their child at home what we were doing at school. So, it was different every month, and for example, I might talk about one-to-one correspondence, sight words, or even how to set up your social media account that you would like to follow me on or remind them about something like that. So, I made sure that it was very hands-on and that it was very timely and organized.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Wow, so many great ideas. I love the fact that you are opening your door and welcoming the families in to really build that classroom community. What would you do if you had a family that might not be able to come for a variety of reasons?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, there were a lot of reasons that families couldn't come. We know that. So, a lot of the reasons were that they have children at home. I had sat something up next door, and I had another teacher come in and volunteer, and we would flip-flop so they could have their Family Forum. And then we would have children playing games, reading books, singing and dancing. We would have snacks for them in the other room. So, they could actually bring their child, but they went to another room. Another thing that I did is that I recorded live on Facebook or on YouTube, and then I posted it and recorded later so that they could come back and watch it if they had to work that evening. But a lot of people would watch from home. So, let's just say they could not leave their house for a variety of reasons. Somebody just had a baby, somebody was sick, they could still partake in what we were doing, but it was from a distance. So, it's the same with the online learning that we're going through right now. These things are still possible. You're just going to have to do it through Zoom or another forum. And have those online meetings with your families, build those relationships, that's what it's all about.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I love that. You're really reaching out and a very diverse manager for the challenges our society faces right now. So how do you get buy-in from your families to attend, either virtually or in the class for these?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, I will tell you right now, it was not hard to get buy-in. After the first month, and they saw how beneficial it was, I was providing them with information. And if they couldn't come, I was recording it. Most of them wanted to come. Not all could come each month. But again, it's about consistency and time management. So, if I only had 30 minutes worth of material or activities that I was using or the guest speaker, I only kept them for 30 minutes. Just because it was an hour doesn't mean they had to stay for an hour. I always stayed for the hour, had the snacks, had the food, had the prizes, had things that they could take home with them. And then families could stay after and visit with me if they needed to. So, I just want you to know that it's not hard to get buy-in. Families want that connection. They want that relationship. Even if they're afraid to come into the classroom with you, they will still do it from a distance, even if you do something live or if they record. And then they're able to talk to you about it later. So, you just have to get that first one under your belt, show them that it's something that's very beneficial, and they will want to come back.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: That's interesting. And it sounds like the kids want to come also. So, you have that initial buy-in from the kids and the families. I think that's great. So, you talked a little bit about the organization of these family forums. How specifically do you pick your topics that you're going to talk about or what you're going to do for the month? How do you plan that out?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, each year, the topics are going to be different because your families are different. The children are still the same, but you switch your plans up. So, you may be doing snowmen one month. You may be doing turkeys one month. Those are just examples. But what are the skills that you're teaching with those themes? What math skills are you teaching? How advanced or how on developmental stage are your students? So, you'll have to know that. So, you've got to get to know your students. You've got to get to know your families, their backgrounds, what they've done, what they bring to the table. So, each year, again, it's going to be different. What is the socioeconomic status in your class? What guest speakers from the community will benefit your families? How can you get your families as many resources as possible and bring that to them in a timely manner? So, it just depended on what my students were learning at the time, what topics I needed to teach. Because we have to remember, not everybody comes to school with a positive outlook on what you're doing. They may have had a negative experience in school. So, we have to teach these concepts to these parents in a way that we're learning right along with them and that we want to help them, and that we're learning from them too because nobody knows their child better than themselves. So, we have to make sure that we are teaching concepts, but that we are also building that relationship with those families. So again, your topics are going to be different. It just depends on what you're teaching that month and what you want the families to know.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: That's really powerful. That's really powerful. So, as we begin to wrap up our recording, can you tell us three takeaways that you really want to leave us with surrounding the concept of implementing Family Forums?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: One hundred percent. One, get to know your families by building those strong reciprocal relationships. That means back and forth. That's before even your Family Forum. I can do a whole podcast on that. That is before they even come to your class the first day of school. Two hold family forums at least once per month to stay in contact with your families. Three, be organized, be consistent, manage your time well, have all of your materials ready, make sure that there's food present. You have prizes and you have something that they can take home with them. It doesn't always have to be something like a pumpkin. It doesn't always have to be a game, but it can be something, an idea that they can take home to use with their families that day.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I love that. And what just a side note on that, how do you best connect with communities? Do you have any advice for that as we move forward?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, I grew up in a small town where the community all worked together, but I taught in a city, Oklahoma City. So, there were millions of people, but the community wants to help your school. So if you go in and tell McDonald's, this is what I'm doing for my classroom. I never had a restaurant turn me down to donate something. And if I didn't have a donation, I ended up making, so if it was winter, I would make a pot of stew and bring it. The parents didn't have to eat, but if they wanted to, the food was there for them. So, connect with that community, those communities that, and once you start doing your Family Forums, they know that you're there and they know what you're going to be doing because you're the same teacher that came in every year and they want to help you, they want to help teachers.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I love that. I bet they look forward to seeing you. That's great. So, on a final note, challenge our audience with one thing that they can do to start up Family Forums. So give our audience a Family Forum challenge. I want you to start your Family Forum today. That doesn't mean you have your Family Forum today. That means you start planning for your first Family Forum, math out and outline your topics that you're going to cover for each month. So, nine months, what are you going to do? They should align with what you're teaching. Who will you bring in from the community? Why are you bringing them in? And then start sending out and putting a little seed in your family's ears that this is coming. You won't be disappointed. All right, there you have it. Dr. Shipley brought us a challenge. All right, audience, let's get on that. Thank you so much for your time today. And audience, thank you so much for joining us. Stay tuned and subscribe for future episodes.

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