

71 - Joy-Filled Teaching and 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. 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 come to you with a 10-minute professional development, that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to get notifications about future episodes.

We are so excited to have Heidi Harris here with us today. Heidi is an early childhood professional, with a Ph.D. in early childhood education from Walden University.

Dr. Harris is an associate faculty member in the graduate-level early childhood programs at the University of Arizona Global Campus, as well as Spring Arbor University. Heidi's passions and research expertise lies in the constructivist-based pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. She enjoys homeschooling her three children, and she implements an eclectic approach that combines the tenets of Reggio Emilia, nature, and faith-based learning.

She seeks to support adult early childhood professionals, in finding joy in teaching through a focus on developing connections before curriculum and holistic approaches to learning. Phew!

Dr. Tisha Shipley: That is a very good intro, and we know that Heidi's awesome. So, Heidi, thanks so much for being here with us today.

Dr. Heidi Harris: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, your session today is Joy-Filled Teaching and Learning, which is something that all early childhood staff, faculty, teachers, administrators, and even parents should be trying to do, right? So, as we want our teaching to be this way, fun, engaged, filled with so many activities, tell us a little bit more about implementing this type of learning, because it can be tough, right?

Dr. Heidi Harris: Yes, exactly.

Yes. We know that, you know, we want our classrooms and our schools to be filled with joy, but I think especially within, you know, the last few years, it's been especially tough, in the field of education, coming back from the pandemic and, you know, staff shortages and all of those things that so many programs are dealing with, and then families as well, you know, working at home more with their children. So, I think that more than ever, we really want to try to think about this concept of joy-filled learning, and how we can really embrace it in our classrooms.

So, you know, one of the things that I, you know, introduced me and gave my background, which is in the Reggio Emilia pedagogy. So, for years, I studied, and I completed my doctoral dissertation on this topic, and it's something that I'm really passionate about, and, you know, I worked in a variety of programs, that were inspired by Reggio Emilia, but I also worked in many that were not. And really, the foundation of Reggio Emilia, is that we are honoring children through giving them opportunities to play, to be creative.

We see their capabilities. We're following their interests. And these things really help to cultivate joy in children.

And so, we really want to be thinking about that as we think about joy, that we can be approaching learning in this way, that is giving children the opportunity to express themselves in the ways that they naturally do.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah, it's so important for us to really embrace, like you said, the fact that learning is fun, and teaching is fun or should be fun, right? Yeah. Do you have any tips for implementing these types of experiences into the environments for the youngest of learners?

Dr. Heidi Harris: Yes.

So, you know, I think a couple of things that I'm thinking about as adults, we really hold a really powerful, I don't know, influence really on the culture of our classrooms, right? The climates of our classrooms. We really set that tone. So, it's really important that we reflect on our own emotional state in order to be able to support children in a joy-filled experience in the classroom.

So, one of the things I've been learning about lately is the conscious discipline of Dr. Becky Bailey. And she helps us as adults to understand how to regulate our own emotions, so that we can really support children through regulation of theirs. So, I think that's just one thing that we can maybe learn more about as adults, thinking about our own emotional state and how before we can coach other children to do that, we need to reflect on ours. Because I think we've all worked in classrooms where we're like, it's difficult.

It can be challenging if you're working with an adult, who is not really self-reflective and they're not thinking about how their emotions can impact the environment, in the classroom at large. So that's just one thing that I think, you know, us as adults can do. Another thing that is something very simple, but as we walk into our classrooms each day or our schools that we're working in, thinking about maybe three things that you're grateful for, right? We can always find gratitude and just even, OK, my coffee is hot and warm, or I made it to work on time today or I know that I'm going to be going to watch my favorite baseball team tonight.

Just something that starts your day, sets your day, sets your mood to be a positive, you know, joy filled experience for the children. And I think also just, as I said, reflecting on like how we're approaching education in our classrooms, is it developmentally appropriate? Are we honoring the child by the experiences that we're setting out for them? You know, even developmentally appropriate practice in 2020, they reflected on their position statement, and brought in more, you know, alignment to we as educators should really be thinking about how we're fostering young children's joy in their learning. So, I think also just being reflective on that and how we're doing that just in the day-to-day experiences.

Are we offering materials that are reflecting what they're interested in? You know, in Reggio Emilia programs, and in other programs that are just mindful of it, we are thinking about the aesthetics of the program. Right. You can walk in, you know, a classroom and you just can feel that it feels calm.

It feels comfortable by the materials offered. And joy is really, you know, thinking about how are we provoking the children's interests? How are we creating a sense of wonder? Another tip is setting out provocations that are really provoking the child. Right.

