

30 - Engaging and Developmentally Appropriate Learning Activities to Start School

Original Air Date: 9/22/21

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Stephanie Heald: 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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I am so excited to be here today with not only my co-host on this podcast but a very dear colleague and friend, and I will tell you, she never disappoints me in presenting. She just presented at the Early Childhood Education Conference on engaging, developmentally appropriate learning activities to start school, and I will tell you, her entire presentation is shared with just amazing activities---so many different activities that you can utilize tomorrow in your classroom, so I hope you will go and view that.

Today, she's going to talk to us a little bit about this topic to just give you a little carrot, and I'm just really so honored and excited to have her here today. Dr. Shipley, thank you for taking the time to be on the other end of this podcast.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hi Dr. Heald, I'm so excited to be here and I'm actually talking about a topic that is truly near and dear to my heart.

I think that we can all remember back when we first started teaching and that first year, even the first day, every single year we taught. What are we going to do? How are we going to do it? How are we going to start our year out? What do we need to do? What do the children already know? So, we know it's all about building those relationships, so that's what I'm here to talk about today.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Oh: my gosh, so why is this a passion of yours? What makes it so important for you?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I think that when you are teaching children, honestly of any age, we are teaching them to be lifelong learners that love learning.

When I talk to a child out on the street or at Walmart, because I'm always doing that, and they say they don't enjoy school, it breaks my heart. Because I know that, as a teacher, we have the ability to make sure that we are building those classroom communities of learners---where we are engaging them, where we are supporting them, where we are including their families, where we are loving on them, and where we are making learning fun. Learning doesn't---just because we're teaching math, science, reading, things like that---that doesn't mean it doesn't have to be fun.

But as the teacher, we have to build that community of successful learners---learners who are using trial and error---and we are ensuring, being creative, and making sure that our topics are important. There are two quotes that I want to share with you, that I try to remember throughout school when I'm teaching. Educators' teaching strategies have a direct impact on student achievement.

And if you stop and think about that, the way that we teach is going to have a direct influence on what our students learn. Are we teaching them from the knowledge that we are getting from them---who they are, what they are bringing to the table that year? Or are we just teaching out of a textbook? We have to make sure that we are teaching children with what they are bringing to us. What do they already know? How can we build on that background? The second quote is: no significant learning can happen without relationships.

I never got to the end of the year and thought, oh, my goodness, I spent way too much time with that child. I got to know that child way too much. No, I thought, oh, I should have sat down just a little bit longer and got to know this part of that child or this part of that family.

So, those are two things that I try to keep in mind when I start my year and throughout the entire year. What can I do to be better?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: That's so important. It reminds me, there was a quote by Theodore Roosevelt that says, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

This really reminds me of that because our kiddos want that environment that they're in. They want that community. I know you have shared so many strategies about how you build this classroom community.

Can you talk to us about how you build it?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes, because I'm so glad you asked that, because a community starts before the first day of school. You're sending out postcards. If your school allows home visits, you're doing a home visit.

Phone calls---making sure you're building that relationship before they even see you on that back-to-school night. And they know that you care and that you are setting that year up to be successful before they even meet you. And then, when they meet you at that door, and you shake their hand and you look in their eye, they already know who you are because you've talked to them.

You've seen them. You've sent them something saying, "Welcome to our community." Building that classroom community, inside and outside the room, is vital.

It's a vital part of who we are and what we do. We've got to get those parents involved. We've got to get that community involved, also.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, that's so important. And I've seen you do that. And I've also heard you talk about that in so many ways.

You know, you speak at the conference about Family Forums and the meetings that you have and even like cooking with students. Can you tell us a little bit more about what that might look like in your setting?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes. So, as I just mentioned, it starts before that day one.

And then day one, you make sure that the families know that you're all on the same page. You all want what is best for that child. You have to continue that relationship.

It's making a phone call every week on positive things. Your child did fantastic on their art project---it's hanging in the art center.

If you want to come by anytime, you're inviting families in to read books, be a special guest, share about their culture, come in and help cook in the science center, come in and help when you go on, you know, your fall walk---whatever it might be. You're inviting those parents in. You want them to build that relationship because a lot of families are even scared to come in.

They don't know what to do. So, make sure you have things for them to do when they come in, and they're not just sitting and observing, because that makes them feel, you know, useless. You've got to have them doing something.

So, then the next thing is the Family Forum. The Family Forum happens once a month. At the Family Forum, it is very organized.

You have food there. You have activities. And it depends on what your month is---that what your topic is going to be.

So, it depends on August through May what you're going to talk about. And I actually have that set up on my website. And I talk about it at the conference---what a normal monthly Family Forum might be.

But let's just say it's August, and you're teaching families about your centers in your classroom and how your classroom community is built. You might go into the different jobs that children have to apply for, that they get to sign up for, and what they do in the classroom and how the transitions work and how the procedures work. So, you want to teach the families about that community and what is going on.

