

36 - Is it Time to Start Your Own Preschool

Examining the Process and Decisions Required for a Successful Business

Original Air Date: 12/15/21

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

Host 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.

Host 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 to try.

Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to get notifications about future episodes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Today, we have with us someone that has presented for us many times. She is a retired preschool and kindergarten owner, teacher, director, and author.

Anita has a BS in early childhood education and an MED in gifted education. She has been involved in presenting workshops to early childhood professionals for over 40 years. Anita, thank you so much for being here.

We're thrilled to have you on the show.

Anita Schlaht Speaker: Thank you. I'm excited about it.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Anita, we are very lucky to have you presenting at the Early Childhood Education Conference. The title of your presentation was, *It is Time to Start Your Own Preschool, Examining the Process and Decisions Required for a Successful Business. So, Anita*, can you tell us what made you want to open up your own preschool?

Anita Schlaht Speaker: Well, as I was growing up as a young child, my mother was teaching elementary school.

I saw a lot of the frustrations that she went through with principals in trying to teach from an early childhood perspective. One year, she had 32 first graders in one class. She finally told her principal, if he gave her one more student, the desk would have to go in the hall because she couldn't get through the rows of children in her classroom.

She was very frustrated. I guess that kind of instilled in me a desire to be my own boss and make my own decisions about what I wanted to teach.

Dr Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love that.

I think that we all get to that point at some time in our career. What does someone need to think about before they open up their own preschool?

Anita Schlaht Speaker: So, I think the first most important decision you need to make is, what kind of school do you want to have? What ages are you going to have? Do you want a Montessori school? Do you want to purchase some kind of a franchise or just really, what kind of school you want to have? I think that's the most important thing.

Then, the next one is the timing of when you're going to open it because I know recently a family member decided they were going to open a preschool, and they knew that school started in the fall, so they aimed at opening their school in the fall, not realizing that most parents back in the spring enrolled their children in the program where they were going to send them, and by fall, they'd already made those decisions.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: That's really great. You do have to kind of be in the moment thinker, but I'm sure there was also a level or is a level of planning that goes into opening a preschool. Can you speak to a little bit about the planning elements that you were involved in?

Anita Schlaht Speaker: Yes.

Location is very important. So once you decide you want to do a school and what kind of school you're going to have, then you need to look at where, you know, you need to investigate and be sure that there's a need for a school like what you want to have, but then you also look at where the city would let you have a school. Maybe there's a school you could purchase and make it your own or are you going to build a building? Are you going to buy land? So, all that's important.

Then you have to think about your staff, who are you going to hire and what training are they going to be required to have? And then how are you going to equip your school? Where are you going to get your equipment? A lot of mine I got through garage sales and thrift stores. I bought good tables and chairs and bookshelves and dividers, but a lot of my toys and games were either things I made or things that I purchased used. And then you've got to figure out your financing.

You know, how are you going to do all of this and how are you going to pay your staff? And then what are you going to need to charge to be able to pay your loan at the bank or your rent or whatever it's going to cost you? So, there's a lot of decisions to be made.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I think that you bring up a good point about when you're thinking about the decisions, you really want to consider your own philosophy and thoughts and beliefs. But I'm sure you also reached out to some, you know, resources to help you in making these decisions.

Can you talk a little bit about the resources that you consulted?

Anita Schlaht Speaker: Sure. Of course, at the time that I started my school, that was back in the early 70s. And in Edmond, our town where I live, there is about a town of 50,000 people.

And at that time, the only developmental preschool that there was in town was the laboratory school at the university that my mother at that time was the director of. And so, I knew that I wanted a similar school to what she had. And I had it as a good role model.

I went to Oklahoma City and visited a preschool, Montessori School, that had a design that I thought I wanted to have when we built our first building. I designed the building after that program because it was an open classroom, center-based program. And so, I looked at their building and how it was working.

And I observed there, I didn't want to do Montessori, but I wanted to do the open classroom type setup that Montessori had. And so, I designed the school after that. There were some, Claire Cherry has a book that has a lot of forms for daycare and preschool.

And it was very helpful in setting up the different forms that I had. Of course, back then, that was pre-computer. So, I did all of my bookkeeping by hand, my enrollment all by hand.

We got computers about the mid-80s, so about 10 years into having the school. So those kinds of resources were important. Also, the financial resources.

