

65 - Why is Lesson Planning Critical for Student Learning

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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. Tisha 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.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: 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 our podcast for notifications about future episodes. Today, we are so excited to have with us Michelle Schwab. Michelle has 23 years' experience, in education, including 14 years as a classroom teacher and nine years as an instructional coach. She graduated from Arizona State University with her master's degree in education, with a focus on English as a second language in 2002. She's been teaching online education classes since 2009. She joined the University of Arizona Global Campus, formerly Ashford University*, in 2012. Welcome, Michelle. We're so excited to have you here with us today.

Michelle Schwab: Thank you. Thank you for the nice introduction. It's such a pleasure to be here today.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Michelle, I'm so excited to talk to you today about your topic, which is lesson planning, and doing this in an effective way, because we all know that when we start out teaching, lesson plans are hard. We need help. So, let's start out with something small, like why are lesson plans important, and what are the most important parts of a lesson plan in your opinion?

Michelle Schwab: Great question to start this topic. So, lesson plans are important because they're the tool or like the guide, that will get your kids learning the skill you're teaching. It gets you from point A, your objective, to point B, your assessment. So, I kind of like to think of them as a roadmap. So, you use a roadmap when you go on a trip, right? So, you plan your trip starting from point A, your house, to your destination, point B. And you need to plan that trip so very carefully without any wrong turns, or detours that may get you off track. So, you follow that roadmap to help you get to your destination. Just like if you follow your lesson plan, you will get to your destination, which is your assessment. So, the most important parts of a lesson is for, in my opinion, all of them.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yes. I always tell my students when they're writing their lesson plan, or when I was mentoring other teachers, or when I was an admin, write your lesson plan so that someone else, including myself, can come in and teach, it for you because you never know what's going to happen the night before. If you get sick, your child gets sick, or you just can't come to school, someone else is going to have to teach that plan for you, right?

Michelle Schwab: Exactly. And you need to write them without skipping any part, because each part is critical to your destination, your assessment. But if I had to choose one piece, I'm sorry. Go ahead. Dr. Stephanie Heald No, go ahead. You're speaking to the detail, and that was actually what I wanted to know more about. How detailed do lesson plans actually need to be? Oh, yeah. So, so detailed. Like she said, you need to be able to have someone come in, pick up that lesson plan and teach it just like you had planned it. So, they need to be explicit. They need to be clear. They need to be step-by-step. And so that means each section, the materials, the introduction, the instruction, the modeling, which is often forgotten, the practice activities, the differentiation, and the assessment, every part needs to be detailed. And teachers need to think about each step of the lesson, to make sure nothing is left out. So, when you start planning, you must start with your standard and then write your goal and objective to align with that standard. I always tell my students who are the future teachers, to refer back to your objective while you're planning. Keep that objective as your focus while you're planning your instruction, while you're planning those practice activities, while you're planning your differentiation, and while you're planning your assessment. So, like when I plan, I continually ask myself three questions. Does my plan teach my objective? Does my plan have my kids practice my objective? And does my plan assess my

objective? Because I don't want to make any wrong turns. I need to stay focused on that objective, or I'm not going to reach my destination. Right?

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Objectives are so crucial. And you touched upon it, but how do students actually go about, number one, crafting a good objective, and then number two, making sure that it's tightly aligned to that standard and that assessment piece?

Michelle Schwab: Right. So, it's important to set up our students for optimal learning. So, our standards are in place for us, so we know what we're expected to teach. So, there are specific milestones, for example, that our younger students need to teach or need to learn, and they need to reach, I'm sorry, and specific standards that our preschool and elementary students need to learn. Therefore, we need to work through the standards that are provided for us and write those objectives that allow us to teach a lesson, that help the kids reach those milestones and those standards. So, I often see students in my classes here at U of A that will write an objective and then they search for a standard on their state site, to match it. And I tell them, you need to start with that standard first, right, and then write the objective that aligns with it. Because these standards are written for us to follow. So, all our students are receiving the instruction that they are developmentally ready to learn at whatever age you're teaching. We never want to spend any time teaching a skill that we're not required to teach, because we already have so much to teach. Why add more, right? So, these standards that the state writes for us in each state, they need to drive our instruction. They need to be the selected piece of our lesson plan first, and then we need to align our objectives with them, so that we are teaching what we need to teach.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, Michelle, I want to move into something that's tough for teachers, even veteran teachers sometimes, and that's differentiation.

