

96 - Bored Stiff - Engaging our Learners

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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. Hield. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month we come to you with a short professional development with new ideas for you to try. Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast for notifications about future episodes.

Today we have Dr. Maura Kelley with us. We're so excited to have her. Dr. Kelley is a lifelong learner who has a passion for making connections and building a network of responsive innovators that focuses on what's best for all of our students. She has been in the education field for over 20 years. Currently, she is an instructional coach at North Scott Community Schools in Iowa and an adjunct professor for the University of Arizona Global Campus.

She works with K-12 students, teacher candidates, educators, and other like-minded professionals on the daily. She's here today to talk about some strategies to engage learners. In her mind, the best thing about teaching is that every day is different.

Host Dr. Shipley: Hi, Maura. I'm so glad you're here with us today. You've been on before, and I love the things that you share. Welcome.

Dr. Maura Kelley: Thank you. I'm really happy to be here.

Host Dr. Shipley: The title of your speech today is The Board's Stiff, Engaging Our Learners, which I loved this topic when you sent it in. But why is this topic important for our listeners? Why did you want to share it today, and why are you here?

Dr. Maura Kelley: It is one of the most asked-about topics for teachers. I lead our professional development here at the district, and it's always well-attended.

But even at the district level, I look out, and I can see glazed-over looks as I talk, and I'm like, oh, I think they're bored stiff. So how do I refocus? How do I change it up and, you know, do some strategies that can access at any level for teachers to use as well as for me with my teachers?

Host Dr. Shipley: I love it. Okay.

Host Dr. Heald: So our educators are in this position, right? They look out, and they see that look. What do we do?

Dr. Maura Kelley: They have to pivot, right? They have to pivot quickly. And things that we have going against us are so many with technology and cell phones and, you know, even in the very beginning of the school year, it's I need to get my room ready, you know.

So how do we kind of keep them on focus and make what you're doing, what you're teaching, meaningful and something that they want to interact with? So that's the kind of strategies I have, like, that our teachers today can try tomorrow. Okay. So just give me some of those strategies more.

Host Dr. Shipley: Like, what are they? If I'm a new teacher, if I'm somebody asking you this at a professional development, what are you going to tell me? What can I do tomorrow? What can I do this week with my students?

Dr. Maura Kelley: Yeah. I mean, what we can control in our classroom is how we teach. It's our instructional practices.

So it's, like, one of the most important factors in boosting how much students will value what we're doing and engage and achieve is how we kind of sell it. So, you know, one thing that I'm always asked is, why are we doing this? Even from the adult level, and especially in the little elementary level. Why are we doing this? Why can't I do what I want to do? So answering that why first.

And I also think, I know we talk about relationships, and I'm not, when I say connections, I am not going right into relationships. I'm saying connect what I'm doing to the usefulness of my learner. So why would they want to use this? Why would they want to know this? A third is, honestly, it's so simple.

It's joy and interest, right? So, reaching where they find their joy. And honestly, if you are actually excited about the topic, that can transfer, and they can be excited because they don't know what it's about, but you're already selling it. So, they're in.

And then-

Host Dr. Shipley: That's so important. Yeah. I love that. No, I just, I love that because that's so important.

Dr. Maura Kelley: Honestly, it's half the battle, is if you're like selling, it's almost like selling a product, like you're the salesperson for the content, for the activity. And if you're bought in, if you're excited, you're going to turn half the class already interested, you know? Right.

Host Dr. Shipley: Yeah. I don't want to butt in, but I think about like all these teachers who teach math, and they don't make it fun. They don't seem excited.

And then they wonder why people don't like math, or why students don't like math, or why they're not understanding it. It's because you don't seem like you're enjoying it. I will never forget that.

Even when I was in third grade, my teacher had us doing all of these math things, but it was hard because she was just kind of teaching, not making it fun. So I think you're spot on with that. We've got to learn what their likes are, what their interests are, and really build on that with the topic that we're teaching.

Dr. Maura Kelley: Absolutely. And I think I always think about Ferris Bueller's stay off. Okay.

When the science teacher is like "Bueller, Bueller anyone, anyone".

Host Dr. Shipley: I love it. Yeah. I love that. Yeah. It happens.

Dr. Maura Kelley: Sometimes you'd be talking, and you're like, you're off on the tangent, and you turn around and like, oh God, I've lost them.

Host Dr. Heald: Yep. So, our classes are so diverse, and we're facing so many, you know, personalities, and challenges, and interests, and levels.

And you know, all the things. Educators need to differentiate, and they need to individualize. How can we do that in a place where we're engaging each and every learner?

Dr. Maura Kelley: Yeah, we do have a lot of diverse learners.

And I think one way, and it's a really simple way, is just choice. I know we all have a product in mind of how we get there, and what we're doing with our learning. But even just a choice that can be what's worthwhile to the learner. Or, even meeting their learning needs and styles.

Like, I know I had this little learner who, she couldn't sit still. And it's like, do I really want her to sit still the whole day? What can I have her do? What performance can I have her create that can show me, you know, a little bit of reading comprehension, but she also gets to dance, you know? So it's like reaching the learners where they need, where they are, you know?

