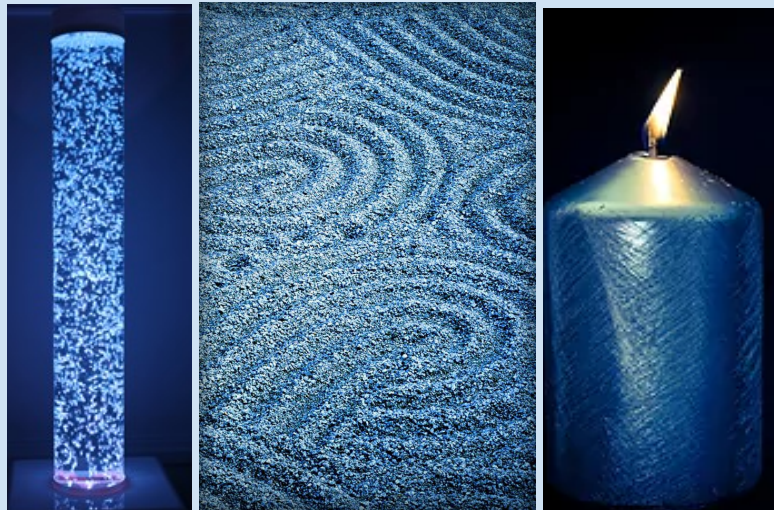


The Cool, the Calm, and the Cozy: Quiet Spaces in Active Libraries



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Thankfully, school libraries in which librarians are constantly shushing their students are more or less a thing of the past; in fact, your humble author is definitely a "no shh" librarian. School libraries across the country--ours included--are vibrant, bustling centers of reading, learning, making, and more.

That acknowledged (and proudly, too), it must also be said that we all have moments when we quite simply need quiet time. There are a myriad of reasons why this might be so; we might be feeling anxious or stressed, for instance. This has likely never been more true than it is right now. We get pulled in a million different directions and have so much on our plates that we would actually be better off with trenchers. There's tension of all kinds afoot everywhere you go, along with the Damoclean presence of COVID-19.

So, where can one go to find an oasis of peacefulness, a nice spot to be mindful and relaxed, a bastion of coziness?

Why, the secular sanctuary--the original safe space at school--the library, of course!

School librarians across the country are actualizing elements of this aesthetic, learning, and programming trend at their schools. Herein we highlight some of the various ways that libraries can offer such places within their own spaces, with a focus on three particular varieties: the sensory room, the "Zen Den," and the "Hygge Hub."

Sensory Spaces

Currently, one in fifty-four children is determined to be on the autism spectrum; the prevalence rate has nearly tripled since 2000. What this means for school libraries and school librarians is that there are certain to be autistic students in our schools at some point, if not already. Because they can struggle with sensory integration (the bodies' responses to sensory experiences), children often have a specific need for time away (often called a "sensory break") from the standard classroom environment. Providing such a space within the confines of the library allows students to have both the place and the time to relax and regroup.

Since various sights, sounds, smells, etc., can prove triggers for sensory discomfort and/or overload, it is important to note here that there are particular conditions, items, and qualities that should be present in a sensory space. These include, among other things: low general lighting (fluorescent lighting is not recommended; fire code-approved light covers can be found) and specialty lamps like bubble tubes or fiber optic lights in calming colors like blue or purple, or even lava lamps; soft seating,

weighted blankets, and body socks; a tactile center with sensory boxes, which can be filled with textured items like water beads or kinetic sand; and, if possible, a swing of some type.

Because of the ambience that exists in a sensory space, even neurotypical students can use it to relax or develop coping skills, which can be overlooked in typical classrooms, where teachers are often pressed for time.

Zen Dens

Zen can refer to the Japanese Buddhist sect that aims at enlightenment by direct intuition through meditation, or it may relate to a state of serene attentiveness in which one's actions are guided by intuition rather than by conscious effort. In either case, calm is key.

Elements that can be incorporated into a Zen Den include: soft lighting and relaxing instrumental music; Buddha Boards and other art/coloring supplies; plants and other natural materials, like river rocks; a small indoor fountain; yoga mats, meditation pillows/cushions, and or beanbag chairs.

As mentioned above, sometimes life and school can be challenging for anyone and everyone, from the tiniest Kindergartener to the Principal. Bringing elements of Zen into a library space means that students and staff will have a place in which expectations, while not necessarily lower, are at least low-key. Away from stress, they can decompress.

Hygge Hubs

Aside from being a really fun word to say (it's pronounced HOO-GAH), hygge is actually a way of life. Originating in Scandinavian countries like Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, Hygge is (loosely translated, since the English language can't completely capture the nuances inherent in this one word) "a quality of coziness that makes a person feel content and comfortable."

Important components of Hygge one would definitely want to introduce to a dedicated space include: candlelight and/or firelight (of course, there are battery-operated LED versions that can be utilized in schools); hot beverages (such as cocoa, chai, and coffee; a Keurig is an excellent addition in this instance) and sweet treats (such as sandwich or snack bags filled with small cookies or candies), and spending quality time with family, friends, or in this case, classmates. (Electronics are not allowed.)

Hygge is all about comfort and connection. Simply said, it is a perfect example of what's needed in these trying times.

There are two final pertinent points to be made: first, as is the case with any special space, there are rules that should be established. While these rules vary depending on the kind of space, anyone visiting should be expected to follow the rules, whether they are a student or faculty member. Ensuring that everyone does so means that all can receive the benefits of being there, and as should be plain by now, the benefits are real.

Second, and last but not least of all, guess what fits in perfectly with any and all of these special programs and spaces?

Of course you guessed it; you're *librarians*!

Reading and books!



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