

48 - Children's View from the Classroom Door

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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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Today, we have Dr. Sandra Duncan with us, and Dr. Duncan works to assure the miracle and magic in childhood through her outdoor and indoor play space environments, that are intentionally designed to connect young children to their environment, their community, and their neighborhood. Dr. Duncan is an international consultant.

She's the author of six books focused on environmental design, and she's an adjunct faculty at Nova Southeastern University. Sandra has designed and taught university courses built on early learning environments. She collaborates with architects, interior designers, and educators to create these extraordinary places and opportunities and possibilities for children and students of all ages.

And we are just so excited to have Dr. Duncan here with us today. Welcome.

Dr. Sandra Duncan Speaker: Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be here.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, Sandra, we have talked a little bit and went back and forth on some topics, and you have some really cool things that you're doing. And when we spoke about your topic, it was an "a ha" moment for me.

And you're here to talk about the children's view from the classroom door, which is so easy but something I truly have never thought about. So, tell me a little bit about this. And I know you've done some research on it.

Why is it important to you?

Dr. Sandra Duncan Speaker: Yes, I have done some research, and some very interesting action research in watching children as they stand at the classroom door, and what their reactions are about going into the classroom door. So, think just for a moment about that game show, Let's Make a Deal, on television. And in that game show, there are three doors.

Behind door number one might be goats, behind door number two might be a coffee maker, and behind door number three might be a brand-new car. And your job as the contestant is to choose the door, that you think most likely to have the brand-new car. Well, that decision is kind of hard to make because you really can't see through the door.

And it would be much easier to make if the decision would be much easier. So, because you absolutely want to win that car, right? The decision would be much easier if you could see through the door. Maybe there's a peephole in the door, or the door might be just open just to crack just a bit that you can see in.

Or perhaps, there's a window in the door. Having all of those things might give you a better way to make a better decision, about the door that you're going to open. Well, the same thing is true for young children.

Think about your classroom door. Just close it and stand in front of it. Now, scooch down to the height of the child that you serve and just see.

What do you see in that classroom? What do you see? You can't see anything but the door face, right? You hardly can see the handle. Maybe if you have a window in the door, you'd be able to see in through the classroom door through the window. But a lot of classroom doors don't have that luxury.

They don't have windows in the doors or even windows beside the door. So, what can you do to help children make a better decision? And a decision that they want to transfer from their outside world, the world that they know, into your world, your classroom world? So, now, let's open up the classroom door for just a moment. Now, what I want you to do is stand in the middle of the door, jam

Scooch down to the child that you see and tell me what you think you might see. Think about it. Look to the left.

Look straight ahead. Look to the right. That is what the children see as they enter your classroom door.

We, as adults, don't seem to think about that very much because we're the adult type. But children really view their world from their height. And that is how they make decisions about what to see and how to transfer from their world into your world.

So, one suggestion is, first of all, go outside your classroom, close the door, scooch down, and that's what they see. And they might be a little scared, because if all they see is wood, that's not too exciting and it's also a little fearful. Like sometimes when you go to the dentist, you open up the door to the dentist, and it's like, ooh, I don't know what to expect or what to think about this.

I'm not sure if I really like going to the dentist today. That same thing happens for children. So, think about what they see.

And you can't really change that from the outside of the door if you don't have windows, or you're not able to crack the door open a little bit. You're not really able to change that. But what you are able to change, is once that door is open, once that door is open, you are able to change what children see from their height, from their viewpoint.

You're able to change that. So, let's think about what they might see from their height, in your classroom. From my experience and my work with early childhood classrooms and teachers, one of the things that I think young children see a lot are table legs.

We have a tendency to put tables near the door. And the reason why we do that is typically near the door there's tile, and that is a good place to put tables, because traditionally children eat at the table. So, you want to have tile underneath for easy cleanup. So, think about do they see table legs? Do they see cubbies? Do they see a changing table perhaps? If they see any type of custodial objects, then the recommendation would be to try to eliminate or try to hide those custodial objects, especially something as easy as table legs.

Maybe by just pushing the table near another.

