

97 - Helping Your Child Become a Better Reader

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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: This podcast is your go-to source for inspiration and practical tips to unlock the full potential of every little learner. Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast for notifications about future episodes.

Today we have our colleague, friend, Dr. Michelle Simecek with us. Michelle is an assistant professor at the University of Arizona Global Campus in the Department of Education and Liberal Arts. She works within the early childhood development with differentiated instruction and child development programs. Hi, Michelle. Thanks for being here with us today.

Dr. Simecek: Thanks for having me.

Host Dr. Shipley: So, your title is Helping Your Child Become a Reader. Why this is important and why it's near and dear to your heart is what we want to know today.

Like, I think that this is important to all our listeners because we all want our child or children to be the best readers that they can be. So why is this near and dear to your heart? And I think I know the answer, but I'm ready to hear.

Dr. Michelle Simecek: The answers are so many, honestly, but it's where I started my career.

So, I have always had a passion for reading and teaching young children how to read. As a professional, I continued getting training in it because I would see kids come into school without the background and struggling. And as a mother, then I wanted to be able to make sure my kids were ready for school because we know that their future success in school is dependent on learning how to read because they can be great at math and other skills. But if they haven't learned to read, it makes reading the math problems and just everything that they do need to do in school difficult.

Host. Dr. Heald: It's such a crucial, you know, pre skill to so many other things. So, tell us about the right time to actually start working with children on reading skills.

Dr. Michelle Simecek: So that one's kind of funny. I think you can start as soon as you find out you're pregnant, honestly. I think there's something to be said for, you know, reading to your child while they're still in the womb.

I think they do hear you. So, I don't think there's ever an age that's too early. But certainly, when your children are little, enjoying books together is a great way to do it.

Reading aloud together. Honestly, children are just sponges from the day they are born, and they hang on our every word and reading with them daily is just so important and it creates a bond between parent and child as well.

Host Dr. Shipley: So, I love that because we do know that it should start in the womb and it goes all the way around. But I'm always having people ask, is it too early? Is it developmentally appropriate to start teaching children how to read in pre-K? But you know, as teachers, we know there's so many things building up to actually being able to read a sentence.

But I want to know about your classroom, and I know you worked with children one-on-one a lot, but in your classroom, what did it look like? How was it set up so that children were getting those reading skills, pre-literacy skills? What did it look like?

Dr. Michelle Simecek: Yeah, I think the number one thing is having that print-written environment in the classroom and also at home. There should be labels.

There should be books representing all ability levels because you have children entering your classroom, especially if you're a kindergarten teacher or an early childhood teacher. You may have children who don't read yet, but picture books are great. Putting together books with environmental print logos, like the McDonald's logo, things that allow them to feel like readers.

We would do shared readings where we would do familiar poetry over and over and then put the poems in binders. My classroom would have all kinds of books in bins, but it would also have things that we created together as a classroom of students so that they were familiar with it and could grab things. There were labels all over, posters, things that the children would make together, just making it fun.

That goes hand-in-hand reading and writing but having it all over in the environment. You can do that at home too, putting labels on chairs, tables, just everyday objects. It's not too hard. You can use sticky notes, and it helps your kids identify what the item is and what that word looks like.

Host Dr. Shipley: Right. Okay.

Host Dr. Heald: Thank you. You touched upon it really quick, but I want to dig down because our audience is filled with educators, but our audience is also filled with parents just wanting to do what's best for their early childhood child at home. What might the home environment look like and what are some ways parents can support reading development at home?

Dr. Michelle Simecek: First, I would say with parents, it shouldn't be stressful.

When you're coming home from work, you're trying to make dinner, and I often hear parents say, "I don't have time to read to my kids".

If it becomes stressful, it's really not enjoyable for you or your child, but it is important to read aloud together. If you can devote just 10 minutes at bedtime to read a book with your child, if your child's older, read a chapter from a chapter book, create a fun memory where you're curled up in bed for a couple reasons.

They can enjoy the story. You enjoy the story with them. Everybody turns off their technology for a second. Get into a good book or a good story. Enjoy just being cozied up and make those memories.

I will tell you that's one of the things now that my kids are grown and out of the house, I fondly remember. Just snuggling in bed and having the kids pick which books they wanted to read, and as they got older, those chapters.

So, I would say reading aloud together, if you can do that at some point during your day, even 10 minutes, and keep it fun and light and positive, and don't worry about making kids sound out words and things like that. Create a time where it's just for fun and just enjoyable for the two of you.

So, creating some type of routine. If it's a daily routine, you're likely to do it more often. So, with my own kids, when they were little, we would do bath time. We would do teeth, get lotion, get jammies on, grab our books, and it was just part of our routine.

It's what I did all the time while my husband traveled, and when he would come into town, he'd kind of disrupted that routine, and I really noticed how my kids responded to that. They needed that wind down time, and I think the more and more the kids are on technology, it's really important to find a way for them to just have a moment to quietly engage in

something that is not technology. It helps their brains calm down. It helps find a little time of peace so that they can go to sleep and get the rest that they need before school.

