

67 - The Power of Play with Music

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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

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. 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.

Host Dr. 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.

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Today we have with us Nick Young, and we are so excited that he's joining us today as our special guest. Nick is an early childhood music educator with over 30 years of experience, leading music group and classrooms, leading teacher training and workshops, performing interactive kids' music concerts, and creating multimedia, interactive music, and movement curriculum for ECE teachers and parents.

And we cannot wait to hear more about this. He also runs his own mobile preschool, music school, and online curriculum membership. Nick, we are so excited to have you here with us today.

Nick Young Speaker: Thank you so much. It's so great to be here with you, Dr. Shipley, Dr. Heald. I've been looking forward to speaking with you.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, Nick, you and I have talked back and forth, and I'm super excited to get to chat a little bit with our listeners. We know that music is being taken out of school more and more. So, we wanted to get to know what we can do as teachers, to put music back into our classrooms and daily schedules.

Give us some activities that work well, to enhance the children's development.

Nick Young Speaker: Well, I think it's something, I'm so excited to be talking about this. It's something that any teacher can do.

And we're talking about early childhood classrooms. So, it's something that you're looking for the right kind of interactive music. What we want to do is we want to make it interactive.

And you want something that's going to be engaging for the children, that also is going to have a lot of other developmental benefits, that just kind of come along with it. But it's something that for teachers, I know most classrooms use music in some capacity, usually on a daily basis. But I think what's important for teachers to kind of see as a goal, is to make it intentional.

It still should be, you know, intuitive and easy and fun. But when you're selecting the material that you're going to be using with your students, and when you're kind of planning your daily activities, and integrating it with your curriculum, it's good to have some knowledge and intentionality behind it.

So, we're talking about some ideas and activities, that when I create music for my classes, the main thing is that it's interactive.

So songs where the children are jumping like a frog, flying like a bird, riding on a train, hopping on one foot, tapping their foot, moving their bodies, expressing themselves creatively through physicality, and with their voices, playing musical instruments like shakers and drums and scrapers and triangles and bells, learning how to read and play music notes in a fun kind of gamified way. All those things are just perfect for early childhood classrooms.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Nick, I have to tell you that music and movement, I was a cheerleader and in show choir, so it was one of my favorite things.

I had music going in my classroom all day and did just that. We moved, we sang, we danced, we jumped. I still have students tell me that they remember songs that we did.

So that makes me excited. I love that. Thank you.

Nick Young Speaker: Oh, that's wonderful. Sometimes I hear from former students, years later, and they talk about how much they enjoyed the music time. And the fact that they remember that from early childhood is pretty neat.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: And I think that leads to the diverse perspectives of Dr. Shipley and I. While I love music and appreciate music, I am very apprehensive as an educator to engage in some of these activities, simply because I don't have the knowledge. In my mind, I'm on tour. In my mind, I'm in show choir and I am on tour.

But I'm a little more apprehensive to bring it to my classroom. And I would imagine we have both ends of the pendulum in our audience. So, can you just speak to how teachers and parents, we don't need to be musicians in order to lead engaging and effective music time activities?

Nick Young Speaker: Absolutely.

I think that's a common feeling that a lot of teachers have. I think while most teachers, as I said, do use music in some ways in their classroom, like they'll have a certain song playing for maybe for transition times, or they'll put on music to dance to, which is fantastic. And that's a really good start.

But as I said, it's good to have sort of some intentionality behind it. And I think that's where teachers start to feel like, well, I'm not a musician, so I'm not really qualified to lead a music group. But the fact is, you don't have to be a musician.

And in fact, when I create music for preschool classrooms, and if I'm teaching myself, I'm playing the guitar and singing, which means my body is not as available as a teacher would be if they were using recorded music. So, one of the roles that teachers have in the classroom is to model the movements that go along with the different songs and activities. If I'm playing the guitar, then I have a limited ability to be modeling the movements.

