

47 - Creating Zen Rooms

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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 will come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to try.

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Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Today we have with us April Jones. Welcome April.

April Jones Speaker: Thank you. Thank you. I'm very excited.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I'm so glad you're here. April is an early care education specialist. She has been in education, and she calls it her passion for almost two decades.

Her first experience was starting a neighborhood art club at 10 years old, not knowing that it would lead to a career in early childhood education. That's so cool. Currently, she's an assistant director at a Reggio Emilia preschool, and all of her experiences have evolved into this wonderful opportunity of collaborating with amazing people.

So, we are so glad that you're here, and I love what you're talking about today.

April Jones Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Yes, your title is Creating Zen Rooms for Educators, which I've never even thought about.

So, it's so cool. It's honestly something that I think that our listeners are going to really be able to take and be able to use. So, tell us why this is your passion and tell us a little bit about creating Zen Rooms for Educators.

April Jones Speaker: Absolutely. So, prior to me being an assistant director, I was an educator for 16 years with multiple age groups. I was an infant teacher, preschool teacher, pre-K teacher, you name it.

And one of the things that I noticed, is that a lot of times when it comes to training and thinking about the aspects of childcare, a lot of times I feel as though educators are left out, and a lot of people do not think about the whole educator. And so, through my practices sometimes throughout the years, I would have these migraine headaches. In the classroom as an educator, sometimes I would just go into a hallway area and just lay down.

I noticed it was cool. It was quiet. And I started to go in this little bitty area.

And then I noticed that other people started to follow suit. And so, one of the things, even though as a former educator, I've always loved other educators. I've mentored some, and I just always had a heart for children, but educators as well.

And I thought about it. I was like, it needs to be just like how people focus on creating safe spaces in a classroom for children. We need to have those same spaces for educators, because you can't talk about the whole child without thinking about the whole educator.

Educators are the ones that are in the classrooms, taking care of the children, doing all of these different types of tasks. And I even read a quote about how some childcare educators make more in the moment decisions than a brain surgeon. And that always intrigued me.

So, I just thought that we need a space. And this is not only for educators, but for other personnel like the director, assistant director, everybody, a part of the community needs like a safe space to kind of just decompress. So, I brought that idea at my center currently and at my former center.

And we talked about doing a space just for that.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: April, I wish you could see me right now, because when we record these podcasts, I come to my closet. So, I'm in a closet and a beach chair on the floor, and I'm just envisioning with my eyes closed, this Zen rooms that you are creating.

Yes. Tell me more about, you know, with my eyes closed, what does this look like?

April Jones Speaker: So anytime somebody listens to this podcast, and I hope that I hope it reaches millions of people,

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Me too,

April Jones Speaker: by the way, mainly the feeling that I want people to take away from it is, that it's a space that you can go into, and that you just feel like some stress is coming off your body. If you think about going into a spa, thinking about going into a space where even if you're not going into a spa, even if you're just sitting on the beach, we just want to create a tranquil atmosphere.

So, as an example, one of the things that we did in our space, is we just kind of cleaned out like an old office, an old supply closet. And I thought about how, you know, when I was decompressing, and it can be different for different people, that the lighting was kind of dim because sometimes the harsh lights can kind of bother you in a way, and it can even bother children. But a lot of times we talk about children with, you know, sensory and different things like that, but we don't think about that when it comes to teachers.

So, I was thinking about, you know, maybe this could be a space that's dim. And then also adding in some plants in there, adding in some diffusers and some sound machines, a nice comfy chair, a nice comfy couch also could be welcoming. So, thinking about like your home living area or your living room area, creating a space like that.

So, if educators or anybody want to go and lay down and turn on the sound machine, they're able to do that. A lot of times too, we really try to reiterate with people that, you know, you can go in there just for five minutes, because sometimes, you know, the stress levels can be running so high, you know, day to day, it can be different in the classroom, day to day, it can be different for a director.

So, if you just need a moment to go in there for five minutes, five minutes could make a difference for a day and a week, that five minutes could really, really just relax your brain and alleviate some of that stress as well.

So, those are some of the things that I want people to think about, and you can transform any space. You know, I know that some people might listen to this and say, okay, I don't have a space inside my building. Maybe you can think about a space that you have outdoors, something that you can add, if you could add like a space behind your childcare center to add some patio furniture.

And then, you know, there are some diffusers that are battery operated as well and plants and things. So yeah, those are some of the things that I noticed that was very welcoming. So, a lot of times what I noticed is when people would come out of there, they would say, oh, this was such an amazing idea.

