

79 - Fostering Positive Identity Development in Children

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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 with new ideas to try. Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to get notifications about future episodes.

Today we are so thrilled and excited to have with us Dr. Toni Sturdivant and she is the Vice President of Early Education at Campfire First Texas. Where she oversees school readiness, early education apprenticeship programs, and community training solutions. She was previously an assistant professor of early education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A&M Commerce.

A successful classroom teacher of three and four-year-olds, she has developed training for early childhood educators, in grades pre-K through third grade across the country and internationally. She has taught pre-service teachers, current teachers, and other future professionals aspiring to work with children at three universities and one community college district. She holds a PhD in interdisciplinary learning, and teaching with a conia in early childhood education from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Hi Dr. Sturdivant, thank you so much for being here and I love your title. I really think that what you're going to talk about today is fitting for our audience. So, audience today we're going to talk about fostering positive identity development in young children.

So why is this topic so important to you?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Hi, thanks for having me. So, this is an important topic because it is an early childhood issue that is often not seen as an early childhood issue. In early childhood when we talk about child development, we're typically talking about you know fine motor skills and gross motor skills and other milestones, but we forget about racial identity development.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: You know in our society today that's so incredibly important. Can you tell us some ways we can actually foster this in our early learning communities?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yes, so just like with the other developmental areas we can provide experiences as well as interventions so to speak when we see that children need them. So, we can plan lessons and large group activities and things that really show the beauty and the diversity of humans including differences and races.

We can respond to children when they ask questions to deal with that deal with race instead of sort of shunning those questions when they're trying to learn more about their world.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, we've talked about the classroom so how can we as teachers and educators or early care providers how can we help families at home understand this and give them ideas on what to do also?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yeah and I think that's important because children are learning about race wherever they are and so I think having something as simple as suggested books that can be checked out at the local library, for parents to use or even sending books like in a backpack home for them to foster those discussions, providing families with maybe some conversation starters about race and diversity, and then also just letting them know that talking to them talking to young children about race does not make them racist, that is actually something that they're already paying attention to.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Right, I love that you said that because I think that when you get into that conversation people get uncomfortable and so as teachers and those early care providers, we want to be able to do it but we don't want to make anybody else feel uncomfortable.

So, are there some resources available for educators that are wanting to embark on this work that they can fall back on that you would share?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yes, so one thing that I would like to talk about is a book that I recently published, with Red Leaf Press called **I Like Myself Fostering Positive Racial Identity in Young Black Children.** And it says black children in the title, but really, the book is about all young children and making sure that they don't internalize messages of anti-blackness. And I think that it will be helpful for early childhood educators, regardless of their children because it includes things like songs and different small group activities, and art experiences and things to include in centers. And it's focusing on birth through age eight. So, it really does hit the spectrum of early childhood.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Love that.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah, I do too, and I'm gonna be very transparent, and saying that this is definitely a learning curve for myself. And just like Dr. Shipley said, I do look for resources to help, you know guide my own learning, so that it does come to a level of comfort. And I'm just wondering, can you share some of those actual activities that are in your book and that you were just talking about what it might look like in the early childhood setting?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yeah, so one activity is it's a math activity, about patterning but it's in most of the activities and are based on children's literature.

It pulls from the book **I Like Myself** by Natasha Tarpley, and in that book at some point the character the main character I believe her name is Tiana talks about bees and liking to hear the sound of the bees as she walks on the sidewalk. So one of the activities that I present in there, is to do patterning with bees but on like yarn or even dolls with braided hair so that they are working on that math skill they're working on the fine motor skills, like we always do but we're just adding that appreciation for different types of hairstyles, and hair textures by coupling it with that book. So, activities like that is what you could expect to see.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah, again I love that because not only is it you know we're sharing these experiences with our children and but we're also learning as adults how to set up these activities so I think that's really great.

One other question Dr. Shipley, sorry how does this work align with our new or our diversity equity and inclusion philosophies?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yes so, this work really is focusing on affirming children, all children. It is not as controversial as some of the other work in the DEI space. Where I'm really just coming from the place where all children deserve to feel good about who they are. And we can help them do that as educators while also making sure that we're teaching them the other things that they need to know. And so what I found, that in even in situations where these sorts of topics can be tricky to talk about, I've been able to talk about them without you know getting in trouble, or having pushback, because it really is framed in a strictly positive way of we just want to make sure that children feel good about who they are, and that's not something that people tend to want to argue with.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah, good point thank you.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: So, if you were thinking about everyone that's listening right now what is the most important thing that you want this audience to know?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yeah, so I think that we need to we need to have children that are able to talk about human differences in a positive way. And we can only do that by talking to them about it, right? And we can do that without negating anyone's identity. Because we can we can all be affirmed at the same time without you know making anyone feel bad. And then also to know that children are already wondering about these things and they're asking questions about these things, so we're not planting the the idea in their head. What we're actually doing when we talk to kids about race, is we're giving them accurate and hopefully positive information so that they can have that accurate information instead of what you know their three-year-old self comes up with. And that they can feel comfortable with human differences.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: I love that yes and I agree with you as teaching three four and five-year-olds 100 percent.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Yeah Dr. Sturdivant we're all learning and I just I absolutely am going to myself reflect on it, and I'm going to check out your book, but can you leave us with three takeaways as we end today?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yeah so, the first one is that young children notice race in infancy. There is research that shows as early as three months infants are already noticing race. So, you wouldn't be presenting them with something that they haven't already thought about. The other is that anti-Black notions are picked up by preschool. So, when we talk to preschoolers, they have already started to believe some negative things about Blackness that people might be unaware, that they believe because they're not having these conversations with them. And then also, that educators can help to foster positive racial identity by planning experiences around celebrating human differences.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: I love that, and we could even do a whole podcast on how to do that right? Okay, so I want you to tell us the name of your book one more time.

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Yes so, my book is called, **I Like Myself Fostering Positive Racial Identity in Young Black Children.**

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Perfect and if somebody does want to look at that,

where can they pick one of those up?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: So, you can order directly from the publisher Redleaf Press or go to my website toniphd.com and get to it you can get it from Amazon Barnes and Nobles pretty much the the you know the major booksellers.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: That is super awesome okay, so we like to leave our listeners with one challenge so if they were leaving today what's your challenge for them?

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: So, my challenge is to think about one early learning standard that can be tied to an identity affirming lesson.

Dr. Tisha Shipley: Okay so everyone is challenged to go out and do that Dr. Sturdivant, thank you so much for being here today. We appreciate you and everyone go out and have a great day.

Dr. Toni Sturdivant: Thanks.