Michelle Schwab: Oh, yes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yeah. So, we all know that ensuring that our children are successful is so important, and that means differentiating for each student, for ELL, for disability, in any student. So how can our teachers do that? How do you do it?

Michelle Schwab: This is a good question. And for me, if I had to pick the most important part of any lesson plan, it's this part because we do have kids at different levels, and then we also have our kids that are on IEPs. We have gifted kids. We have our ELL kids, and we need to plan for all of them. So when I'm planning a lesson, I actually plan my differentiation part first, because I want to plan the bulk of my lesson, my instruction, my practice activities, my assessment, towards my kids that are on grade level or close to on grade level because, that's most of your students, right? You're going to have kids on IEPs and gifted kids and ELL kids, but most of your kids are right around grade level. So, once I have those plans done, I start with my kids on an IEP. And there can be various accommodations that may be included in any IEP. And as teachers, we're required to follow these IEPs, as they're written. So, I plan on how I'll modify the practice activities, and the assessment to meet their needs. And these modifications can include all kinds of things. I mean, the list is endless. Maybe they have to work with a strong partner, or maybe I need to minimize the amount of practice that they do once they get to the practice activities. Maybe I need to repeat the instructions to them. Maybe they need technology to complete an assessment. I mean, you all know IEPs are, they can be so full of different accommodations. So, we just need to be ready for anything, anything our kids might need. So, once those plans are complete, I then move on to my gifted kids. And to differentiate for them, I look at the practice activities and the assessment, and I need to think of how I can challenge them and expand their learning because they need to grow in their skills too. So, they'll work on the same objective, but at a higher level. So, for example, my gifted kids will practice the same thing that I taught everybody, but at that higher level. So maybe instead of having them answer a multiple-choice question at the end, they'll answer open-ended questions. Anything that gets them using those higher-level thinking skills and some reasoning. Maybe if we're reading a story, they read the same story, but at that higher level. I may partner them with another gifted student, or a higher-level student so they can have discussions about the story at that higher level. Another example would maybe be if I'm teaching CVC words to my kindergartners. My gifted kids can definitely locate those words quickly in a story, but then I can step it up a bit for them, and maybe they can look for those words that have the E at the end, making that vowel in the CVC word change its sound. And then once they're finished, they can have a choice board that's available, and they can choose an activity that will keep them working on previously taught skills, but, again, at that higher level.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: You touch upon so much within that assessment piece. You have that reflective practitioner piece, where you're literally looking at your children to see how they are developing the skills in a progressive way, a progress monitoring way, but also that summative way. Can you speak just a little bit as to the relationship between lesson planning, and that final assessment? You know, when to know, when to assess, what to do if your assessment might not reflect what your lesson plan was supposed to obtain. What do you do in those moments?