It's important to provide access to books. So, when I say that, that does not mean parents should think they have to go spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars on books. That is what my sister did. I always thought it was crazy because the kids would lose interest after they read the books a few times. Don't do that.

Go to the library or borrow books. They have free library locations everywhere in the community. You can go get a tub of books checked out and then swap them out as your kids' interests change.

If they like magazines, you could subscribe to some magazines. There are just all kinds of ways to fill your house with books, but don't feel like you need to spend a fortune to do that. The library is free, like I said.

I also like to encourage using phonics skills with children, especially when they're younger and they're just learning to read. Play games and use activities that kind of reinforce phonemic awareness, like rhyming, like we're driving in the car. What is a word that rhymes with 'bat'? And just playing those games requires no preparation, but it really helps your kids learn some of those skills they're going to need for reading.

You can utilize technology, too. I know that most of them have iPads, and there's a lot of educational apps and websites that they could do. There are word games like Scrabble.

There's that Bananagrams game. There's a lot of games out there that kind of reinforce those reading skills that are also so important.

And when driving, instead of kids just zoning out on their iPad or on a phone, have them read the environment to you. You can play games like, let's locate signs or restaurants that start with the letter S, and they're looking out the windows now, and they're engaged, and they're paying attention, to their environment. You're creating a memory with them, and they're also learning to read that way.

I'd say parents also just need to be patient and supportive, because learning to read can be challenging. So, our patience is important, and we want to support kids, even if they're struggling. Support their efforts. Celebrate their efforts.

Try not to make it be work. Try to make it fun as much as you can, because if they enjoy reading, it's not going to be such a task that daunts them down the road.

They always say to model reading as well, and this is hard, because I know a lot of us just don't find the time to read, or we don't make the time to read.

We are caught up in so much work and cleaning our house. Maybe on Sundays, you find a time where everybody grabs a book, and you sit in the family room with a fireplace. If they see you reading and reading for enjoyment, that's a really great way to model reading for pleasure for your kids.

As they get older, ask them questions. So that helps with the comprehension of what they're reading. So, as they're reading a book, just stop every few pages.

Ask them to tell you about the characters or what's going on in the story. It's a great way to check in with them, and it helps them kind of internalize what's actually going on in the book, rather than just reading the words. And then, if you can create a little reading nook or cozy place, that's what we did in our house.

Like I said, we would put the fireplace on and get our blankets, and I would try to make it like a memory for the kids on a Sunday afternoon. Just everybody go get your books. Let's get our blankets. Get your stuffed animals, and we would make a little 30 minutes where we would all read together. That was one way I tried to make it fun for my own kids.

Host. Dr. Shipley: Hey, listeners.

You've heard it from a reading specialist herself, right, Michelle?

Dr. Michelle Simecek: Yep. All the things we can do.

Host Dr. Shipley: Yeah.

These ideas and tips and tricks are so important, and I think that families at home try to find them. And I know that children and students, as they move through early childhood to even middle school and high school, I remember even changing. I learned to love to read, and then I didn't when I got into high school.

And then in college and after college, I started loving to read again, and now as an adult, I love to read. So, I think we go through those different shifts. But as we wrap up for our listeners, what are the three huge takeaways you want them to know?

Dr. Michelle Simecek: Well, number one, it's never too early to start paving the way for your child to become a reader.

So, I would say the earlier, the better, and keep reading fun would be number two. Finding ways to keep the fun in reading is going to help your child enjoy the process of learning to read rather than dreading it. And if you think that your child might be struggling in the area of reading and you're not really sure how to support them, reach out to the school, ask them to test your child so that you can find out any needed information that you need early so you can get some help for your student, especially maybe in the summer before the next grade level starts or something like that.

But there's a lot of people in the schools that are there to help you.

Host Dr. Heald: You know, Dr. Simecek, I love the fact that you brought up the crucial content piece, right? The phonemic awareness, the phonics, the components of vocabulary and whatnot, but you also brought up the fact that let's just make it fun so that we can hook students, hook children on lifelong reading. That's so important.

And I can almost see your house and visualize that, you know, lotioned up little kiddos jumping up and just wanting to read. So that's amazing.

Can you also give us one challenge for our listeners as we wind down?

Dr. Michelle Simecek: I would challenge everybody to go visit your local library and see what they have available to you.

There is always a children's department and the children's librarians are so knowledgeable, and they run programs and incentives and have story time and do all kinds of things that can make reading kind of fun and engaging and even take the work off of you. So maybe you don't know how to make it exciting for your kid, but the librarian sure will. And the kids love to go in and just have that chance to grab what they want and see new things.

So, I encourage and challenge everybody to just get familiar with your local library.

Host Dr. Shipley: Dr. Simecek that was awesome. I love hearing about reading tips for reading because it's so important.

It's the foundation for every other subject. So, thank you so much for being here with us today and we hope to see you here again soon. Thanks listeners.

Dr. Michelle Simecek: Thank you. Have a good day.