

## 5 - Online Learning Environments of Today

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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. [www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast](http://www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast)

**Audience:** Current Active & Enrolled Students

### Episode Transcript

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

**Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker:** Twice a month, we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas that you can use today. So be sure to subscribe to this podcast for future episodes, and let's get started.

Because today we have Fran Margolis. She has a BA in Elementary Education from Hofstra University, a Master's in Instructional Technology from George Mason University, and all but dissertation in Instructional Technology and Media from Teachers College, Columbia University. She has been teaching in and out of public education since 1994 and has taught every grade K through 9 in some capacity, including general ed teacher and tech teacher.

Currently, Fran is a sixth-grade teacher in Lansdale, PA in the North Penn School District.

**Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker:** Today, Fran is going to talk to us about teaching online in today's society. And I really got the pleasure to know Fran personally, and I really saw her when her children Aaron and Micah were young, and I really saw how she interacted with them and just did really valuable teaching with them at home and when they were early childhood age.

And now I have the pleasure of knowing her through the professional capacity in her teaching role. So, Fran, what does this year look like for you in education?

**Fran Margolis Speaker:** Well, hi, ladies. It's so nice to be here with both of you.

Thanks for having me. So, this year we are, I am teaching virtually, 100% virtual. And I was lucky I had the choice of either going into the classroom and teaching virtually or staying home and teaching virtually, or I could do a combo.

So, I do a combo. I go into school two days a week and teach from there. And I stay home three days a week.

And that's really good because it gives you a good sense of normalcy to get up and go to work every day. So, we're teaching virtually. My own children are learning virtually.

And I would say it's had some ups and lots of downs. I'm certainly the type of teacher that needs to be with her students. I don't feel like I'm as effective this way.

And I know that that's kind of how everybody's feeling right now. I'm trying to have a positive attitude, like we are doing the best that we can. And that's going to have to be okay.

We just got word that we are going back to school in November. So, November 8th, the kids will come back to me in a hybrid setting. So, they'll be in school two days a week, out of school two days a week, and then alternating Fridays.

They'll come in and out of school. So that's kind of how my teaching is formatted so far this year.

**Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker:** Yeah.

You know, I love the realness of it because you really have brought up a point that many teachers are facing. It's hard. It's definitely different than teaching in a traditional classroom.

Have you found anything to be able to work online that you really think, gosh, this is working online and feel comfortable with it?

**Fran Margolis Speaker:** Yeah. In the spring, when the world shut down, we used Google Classroom, which I really liked. I utilized that in my classroom.

So, it was kind of a seamless transition, except we weren't together. But I kind of taught the same way that I taught in the classroom. I mean, obviously not the same, but now my school district has moved to using Canvas as their learning management system.

And there's a huge learning curve there. It's very difficult. It's not so difficult once you start using it, but there's a lot more work to be done because of Canvas.

So right now, I think we're in a pretty good groove with it. The kids have learned it. Today, Google, we still use Google Meet to see each other because Canvas doesn't have a Meet capacity.

But today, Google actually pushed out their breakout rooms, which was like a major game changer today. In my last math class, we had so much fun. We were breaking out different rooms, which was good.

I do find that what's working online is by structuring my classes the same every single day. That really helps. I'm working a departmentalized grade, so I teach English and Math.

And my first English and Math class are a co-taught special ed class. And I feel that by structuring the class the same every single day, the kids really know the routine and what to do. So just like if you were in the classroom, you would have different routines.

It's really important to have the routines online, too, so that they know what to do. They know where to find their work. Everything is there for them.

**Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker:** That's a really great point because you're right, kids. And I bet you the families appreciate the consistency, too, because I'm sure many of your families are working. One of the things that I've always loved about you is your ability to inspire and your ability to just kind of recognize the needs of your own children, in my eyes.

But now you're recognizing the needs of the kids and just bringing that consistency over. What are some things that you have found to work with children to kind of get to know them and create those bonds and connections that you have?

**Fran Margolis Speaker:** Yeah, so what I've done in my class, my homeroom, is we've decided to have special Fridays in the mornings. And you would think sixth graders, they're still in elementary school in my district, but sometimes some of them are a little too cool for school.