Maybe by relocating the tables in another part of the room if you can.

Think about if you see cubbies and what that message sends. The whole idea is to understand the children's viewpoint from the classroom door, and how could you improve that viewpoint, and how could you make them excited about coming into your classroom?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: One second.

Dr. Sandra Duncan Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Oh, excuse me, Dr. Duncan.

You've given us so much information. I just had some questions pop in my mind. So, our audience is often very diverse, and we have very experienced teachers, and we have some newer teachers.

Any educator, you've given so many ideas to, but ultimately, we want that first step for them. So, what is one thing that they can do for that first starting point to maybe look for or tackle?

Dr. Sandra Duncan Speaker: I think the very first starting point is to stand in your door jam, like I said, scooch down to the height of the child and see what they see. If what they see is not exciting, not interesting, then make a change.

Either put the custodial objects to the side, to another part of the room, or there's some other things you could do. For example, could you put a curiosity table, just a very small table at the entry door, and on that table is something very interesting. You don't have to change it every day, but maybe you could put, for example, in the middle of the table, a beautiful seashell, or maybe you could put a box that has a lid on it, and put something in the box, something beautiful, something that would provoke and promote wonder with children and curiosity.

That's why I call it the curiosity table, and it doesn't even have to be a table. Maybe you could put a little rug just off to the side of your classroom entry door, and on that rug every day or every other day, you change what's there. So, children are curious.

They want to know what's right beyond that classroom door, so they're more willing to make that transition from their world to your world. Another idea might be to begin a ritual, a ritual that would help them transition from their world to your world.

One idea about a ritual, and I saw this in a Baltimore child care center in a classroom, is the teacher right outside the door put this little table, and on the table, a piece of paper, kind of a rather big piece of paper, and she wrote a question every day to the children.

Now, could the children read that question? Probably not. Like the question might say, how many birds did you see today? And as the parent is signing in the child, the child is also signing in by answering that question that the parent or the caregiver or the guardian helps the child understand what is written. How many birds did you see today? Well, maybe the child can't even write the numeral three or doesn't know how to write his name yet.

That's okay. They can just write whatever they want, but the important thing is it's a ritual. The teacher has asked a question about how many birds did you see on your way to school today? How many clouds? Is it raining? All sorts of things that the child could increase their observation skills on the way to school, and anticipate that question that that teacher is going to be asking and then have the power to write the answer, be it just a checkmark or an X or a scribble or the name or the actual answer.

Yes. Y-E-S. I did see that.

And it creates this stability, and this ritual, and a reason to come into the classroom and to get into the classroom. It creates predictability and stability and promotes this sense of belonging and helps that child transition again from their world to your world.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Sandra, that is so cool.

So, we've talked about this a lot, and I love that you've started now, at the door looking into the classroom. And I'm hoping that we can have you back on soon so you can talk about what's inside the classroom because you've given great ideas that I never thought of when I had a classroom. So, thank you so much. And as we wrap up, do you have three takeaways for the listeners that you want them to remember?

Dr. Sandra Duncan Speaker: I think number one, takeaway would be eliminate any custodial views that children have from your door.

Eliminate. Try to put the cubby somewhere else. Try to put table legs somewhere else.

Eliminate custodial views. That's the first thing. The second thing is place some sort of curiosity table, some sort of novel object that the children will want to see.

I wonder what's there today. I wonder what I'm going to be able to see or learn about today. So, create that reason for them to transfer from the hallway into your classroom.

And the other idea is to create, think about rituals. And there's a whole bunch of ideas about rituals in a book that I wrote. It's called *Rethinking the Classroom Landscape, Ideas for Connecting Children, Families, and Communities.*

That's not the exact title, but the beginning is *Rethinking the Classroom Landscape.* It's by Griffin House.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Awesome.

Okay, Sandra. Thank you so much for being here. This is so much information.

Go back to your classrooms today. Look at your door. Look at what your students are seeing as they walk in and make some changes.

Sandra, thank you so much.

Dr. Sandra Duncan Speaker: Thank you. Thanks for having me.