But a teacher who's just moving along with their students to recorded music, they can move their arms, or legs, and their bodies, and do all the different things that the students are going to be doing. So, I think for someone who's feeling reluctant or apprehensive, another thing that teachers will say is, well, I'm not a good singer. My voice doesn't sound good.

And I always tell them, the children do not care if you're like some kind of great singer. It's just that you're singing. And one of the greatest gifts that we can give to our students is to bring music into their lives and make them feel like music and singing is something that people do naturally.

And that it's something that they're going to take on into their lives. Because if they go every day to a classroom, where there's no music or singing going on, then they're going to just assume, well, that's just not something that normal people do. It's something you listen to on the radio.

But I'm not going to sing because I don't see adults singing. But when you're singing, whether your voice is great or not that great, it doesn't matter. Then the teachers get that message that singing is something that people just do naturally.

And they're going to be more inclined to have that as a part of their life, which is, I think, one of the greatest gifts that we can give to children, is to the idea and the feeling about music, that it's something that they want to have as a part of their lives moving forward. Yeah.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I agree with that.

And I have to tell you, I've been in classrooms lately, where teachers will just put somebody else singing and dancing up on a smartboard. But your kids want you doing it with them. You need to stand up and dance and sing with them.

They want you to be involved. And they remember that. And they love it.

And they don't care if you can dance good or sing good. I'm not that great of a singer. But I sure belted those songs out.

So, the next question is, well, integrating music and movement activities into daily curriculum. Does that add extra burden on a teacher? I mean, we know that teachers, their mental wellness right now, they're overburdened, they're overwhelmed. And maybe that's why sometimes they take that little break and add somebody else doing the singing and dancing. But how can we tell teachers that this is just part of their daily? How can we not make this a burden for them?

Nick Young Speaker: Well, that's a really good question.

I think a lot of teachers have a lot on their plate. They've got a very big, full inbox of things that they need to do, whether it's observing their students and measuring their development over time, filling out paperwork, making sure that their classroom is running well. All the different, I mean, being a preschool teacher is like one of the most intense jobs you can have.

I did it myself for five years. So, a lot of times they'll be like, well, this is so great. I'll have teachers come to my workshops and I'll give them all this fun stuff.

But then again, I get the feeling that only a small percentage of them are actually going to follow through and integrate this into their actual curriculum, that they use on a daily basis. Because they just feel like it's something I'm going to get to when I get around to it, which is probably never, because there's just so much else that they're responsible for. But I think if they have a different attitude about it, that music should be fun, intuitive, and easy for everybody involved.

It's just something that we do naturally as human beings. It's part of being a human is music. We know this because when I go into the infant classroom, and I'm playing my guitar and singing, and I'm playing a nice rhythmic song, I see the little infants start to move and bounce around to the music.

This is before they even have language abilities or anything. We know it's innate and it's something that's just a part of who we are as human beings. That's how we should approach it.

It should be something that's just natural. It's just like whatever we're doing in our day, we're singing, we're moving. It's something that shouldn't be something that's adding to the burden or the responsibilities of the teacher, but it actually makes their lives as teachers easier, makes their day go smoother and helps them in different ways, like I mentioned before, in transitions from different activities throughout the day.

Music can be something that cues the children and gets them prepared to go from inside to outside or different transitional parts of their day. Also, it applies to so many different aspects of the classroom curriculum. Music is a very powerful tool for developing language, cognitive abilities, and all these other things like gross and fine motor skills.

I could just go on and on and on. The list is endless of different ways, social and emotional abilities, and academic performance. All those things are positively impacted by being involved in interactive music and movement, which is really a different level.

If we're just talking about music, there's another level that we like to go to, which is interactive music and movement. Which involves not just passive listening, but being involved in an interactive way. Like you said, about teachers who just want to put music on and then take care of other things that they have to do, that to me is not really taking full advantage of the developmental educational opportunity, that's there. We want the teachers to be involved, just as involved as the children are.