Not quite. But we decided to have special Fridays. So so far, we had pet day.

And Dr. Heald knows how I feel about dogs, animals in general, when they're not my favorite. But the kids, all they wanted to do was to show me their pets, because I told them pets don't belong in school. Like I didn't want their dog sitting on their laps during the day.

That wasn't my only rule, but that was one of my rules. So, I said we could have pet day. So, like the first day was pet day.

And everyone got to show their pet or stuffed animal if you didn't have a pet. Another day we did, we did crazy hair day. So, we all showed up on the Google Meet like all crazy.

And this week, we're having special, I can't remember what they're calling it, special talent or outstanding day. So, if they are, if they do something, they could play an instrument, they could do a dance, they could sing a song, they could tell a joke, whatever. I, one kid said, can I videotape what I'm doing? And I said, yes.

And his mother just sent me him like riding a dirt bike over this like crazy trail and doing these jumps. I mean, I didn't even know that about him. So, I think even though most of these kids have been together since kindergarten, first grade, if they've been in my school, I don't know them that well.

And this is a really good insight into their personalities and that sort of thing.

**Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker:** Oh, that's so awesome. It is a pet story, we'll comment on a later episode.

**Fran Margolis Speaker:** Right. And they are making friends. There's, I have a couple of new to the school children and we taught them how to use Google Hangouts to text and stuff.

And they're making friends and they're socializing, which is nice. I let them have some time in Google Hangout before I get in there so they can chat.

**Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker:** Oh, that's really important because that is something we hear our children are actually missing from school.

So how do you use your technology and your mindset with that to connect with families?

**Fran Margolis Speaker:** So, I do, I'm pretty good about communicating with families. I do like to send out emails. We had a virtual back to school night.

I make myself available virtual, but live. So, I think the upper grades were having recorded sessions, but we had virtual, but live. And everybody was so positive, which was really amazing.

And so, I try to email Canvas, which is, I said, our new learning management system has kind of a public view. That was the issue with Google Classroom. There's not really a public view.

It's really just the student view. And so, parents can be a quote unquote observer in Canvas and they can see their children's grades, their assignments. They can pull anything up that a child can.

So that's really good for parents to be able to see what their kids have been doing. And so, you know, that's how I try to, you know, stay connected.

**Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker:** That's important to, again, just drawing them in, in that level of engagement.

So, I'm going to place you on a little bit of the spotlight on our ending question. So, a new teacher that is just, you know, starting up and she's maybe had one year in a traditional classroom, but has to kind of modify her ways a little bit to be an online instructor. What are three strategies or pieces of advice that you want to give to our audience that might be our new teachers?

**Fran Margolis Speaker:** I would say, forgive yourself, give yourself a break, be very flexible.

So that I would put all in number one. You know, it's going to be okay. And if something doesn't work, go with the flow.

Change gears and the kids will be okay. This is one year of their lives. And I know that every year is important, but in the scheme of their life, perhaps they'll remember your candor and laughing about it.

Technology wasn't working the other day. And I said to the kids, when you come back in the classroom, I promise I'm not this much of a mess. So that I would say, modify your lessons.

So don't try to do too much because everything is seeming to take a little bit longer to kind of do. You're not teaching them in the same way because you're not there. There's no hands-on manipulatives.

There's no pointing to a page for them. So, I think that's really important, modifying your lessons and maybe keep them robust, but perhaps not as many activities. And I think also what's really important is to find a way to assess the children.

In Math, I have an exit ticket every single day and it's four questions and it comes from the math work from the day. So, it's not extra work. They just have to transfer the answer over.

And that gives me a really good idea of who knows what they're doing and who doesn't know what they're doing. So, I think if I had three things to say, those would be it. Get yourself a pair of glasses because you're going to need them.

**Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker:** Oh my gosh. Yes. So much to walk away with.

I think that's really, really important to remember a level of grace for ourselves while also just challenging our learners and understanding where they're at so that we can progress them forward. Fran, thank you so much for your time. Listeners, please stay tuned because I'm sure we will have Fran back on as well as future educators in our future episodes.

Thank you so much. And don't forget to subscribe.