So, we're going to set out materials in a way that's engaging that a child's like, wow, look at that. The clay is set up and there's, you know, maybe some leaves with it. And there's a book set out that is talking about fall and just the aesthetic of the of the invitation is helping the child to have a joyful experience.

And I think that most of us that have been around young children, I mean, that's another thing. Not all people get to go to work every day and be surrounded by children because they honestly bring just so much joy, in general when you're around a child. You know, I read a statistic preparing for this podcast that a child laughs 400 times or 300 times a day, and the average 40-year-old only laughs four times a day.

So, you know, seeing it as a gift, that we have this opportunity to be with children, we can just pause sometimes, be present, enjoy them as children and to just take time to sit with them. You know, sometimes I think we're so busy as

educators, trying to do all the things that we don't really slow down and just sit with them, be present with them, hear them. They're so precious in so many ways.

And just to really see them as a gift, I think.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, Heidi, I 100 percent agree with you on everything you said. I always got to the end of the year and thought, did I spend enough time with that child? Did I get to know that child enough that I never thought back, oh, I spent too much time with that child.

So, I have one big question I just want to ask before we wrap up is how do you get the buy in from the admin, from the parents, for those people who want you to not be doing the fun things that they call it?

Dr. Heidi Harris: Yes, that's a great question. Yeah, I think that we as early childhood educators, we have to be advocates, right? We have to.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yes,

Dr. Heidi Harris: we have to advocate and make it visible how this way of learning is not only joy filled, but it's also beneficial to the child.

And this is truly the way the child is learning, through their play. And I think one simple thing that I did in one of the classrooms I worked in is we went through the classrooms and the areas of learning and all the different play materials that were out. And we created like a little poster board that explained, you know, what the child was actually like learning in that space.

Because I think so many times parents or maybe admin, they think, OK, well, all these open ended, loose materials are out. But what is the child really doing with it? You know, so making it visible by saying like through these experiences, through the block play, the child is learning pre math skills, and they're doing counting and, you know, just sort of outlining those more, I guess, academic areas that the parents and the admin usually want to see. Just, you know, and being and being as transparent as possible and just, you know, advocating for it, speaking with them, talking with them, communicating at your open houses, you're going to be displaying, you know, making the documentation visible, and talking about, you know, that through what they've been doing, you know, showing the documentation of their learning.

And I think that's a way that you can help bring the buy into it. Right.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: OK, thank you.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: It's so neat because I'm very much glass, you know, glass half full type of person, and I do really appreciate just going through my workday, enjoying what I do. And I can imagine adults and students are going to find a joy filled learning experience much more captivating and like you said, intriguing and engaging than one that's just so mundane. So, as we leave our listeners today, we always want to give them three takeaways.

And there's been so much about how to how to create those joy filled learning experiences. But can you tell us specifically what three takeaways you would leave them with?

Dr. Heidi Harris: Yeah, so I think just like I said, reflecting on really your approach of learning, how you're honoring the developmentally appropriate practices in that day-to-daying. One of the things that I didn't really touch on too much, but I'm an advocate for, is using nature, and being outside as much as possible.

I think that anybody that is, you know, when you're seeking joy, if you are outside, it just changes. It can change the tone of of everybody. So, I think that that's something that's really helpful as we think about joy filled experiences.

And then I think just really doing your best to one of the things that I I have written down that I wanted to share, is that before you say no to the children in your classroom, asking yourself why, like why are you saying no?

Because sometimes I think our classroom climates can become just sort of a festival of setting boundaries and saying no. But if we really reflect on before we say it, why are we doing that? Is it a safety concern? OK, that's OK. Other than that, we should really be trying to, you know, honor the children's in their interests and in thinking about that and how that tone can really, you know, set the tone either in a positive, more joy filled manner or or not.

So, I guess those would be the three things that I would say could really help you move forward to focusing more on a joy filled experience for everyone.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Well, Heidi, every single time that you present for us, whether it be at the conference or the series or our podcast, you are always a wealth of wonderful, positive energy and information. So, thank you.

And as you leave today, what is one challenge you have for our listeners?

Dr. Heidi Harris: I would say I would just want to invite you into thinking about how you could set a more joy-filled tone in your classroom tomorrow. So, is there one practical thing you could put into practice? Could it be getting outside more and maybe changing up the routine a little bit, maybe starting your day out outside instead of inside?

Or how are you honoring the 100 languages of children? Are you giving everyone, with all their varied strengths, the opportunity to showcase their learning? So just to think more about your day-to-day practical ways of teaching and how you could honor the children a little bit more, to to bring more joy into the days.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Heidi, thank you so much.

And we hope that you'll come back to our show.

Dr. Heidi Harris: Thank: you so much. Have a great day.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: You too.