Host Dr. Shipley: So I think that goes back to differentiation, because that is a huge thing in our classroom, and it's hard. And I always talk to my students about differentiating for each child, no matter if they're, you know, above grade level, on grade level, below grade level.

How are you going to differentiate for each child? So how do you see that working in your classroom? How do you do that, or tell a teacher to do that?

Dr. Maura Kelley: You know, one of the easiest things is, you know, there's never one route to place. So I always do a menu board, and the power of difference, what I kind of talk about when I say that. So, I know differentiation is a word that sometimes even our adult learners will hear, and goes out one ear, because they've heard it for years.

But if I just change it, and I sell it as the power of different; it's a little, they still have the idea that they have to change things up with the product, or the way that a learner gets there. But if they could still master the standard, or reach that goal, or that benchmark, why, who am I to say that there's only one way there? So, work with the learner. Work with their styles, and sometimes they'll tell you how they want to show you.

I think that's really powerful. It's like when you have that conversation with your learners, even your little learners. You say, well, how can you show me this? And sometimes it's off base.

Sometimes they just want to distract you. But most times, they know exactly kind of an idea that you can curb to meet your needs.

Host Dr. Heald: Yeah, and I think, you know, you bring up a good point.

Ultimately, no matter what we're teaching, no matter what the grade level, our goal is to increase engagement, right? Because we know greater learning outcomes come from that. When our students are engaged, and they're active, and they're participating, and they're owning a part of their learning, engagement goes up, learning goes up, right? So the thing that we have to understand is this goes along with everything you're already doing. So you're not necessarily replacing anything, right? You're not rebuilding anything.

You're adding to what you're already doing. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Dr. Maura Kelley: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, you have a curriculum, either it's bought for or something that you built. I'm no way asking you to change your curriculum. I'm just saying try something new. Fail forward even if you have to in the sense of, you know.

I mean, we learn so much by taking risks, and failing forward is a learning opportunity for us as it also demonstrates for our students. Like, hey, we can mess up. Like, guys, I taught this lesson on ratios, and I'm not a math teacher.

And it's like, whew, I did that all wrong. And they're like, yeah, it's okay. They're so forgiving, our students, even our adult learners sometimes.

But yeah, fail forward and take that risk to try new things with your differentiating of your outcomes and of your products that you, you know, need from your students.

Host Dr. Shipley: Well, this has been a really, really good information. I love what you've added.

I think that there's some practical tips for teachers. What are three main takeaways that you want people to leave this podcast with today?

Dr. Maura Kelley: Learning doesn't have to take time, necessarily. You have to maximize that learning for your students, which could also mean minimize the polish a little bit.

And I've heard that at the conference I was just at last year. But it means it doesn't have to be perfect. Maximize the learning, get to where you need to be, focus on the growth and the process.

And sometimes the product will come. It'll come eventually. But just give your students an attempt to understand the learning and not have to be perfectionist at what they're doing.

And I think applying that is really important. For teachers, bait the hook, that's the fish. You know, I heard that. I love that. Bait the hook, that suits the fish. So meet your learners where they are and make it relevant.

I think for even my adult learners, that's why do I need to know this? Or how is it going to save me time? Or how is it going to impact my students or make them achieve more? If you can answer that question and it's relevant and it makes connections to our learners on how they're going to use it, it's powerful.

Host Dr. Shipley: I agree with that.

Host Dr. Heald: I'm going to have to come back and listen to this because you've had some great catch lines that I want to go back and write down.

So I'm trying to stay focused. But at the same time, I'm also trying to write these down. So in wrapping up, we typically leave our listeners with a challenge.

Do you have a challenge for our listeners today that they can implement into their settings?

Dr. Maura Kelley: Yeah, okay. So here's a challenge that I do with all my learners at every age. And I know for those who teach littles, you guys are like, yes, I know this.

I call it kumbaya, but it's like a circle time moment. I even do with my adult learners to regain the focus. And sometimes it just helps.

I did it today with a group of seniors. Just take a risk today. Identify that kind of group of learners that maybe have lost focus, they've glazed over, and change it up.

Pivot and try something new. And it may fail, but you may actually recapture their interest. So, my kumbaya moment was kind of like, how are things going? What's going well? What's not going well? And they all share, or you can have it where just some of them share.

But it's enough. It could be less than five minutes. It could be 10 minutes.

It's enough to kind of break up, and I want to say this in the kindest way, the monotony, and get them recharged and reinterested in the topic. So don't be afraid to pivot, to change it up. Take the risks.

And I guarantee you may not reach all, but I'm willing to bet you're going to make a difference in more than one student.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love that. And I think that you can do that with families, too.

It doesn't just have to be with your students.

Dr. Maura Kelley: Absolutely.

Host Dr. Shipley: So, Maura, you have done a fantastic job.

I can't wait for this to go live. We will have you on again. Have a great day.

Dr. Maura Kelley: Thank you, listeners. Thank you very much. Have a great day.