Or you could see a little bit more of a smile or a little bit more of relaxed demeanor in their body language, and even how they respond to you, especially if, you know, I call it like teacher frustration, if a teacher is just like, headed up to here and they're so frustrated, I'll say, okay, go into the Zen room. Go into the calm down space. And you can come back to me, but why don't you just take a few minutes and just go into that space? And we welcome it for anybody to go into that space.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Okay, so April, I love this.

So, I was an administrator for a long time. I wish I would have made one of these rooms for my teachers, but obviously I'm learning all the time and growing. But when I think about it, what about having one in your classroom, too, as a center for your students, like a Zen area that they can also go and decompress? You know, we have these timeout places where they can go and they can, you know, settle down their frustrations.

Have you ever seen one done for the students also?

April Jones Speaker: Yes. So, a part of our training, a lot of our training, is with Dr. Becky Bailey, Conscious Discipline. Those are some of the trainings that we have taken.

And for most part, most centers that I've worked in, we've always created a safe space for children. And that's what initially kind of inspired this idea for me. And we always created a safe space for children.

I know when I was a former educator, I had like this box that the children would go into. So, they had their pillows. We even did a little curtain.

So, we had a class book, and we talked about what this space means to the community. So just like educators, this space is just designed for that. You don't go in there to like, I don't know, to have additional meetings or things like that.

This specific space is just for calming down. And we also let the children know about that as well. So, we would see changes with that, too.

And I definitely, definitely have seen some very positive outcomes with that, you know, with children going into the space. And one child, you know, some of them have separation anxiety in the morning. You know, sometimes children are trying to adapt to their caregivers, their parents going out of town.

And I would say, you know, if you just need five minutes within that space or some time to go in that space and close the curtain, you can do that. And they would do it throughout the day and small group lunch. It didn't really matter.

That was their safe space. And I wanted to know that they were welcome to do that.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I love that.

I can just envision it working for both. Like you said that moment to pause for our children and for our teachers. Yes.

As we wind down this session, can you think of three takeaways that you want to leave our listeners with?

April Jones Speaker: Yes. So my main takeaway, one of the takeaways I want to mention is that people need to really, like I mentioned before early in this podcast, thinking about the whole teacher, especially in this climate, because more than ever, you know, child care has always presented some of some challenges and difficulties. But now we are in a pandemic.

We're dealing with different variants. We're dealing with all different types of stuff, additional protocols. And that adds another layer of stress.

We have more educators and more people experiencing death than never before. And so, I want people to really think about, OK, this is sometimes, you know, educators might not express all of these things to you. But the key takeaway is that not only that the whole child is important, but the whole teacher is important as well.

And also, you know, I feel like this is also bringing value to our community, letting people know that we value your work. We value what you do in our centers, in our childcare centers. And so, we want to design just a special space for you.

And that's why some of the things, one size doesn't always fit all.

So, the diffusers and the plants and the sound machines, a number of different things I've put in there, like handheld massagers and neck massagers for people as well. So that's another key takeaway.

And then another takeaway that I want to mention is that anybody can do this. Anybody can do this. You know, you don't have to think about it starting as this big, big project.

But, you know, maybe you can ask parents if they have any diffusers at home, if they have a rug that they're not using, any plants or think about, you know, opening it up to the community to see how they can support you.

People love doing like this. And especially in times like never before, I think especially with a lot of children having to be virtual and schools closing, people are trying to kind of seeing the value of it a little bit more.

So, I want people to know that anybody can do this and get your community involved.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love it. And I will be at your door tomorrow morning to sit in your Zen room.

I just want you to know, so be looking for me. Now, as we leave, what is one challenge that you would like to leave our listeners with?

April Jones Speaker: One challenge I would like to leave is that I want every owner, director, even educators, no matter where you are in your community of child care, to look at this and see how you can come together, see what you can do, maybe have, you know, a design like, OK, you know, we're going to have, you know, the infant class to come up with this for our Zen rooms. And also, you never know what comes out of this conversation.

It can be so layered. So many things can just branch off like a tree into other different things in this climate. So that's my challenge for everyone is to get the conversation going and see how you can get started.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: April, this has been amazing. Thank you so much for coming here, and giving us this idea. I hope that everyone today will go and at least set up just a small one and then you can move up to something bigger.

So, thank you. And hopefully, we can talk to you again soon.

April Jones Speaker: Thank you.

Thank you so much. I truly enjoyed it. Thank you so much.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Thank you, April.