I hired a bookkeeper, actually, she had children that came to my school. And so, I was able to get her just by letting her children come free. And so, she helped me with the bookkeeping and then having a good accountant to do your taxes and all those things.

I wish that in my training, when I was studying early childhood, there was no business classes required. And so, I was fortunate to have a father who taught business at the university. And so, he could help me with the hiring, trying to set up what was I going to ask in the interview and that kind of thing.

But I had to learn a lot of that just as I went along.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: You bring up so many great points, Anita. Administrators and leaders and those who start preschools have so many different caps and hats to wear from building a budget to writing grants for using safety features and credentialing with their hiring and firing and marketing and even right down to the menus they design every day.

There are so many caps and hats. Do you have any tips for educators who really want to build their own preschool, but also have never managed those roles and caps and hats?

Anita Schlaht Speaker: I would say conferences, people you can talk to. Most schools will let you come in and visit.

I was fortunate to have preschool aged children during a lot of those years. So, I could go in and look at preschools. I didn't have to tell them that I wasn't really looking to enroll my child.

And I could look around and see what their programs were like. And we were always open to letting people come to our school, too. And I'm sure they were doing the same thing.

But that's important. And then talking to people who've had experience. I know there was a lady in Tulsa that had some very successful preschool program and had several different locations.

And as I was going through those early years, I would always seek her workshops out when I went to conferences because I knew she was doing it well. And I wanted to learn from her. So that's important.

And then having those business resources or taking classes. I know our local Vo-Tech has classes on entrepreneurship. And I'm sure those would have been very helpful in starting my own business and all the different things to think about.

And then you want to look at your state guidelines, too, of course, because they're going to have requirements. And if you're going to want to get funding through the federal government or through your state, then you want to be sure that you're going to meet all of those requirements.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah.

You know, one thing I've learned for you over the years, right from your play poem that you shared with us to this today, is that you have never stopped growing and learning. And I think that's important for all of our educators to just really understand and, you know, and become, you know, accustomed to. I mean, we are really truly learning every day.

So, Anita today, if you were to close your eyes and just walk us through that classroom that you would see, you know, what do we see as a high-quality preschool today? What are we seeing in your classroom?

Anita Schlaht Speaker: You're seeing lots of visual stimulation, a lot of colors, a lot of hands-on equipment, good quality equipment. I spent my money early on things that I knew would last. Large wooden climbers, large wooden blocks, and they're expensive.

But they lasted for 25 years. And I ended up selling them for almost what I paid for them when I closed my school. So, they're worth the investment.

You can get a lot of things cheaper. You know, you can buy used books, you can buy used other things. But having those quality pieces, that's what you're going to look for in a setting.

You're going to want to look for books down accessible to children. You're going to want to look for lots and lots of smiles. You don't want it too quiet because children are not quiet.

And so, if everything is very quiet, you know that there's a lot of controls being put on children and their learning. And I think that learning is noisy, and it's messy. And so, you want to see art areas that have lots of things that are messy.

You want to see teachers that seem to be enjoying their time with the children and the way they talk to children, the way they listen to children, they get down on their level. Those are the kinds of things you want to see when you go observe somewhere.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, I love it.

I love it. You spoke to so many points that we have in our environments, but then also what we are creating through our own movements and just interactions with the children and what we want to convey. Anita, thank you so much.

There are some takeaways that you have for our audience, specifically three takeaways that really kind of summarize your ECE presentation in our chat here today. So, what are those three takeaways for our listeners?

Anita Schlaht Speaker: As I said before, I think timing is very important. Is there a need and how long is it going to take you to get all of your ducks in a row and be ready to advertise and open your school? And so that's very important.

Another thing is the resources, what resources do you need? What do you have? What experience do you have? What training do you have? And then what do you need? And so going out to find those pieces that you are lacking, that you need. And then finally, I just would like to motivate you to follow your dream. If it's always been your dream to have your own school.

I told people when I was a senior in high school that I wanted to have my own preschool. So, I was 17 years old then, but it happened by the time I was 21. So, it can happen, and you can make it happen.

And if that's your dream, I just encourage you to go for it.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: OK, listeners, that is your challenge. If you think that there is a need for a new school, Miss Anita challenges you to go forth.

Miss Anita, the time with you is always amazing. You continue to be a learner in so many facets. And we just thank you for taking the time today to lead us through this.

Please join the education conference and view Anita's entire presentation and continue to subscribe and join us next week. Thank you so much.

Anita Schlaht Speaker: Thank you.