I'm not saying they have to crawl on the ground like a spider, but they can tap their foot, wiggle their shoulders, move their bodies. They're showing the children through their body language, their facial expression, their vocal inflection, that they're engaged and excited about what they're presenting. That really helps the children to get engaged and be a part of the music time.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Yeah, you answered my question. I was going to ask you if there were certain criteria to really kind of uphold the philosophy of not in addition to, but just supplementing in alignment with, what we're doing, because there are so many areas in social, emotional, and cognitive, and language, and gross motor, and physical wellness, and school readiness, that all can be positively correlated with academic achievement, which obviously is on our minds as educators, but you really address that through that engagement and the fact that you're making mindful movements into the curriculum, and mindful additions with your activities. I just think that's so important.

Nick, as we end the podcast, we leave our listeners with some takeaways. Do you have something that you want, three takeaways that you want to leave with our listeners?

Nick Young Speaker: Yes. Thank you so much.

What a pleasure to be with you guys today. Every classroom can benefit from bringing more music in, and it's just like we were saying before, it's something that connects with every aspect of the preschool classroom, and the preschool curriculum. Why not take advantage of this incredibly powerful tool for helping children to develop in so many important ways, as they're getting ready for kindergarten? So, their language development is, I think, music and movement, it just accelerates language development in such a powerful way, and phonemic awareness, and cognitive ability.

Just keep in mind, even though this is something that the children are attracted to, that's fun, and it doesn't feel like work. I think a lot of times we might think, well, if it's not hard to do, then it's not really doing anything important, and that's just not the case with music and movement. It's something that is fun and easy, but it also is having just a cascading effect on all these different levels of children's development.

Not only that, but it's so important for creating a positive environment in the classroom. Sometimes when we have challenging groups of children, or certain children that have challenging classroom behaviors, teachers get tired, they get worn out, they start to try to be more controlling of their classroom, and sometimes it can start to create a tension in the classroom, and a negative affect in the classroom. But music can come in and just make the classroom feel fun, and engaging, and it develops the sense of community that gives children an opportunity to connect with their peers, cooperate in creative ways.

It gives teachers a chance to connect with their students in positive ways, and all those things are so vital and important, and I think this is just something we don't want to miss out on. It's something we should make a priority, and I just want to spread the word to all the teachers out there that, always err on the side of more music in your classroom.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: And Nick, you and I could talk about this all day because it was one of my favorite things to do in my classroom, every time I see a small child who's just started pre-K or kindergarten, I'm like, do you sing and dance in your classroom? And sometimes they're like, yeah, and then other times they look at me like they've never heard of that, and that makes me so sad because I know what it's done for my students.

I knew what it did for me when I was younger. So, as we leave, can you tell our listeners about one thing you want to challenge them with?

Nick Young Speaker: Oh, what a great question. I want to challenge them to sing more in their classroom.

I want to challenge them to get a collection of hand percussion instruments like shakers, scrapers, drums, triangles, bells, and start using those, pass them out to your students, put on some rhythmic music, and let the children explore rhythms and music and sound.

You know, seek out music for your classroom that's engaging. So, you want to make sure that whatever music you're using is something where there's an interactive element, so the children have a chance to interact with the music, and move their bodies and then get in there and do it with your students.

You know, this isn't a time for you to do other things that are very important in your classroom. Really think of this as your special magical time that you do every day for 30 minutes. And for this 30 minute, you know, nothing else is going on.

There's no other distractions. You're 100% engaged with your students. And just watch what happens.

You know, take a month or two, of doing this every day and see how positive, wonderful effects there are, and how the parents will be coming to you and saying, oh my gosh, my child is singing in the bathtub and all these wonderful songs. And, you know, something that just brings people together. And let's do it.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Perfect. Well, I hope you will come back and join us again because you're full of great ideas. And I know this 10-minute podcast is not everything that you want to talk about.

So, I hope you'll come back.

Nick Young Speaker: Oh, I would love to. Yes, I've got lots more to talk about.

That sounds great.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Okay, thank you, Nick, so much. See you soon.

Nick Young Speaker: All right. Take care you, guys. Bye-bye.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: You too. Bye-bye.