And then you want to send them home with something. And it might be a family building exercise, such as a game, or you send a camera home with the family, and they get to take pictures, and the child gets to bring them back. There's just so many things that you can do at Family Forums, bring community members in to talk about glasses, talk about if you have a dentist or a doctor, or if you have families that need help with food banks, you can have the food bank regional manager or food bank person come in.

There's so many cool things that you can do to support those families. And as you're supporting those families, they're going to in turn support you. So, your classroom community with those students is going to be the best that it can be.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I love that. And you hit upon it briefly, but you also not only do you create that community in your classroom, but your outreach outside the classroom is huge with all of your social media and website and whatnot. Can you speak a little to that?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Most definitely.

I think that's one of the most proud things that I have going, because I want to reach a family no matter where they are or what they're doing. So as we know that most families have either a computer, an iPad, a cell phone of some sort, or they can get to a resource like at a public library or at a university---they're open to the public also.

I also tell my families they're able to come into my classroom and get on the computer whenever they need. So, I have a Twitter. I have an Instagram.

I have a Facebook page. I have a Pinterest page. All of these are early childhood.

They're all giving early childhood topics and ideas, and what parents can do out in the world with their children and at home. Ideas on what you can do this weekend with your child---whether it's go to the beach if you live in San Diego, or it's going outside and building a snowman if it's snowing in January. I'm giving ideas all the time.

And that is what I have the most feedback from with my families also, is the outreach that I have. I don't just send that note home in the folder. I don't just make phone calls.

I also have all of these other means of communication where they can get to it quickly, along with my website, so they can just jump on my website, and they knew what was going on.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I love that. And for families who might not have that access, what else might you direct them to or social media? Any other resources that you could direct them to support learning in their home?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: A hundred percent.

And that's what the Family Forum is about. And if you come and it is just for parents, it is just a time for us to get to know each other. And once a family knows what that Family Forum is about, I'm not there to waste your time.

I am there to get straight to the point. I'm going to serve you a meal and I'm going to teach you what we are doing in our classroom so you can help your child at home. They want to come.

I might start out with just a few, but then when they start talking to the other families, they want to come. They want to engage because it's not about building that relationship with me. They're getting to build a relationship with all the other families in the class now also.

And it's really neat when I see my old families from years ago who still come up and talk to me and say, I still keep in touch with this other family in my class, or we still go on vacations with this other family because of the relationships you built. And so, they are so great. And I get to follow those families on social media now.

And that Family Forum, this is an important part of it, is I record that and put that, I did put that on my YouTube page so that those families could go watch that. So, if they couldn't

come, they had the access to watch it, or I could send it to them if they didn't have YouTube, or they could come in again and talk to me one-on-one. But I think it's really important that we share all sorts of resources and think outside the box.

It's not just a paper home anymore.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: It's truly so clear how you start to build those family partnerships and those foster into lifelong relationships that's crucial.

Dr. Shipley as we are winding down the podcast could you please share three take aways for our listeners?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: For sure, I want to remind you about the two quotes. Educators' teaching strategies have a direct impact on student achievement. That goes back to developmentally appropriate practices in your classroom. I know that sometimes we have so many things going on in our head: test scores, how we are going to assess, our principal wants us to do this, our colleagues are doing that. We have to follow what's in our heart. What is right for our students?

That is using developmentally appropriate strategies in our classroom. Then you have to talk about, no significant learning can happen without a relationship. Build that relationship in your classroom, outside your classroom, with the colleagues you teach with, with the administrators, and ask for help if you need it. Everyone is there to help you. And then engage with those peers and colleagues and see what they are doing. Get ideas from them---you don't always have to reinvent the wheel. There are so many great things that are already out there, just ask for it.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: That's huge also. And as you know, we always leave with a challenge. So, what is your challenge for us?

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: My challenge for you for this year, it doesn't matter when you started, is to do some sort of Family Forum.

It doesn't have to be called a Family Forum. It can be called a parent night. You don't have to do it once a month.

You can do it every six months. You can do it whenever you want. It can be set up however you want.

But if you start inviting those families in and sharing resources with them, you are going to build the type of relationship that you've never had before. And if you do come, if you do have them come into your classroom, have them busy, give them something to do, and then thank them and reward them for being there because they're doing you a favor, also. So, don't forget, I did present at the early childhood conference, and all of these things are broken down in my presentation.

So, you can find that in the notes section. I think it's really important that you have a good grasp on what a family forum is before you just go out and do it.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, Dr. Shipley, we are so honored to have you on the flip side. And this just gave us so much insightful information on how to build this community and kind of foster it throughout the year. Like you said, for those lifelong relationships. So, thank you listeners.

This is huge. Dr. Shipley's presentation marks the last episode of our first season of ECE (early childhood education), Early Childhood Chatter podcast. Dr. Shipley and I are just so thankful for you listening and allowing us to expand this podcast to several different hosting sites, wherever you're listening.

We are thankful, and we are thrilled to announce that we will be coming back for season two and are just so excited for our dynamic lineup of presenters that we are going to bring to you for inspiration and excitement. And we just appreciate you. Thank you.