

74 - Keep It Real- A Better Way to Spend Large Group Circle Time

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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.

Today, we are so excited to have our friend, who has been with us in the past here with us today, Cindy Terebush. Cindy is an early childhood consultant and sought-after provider of professional development nationwide.

She's the author of the book, **Teach the Whole Preschooler, Strategies for Nurturing Developing Minds,** and you may be familiar with her podcast, *How Preschool Teachers Do It*. Cindy has worked as a subject matter expert, on the topic of child development for the Institute of Families at the Rutgers School of Social Work, and is an associate faculty member at the University of Arizona Global Campus. We have been so fortunate to have spoke with Cindy before at our conference, and today, we just want to welcome Cindy to our podcast.

Cindy Terebush: Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Hi, Cindy.

Hi, everybody.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: As always, I'm excited to talk to you because you always bring a wealth of information on your topic, and today, you're here to talk about large group times, which is sometimes called circle time or carpet time. I call it carpet time in my school.

Why is this topic something that you wanted to share with us, and what is large group time exactly?

Cindy Terebush: Large group time, which is often called something like circle time, or morning meeting time, is something that I really enjoy talking about, because I think it can be used in very productive ways if we're willing to step away from what was traditionally done. The purpose of large group time is simply to remind children that they're part of a group, and we've spent a lot of time during that time of day, trying to get children to memorize things that aren't so meaningful to them, but that time can be used for impactful social emotional lessons, language building, focusing on both language and literacy. I think people just need to know that it's okay to stop doing some of the traditional things and move on to things that are more conversational.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Cindy, I have a ... Sorry, Steph. I loved this time in my classroom. It was one of the very first things I did in the morning.

I did a morning meeting. I did a message from our classroom mascot, and the teachers that I taught with could not believe that I had four-year-olds, at my carpet time for over 30 minutes, but we were busy, and we were having fun, and we were engaged in doing all of those things. How long do you think is an appropriate carpet time, and what are some different things at carpet time for teachers that want to start incorporating it, for them to do?

Cindy Terebush: An appropriate time is basically the children's attention span.

In the early childhood years, their attention span, generally speaking, is talked about as being about 10 to 15 minutes long. That usually is true. That said, if they are very engaged in what's going on, we can continue the conversation with them.

The key is keeping them very engaged.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Right.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: My question, actually, and I just want to pop in here, so I can visualize this.

My question is that is huge. That engagement factor is huge, and we know in our earliest environments, we want that to happen because that's where the learning occurs. What does that engagement factor include in an early childhood classroom?

Cindy Terebush: That engagement factor, at any time of day, includes topics of interest to the children.

You know when they arrive in the morning, they can't wait to tell you things and share things with each other. I think far too often, we bring them together and say, okay, now sit down and listen and let's do things like memorize the fact that today is a certain date, which has really very little meaning to them. We begin to lose that engagement, because now they're just doing rote memorization.

Memorization is not the highest form of understanding something. It doesn't engage the deeper thinking. I also like to point out to teachers who I talk to this about that, you know, just because a child memorizes something and can give it back to you doesn't mean it has deeper meaning to them.

I use calendar as an example of that.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Right. Yeah.

I totally agree with you. I think that's why I could keep them there for so long because we were playing games, we were singing songs, we were doing engaging lessons with the theme that we're doing with the book, and I loved carpet time and I think my students did too. So, would you recommend that carpet time be at a certain time? What about a transition to carpet time? Because I had different transitions that I would use to carpet time too, but I had it at the same time every day.

Cindy Terebush: It's good to keep a routine with young children. We know they thrive off routine. They do need time to transition from home into the space before we say, okay, let's all go over to wherever your large group time is.

Doesn't have to be in a circle, doesn't even have to be on a carpet. Children can sit on whatever you're going to do together as a full class, is a large group time. When they come in in the morning, let's say they arrive, you have an arrival time and just arbitrarily like 9.15 is going to be your time every day.