Michelle Schwab: Well, you know, assessment's important, but it's one thing to think about your plan, and that you've got that assessment plan for the end of your lesson. You don't want to rush into it. We need to gather some feedback from our students, to know if they're understanding our objective or not. So questioning students during instruction is a great way to start that process. So after a minute or two of instruction, I love to pose a question to my class, and then I'll have them maybe turn to a partner and discuss it, and decide on an answer together, and this helps kids that are needing the extra help because maybe they're not quite getting the beginning of the instructional part, and those that are getting it, they can be the helper. I'll then ask for a core response from everyone, or maybe I'll have just the boys reply, and the girls reply to the next question. Sometimes I give the kids whiteboards, and they can write their answer, and then with my signal they can show their board so I can see who has the right answer. And I do things like this throughout instruction just to do a quick check-in on kids, just to see are they getting me so far. Are they starting to understand what I'm teaching? And then once instruction is complete, and I've taught my lesson, I have the kids move on to their practice time, and then during this time it can be like a partner practice, or a small group practice, or independent practice, but I use formative assessments. So, as they're working, I walk around and check in on how they're doing and help them if necessary. Some kids are stuck, and they need a little bit more support right there. Sometimes they just need a little bit of feedback, and, of course, I praise them if they're doing well, but these check-ins, when they're done right, I can catch their mistakes right away and avoid them practicing incorrectly. Actually, there's been times that I've stopped the whole class from working on their practice, and provided instruction, more instruction on the same skill, and then I get them back to working. Or sometimes as I'm doing those check-ins, I see a few kids that just need a little bit more instruction. Everyone else is doing great, so I'll pull those few students into a small group, and provide some instruction while everyone else continues working, and that's okay, too, because I need to be flexible, right? I can't just expect to assess at the end of my lesson, because that's what I planned. So, we need to have explicit instruction on the objective. The kids need to practice the skill before the formal assessment is done, and you can't assess until they've had that practice time. I say this because what I've seen in my classes at the U of A, is my students will plan some great instruction, but their plan doesn't include practicing. Rather, they move right into the assessment. They just teach and assess. And, you know, they need that practice time before you can assess. So sometimes I learn from my formative assessments, that I can't assess as quickly as I planned, and my kids need more time on that objective, and that's okay, too. I know I can't rush to the assessment just because I planned it for that day. So, when that happens, I just teach another lesson on the same objective the next day, and then I assess them if they're ready the next day. However, if I learn through my formative assessments that the kids are getting it, I can move on to my formal assessment as I planned it. So, assessment is a vital part, and it does need to start during instruction, and it's that formative assessment that's done during instruction and practice that tells you if the kids are ready for that formal assessment. And, of course, the formal assessment is a vital part of your lesson, too, because your kids need to learn your objective, and your assessment will give you the data you need to know who learned it. And for those who do not do well on your assessment, you have that data as well, and you can plan for additional instruction for those kiddos.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, all of this is so important, Michelle, and I think lesson plans, like I said at the beginning, are tough, and some principals require them every week to be turned in. Mine did, but, as we wrap up, I want you to give our listeners three takeaways from your session.

Michelle Schwab: Okay. One would be to keep your focus on your objective, while you plan your entire lesson. Don't lose sight of that objective because it drives your lesson. You must model your expectations. A lot of teachers will not show the kids what they expect from them at the end of the lesson, so I think of myself as a learner, and when someone tells me how to do something, I may not always get it, but when you show me, I'll get it. So modeling is very important. And you must teach the skill, and the kids must practice the skill, before you assess it, and be flexible with that assessment. It doesn't have to be done on the same day just because you planned it to happen that way. It can be done the next day, if more instruction is needed.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: I love how this podcast just really brings it around to being manageable resources for our learners, and our audience in developing lesson plans. And now is the hard part. Let's challenge our listeners with one challenge takeaway.

Michelle Schwab: Well, you kind of hit on it at the very beginning, is to plan a lesson and then ask a colleague or a family member to read it, and ask them to explain it to you so you can see if they could teach it the way you taught it, or the way you wanted it taught, the way you planned it. Because if it's not planned correctly, it's not going to be taught correctly. Like you said at the beginning, you want anyone to be able to walk into your classroom, pick up that lesson plan, and teach it the way you have it planned. So, a challenge is to have a family member or a friend, or a colleague read it and see if they could do it.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Michelle, thank you so much for being here. All of this is just soaking in, and I hope that our listeners got something great out of it today, which I know they did. They can pick and choose what they want to take and use right now. But thank you so much for being here. That was wonderful, and we hope you'll come back.

Michelle Schwab: You're welcome. I appreciate the invite. Thank you. And I will be back.

*Ashford University is now the University of Arizona Global Campus.