As they're arriving, the children need something they know they're responsible for doing, like signing in in some way, moving their picture from one place to another, putting their coats away, whatever their responsibility is as they arrive, and then they need to attach to either a person or a thing in the room so that they transfer, that attachment from home to your setting. Then we can go ahead and bring them over. So, there does need to be a routine before and I think that that is a nice transition to the room.

To transition into that, we're all going to do something together, music. Music tends to work.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Right, right, right.

Okay, I love it. Thank you.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: And I'm totally with you.

I can see this happening. So, if I were to walk into your classroom, you would kind of mention that it doesn't necessarily have to be on the floor. Walk me through visually what this circle time might look like, including the environment, and activities and you talked a little bit about music, but tell us more about that.

Cindy Terebush: Okay, so you bring the point again is to make sure they understand, hi, we're all together here and sometimes we're going to cooperate, and we are a classroom team. That's the point. So sometimes we're going to have to do things together.

We're going to be encouraged to do things together. You can ask them to come to an area of the room and frankly, through the work that I've done, I have found that when children sit in chairs, they're able to attend better. They understand body boundaries better.

It's okay for children to bring chairs. They also, by the way, love to move furniture. So, it gives them a chance to do that.

Good physical activity. Everybody move your chairs to this area. I can tell you that I worked with programs during the height of COVID-19, when teachers would say to me, you know, we can't all come together in a group like that.

Well, you know what? It was okay that they were sitting at tables a little bit apart as long as you're all doing the same thing together. It can look like whatever works in your classroom. Some people have the carpet squares to provide them with that body boundary.

I think it's just when we seat them together and they don't have some sort of body boundary, that we spend a lot of time saying things like sit up, stop rolling on him, stop touching her, you know, that sort of thing.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yes, yes, yes.

Cindy Terebush: And then when they come together, we want to do things that fully engage them and that help them to walk through their day.

So, you'll want to talk about what's coming up today. You might have a visual schedule instead of that calendar that actually isn't a calendar, when you think about it. You know, those calendars that were marketed to us so well that are either a pocket chart or a graph and the teacher puts up the numbers.

You know, the studies show that young children don't even understand that the teacher isn't deciding where to start with the number one. That's not a real calendar. It's not preprinted.

It doesn't have multiple pages. And children don't really relate to it in the way that we wish they did. So instead of doing something like that, I might bring the children together by singing with them, have a little conversation with them.

What happened since we saw you last? What do you want to tell everybody? Let them get that out. And then have schedule, visual schedule cards for them. And that's when we talk about the movement of time, where we set up one card for everything that's going to happen today on Velcro, because it changes every day.

That's why I say Velcro. The routine may be the same, but things happen, right? You could have a fire drill, someone could get sick, and your schedule has to change so they should be movable. And we can set up that visual schedule with the children, so that directly connects to their day with pictures of your real setting and words that match that time of day.

And that way they understand what the flow is going to be of their day, right?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Yes. So, I want to talk about Show & Tell because I love Show & Tell. It helps oral language, helps listening, communication.

There's so many things that I don't think people understand. And I think Show & Tell has kind of went out the window, a little bit in some of our early childhood classrooms. Tell me about Show & Tell at the carpet time.

That's when I did mine. I did it once a week. But there are teachers that do it every day, and I love that too.

Cindy Terebush: So, what about Show & Tell? Yeah, I love when I have observed teachers and their Show & Tell is kind of casual. They'll say to families, we're going to offer the children the chance to do Show & Tell during our large group time, maybe two or three days of the week. Children can bring things in.

And then it becomes more a choice of the child and the family. You know, when do you want to bring in something? You don't have to have everybody on the same day. That can challenge their attention span, if we have everybody talking about things on the same day.

So, if you divide it up, I also work with teachers who've said every day we're going to offer the children an opportunity to do Show & Tell. Please ask your child if they'd like to bring something. What I have found is that children who are more reserved, a little less hesitant to speak publicly, may not bring things as often as the other children, but important modeling happens for them.

So, I think that that's OK. And I think it's OK for children to be who they are. If a child is less apt to do it, that's OK.

We accept you and, you know, value you for who you are. I would tell that parent, you know, your child hasn't brought anything in a while. Is there anything we can do to support your child bringing something?

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Right.

But I didn't even have children bring something. Sometimes they just stood up and told a story, like where they went to dinner last night. And that's when they really a lot of them would start standing up because they didn't have to bring something.

They could just tell us something that was going on at home. And that was cool to also listen to, as you know.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: And it's so funny because as Cindy was talking, I could totally see.

I love the fact that we are truly feeling the vibe of the audience, right? We're really tuned into that differentiated, individualized approach on what our kiddos need. Cindy, can you just talk to what the planning for this might look like, for our new teachers, and veteran teachers, and how to kind of, you know, weave off the path when we need to for that differentiated piece?

Cindy Terebush: Yeah, I think that it's important to think about, you know, we have to give children the space to talk about what's on their minds, and they also have to learn to give us the space to talk about what's on our minds. And what might be on my mind, is the topic we're working on this week.

So, I would have prepared not only the visual schedule cards for that day, and we're going to put those up, but I would also have a question of the day prepared. Something that I can ask the children that gets them thinking about the teaching topic that we're working on this month, this week, however it works in your program. And ideally, it's an open-ended question that we ask the children, get them to think, and you can do shared writing with them.

Shared writing looks like you have chart paper. And as children are responding to your question, you write their name and their response on the chart paper, and you take exact dictation. What we're teaching them then is that the written word is connected to the spoken word.

What you said can be represented with these letters and words.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: And there's such a strong connection to content.

Cindy Terebush: Yes, I think that there's, you know, if we want, it's like this with the teaching topics too.

Not everything you do all day long should relate to the teaching topic. That's why children get bored with topics. But in the morning, when we bring them together, it's important to remind them about the focus of this month or this week, however long you do topics.

And to do that through asking questions, because it isn't about me thinking as the adult. It's about, you know, inspiring the children's thinking.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah.

Well, you certainly have inspired me to really kind of think through this new view on circle time. Can you leave our audience with three takeaways?

Cindy Terebush: Yes, I sure, sure can. Probably more than three, but I'll limit it to three.

Large group time should be interactive. It's not a high school lecture. So, we want it to be interactive.

Lots of social, emotional building, taking turns speaking language and literacy, that sort of thing. Another takeaway can be to really think about that calendar that you might have on the wall, by the area where you do your large group circle or carpet time, whatever you call it. Conversations should be authentic, right? And we need to teach children authentic skills.

So instead of doing that, maybe take a real calendar, and write everybody's birthdays on it and put it in your dramatic play area. Talk about it when children are interested in turning the pages and focus on the visual schedule instead. And remember that that visual schedule, is my third takeaway.

That's what actually directly connects children to the movement of time, because they're concrete thinkers and that's their actual day.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, I love all of this because I love carpet time. It was, like I've said before, one of my favorite times in my classroom during the day.

But what is one challenge you would like to leave our listeners with?

Cindy Terebush: The one challenge that I'd like to leave everyone with is to take down that calendar, put it in, get a real one. Even two real ones are great so you can show them they're the same. They're pre-printed.

This isn't determined by the teacher. Put everybody's birthday on it, special days on it, and hang it in your classroom where you would find a calendar at home. That would be most likely in a kitchen, right? So, in the dramatic play area, when children go over and start turning pages to look at the pictures, that's your teachable moment.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: I love it. Thank you so much for these tips and tricks for large group time. Even veteran teachers can take something away from what you said.

So, we appreciate you being here. You're always a wealth of information. So, thank you so much, Cindy.

Cindy Terebush: Thank you.