

## THE THIRD TEACHER

*How the physical environment shapes teaching, learning and behaviour*

Explore, Create, Empower Conference  
1/8/19  
Luke Touhill

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*"Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there is really another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it"*

A.A.Milne, *Winnie the Pooh* (1926)



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## The importance of the environment

- The physical environment is a key factor underpinning good practice
- The environment and how it is organised shapes our behaviour as educators, and children's behaviour as learners
- A carefully thought out and well organised environment is an important precondition for good practice

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“The environment is seen... as educating the child... it is considered as the “third educator” along with the team of two teachers”

Lella Gandini, *The Hundred Languages of Children*

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“If we embrace the idea of the environment as a significant educator in our early childhood programs... we must ask ourselves what values we want to communicate through learning environments, and how we want children to experience their time in our programs. “

Carter, D. & Curtis, M. (2003) *Designs for living and learning: Transforming early childhood environments*

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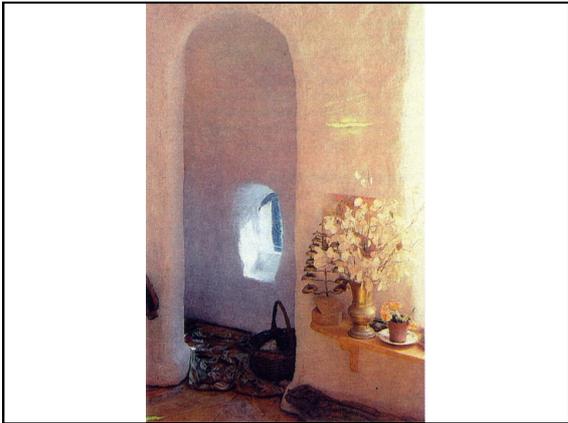
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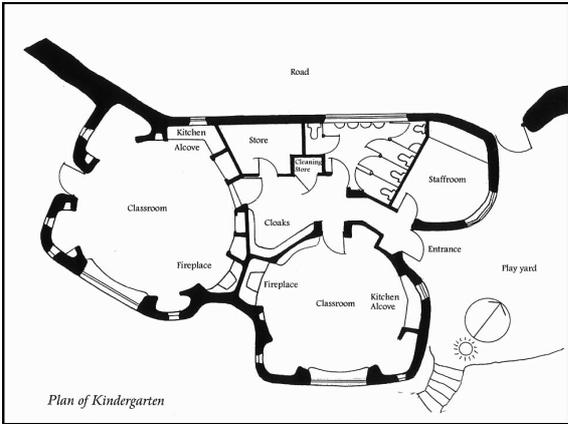
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“An underlying requirement of any building for small children is that it is as magical and full of reverent wonder as an ancient fairy tale. Children should not be forced into a mould by the architecture but have the possibility to move, live, imagine in their own child-world and to receive attention as individuals”

*Christopher Day, Architect, Nant-y-cwm Steiner Kindergarten*

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"We did a lot of research into existing child care centres in Australia and overseas. We did some super-sleuthing into what the city already had and what we saw was pretty abysmal - they all looked just like office fit-outs.  
Children have to be there for six to eight hours a day, so we wanted something that would really knock them over.  
We took out literally loads of videos [of children's cartoons] and when we saw something we loved, we pressed pause and saw how they did it"

*Scott Weston, Architect, Capricorn CCC*

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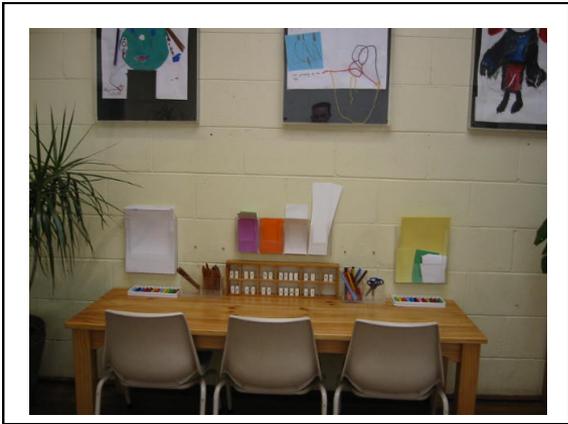
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What is in a space, a room or a yard, and how it is arranged can affect the behaviour of people; it can make it easier to act in certain kinds of ways, harder to act in others...

One of the most effective predictors of program quality [is] physical space... the higher the quality of space in a centre, the more likely [are] teachers to be sensitive and friendly in their manner toward children, to encourage children in their self chosen activities, and to teach consideration for the rights and feelings of self and others.

Where spatial quality [is] low, children [are] less likely to be involved and interested, and teachers more likely to be neutral or insensitive in their manner, to use larger amounts of guidance and restriction, and to teach arbitrary rules of social living.

Sybil Kritchevsky and Elizabeth Prescott, *Planning environments for young children - Physical space* (1977)

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### Space and Time

- Children need space in which to play, explore, spread out, move...
- Thinking about space also involves thinking about time
- When children have adequate space, time and resources they are better able to become deeply involved in play and learning *and we as adults are better able to support and extend that play and learning*

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### A consistent environment

Resist the urge to constantly change the layout of your room or playground without good reason. A consistent and predictable environment helps children to feel a sense of belonging and attachment as well as allowing them opportunities to practice using materials and equipment.

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"connections and continuity between learning experiences... make learning more meaningful"  
(EYLF, p.33)

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## The importance of predictability...



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## Please don't pack this away



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### Mud Puddles to Faces



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### Arranging Space

•Breaking up the space with clear pathways and clear play spaces produces more focussed and productive play. Children are able to play in small to medium sized groups, without unnecessary interruption or encroachment by others.

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**Arranging Space**

•Breaking up the space with clear pathways and clear play spaces produces more focussed and productive play. Children are able to play in small to medium sized groups, without unnecessary interruption or encroachment by others.

•Try to avoid creating a ring of activity areas or learning centres around the edges of the room. Such an arrangement usually fails to clearly define play spaces, allowing each to spill into the other, and the open space at the centre tends to invite unfocussed and/or aggressive physical/rough and tumble play.

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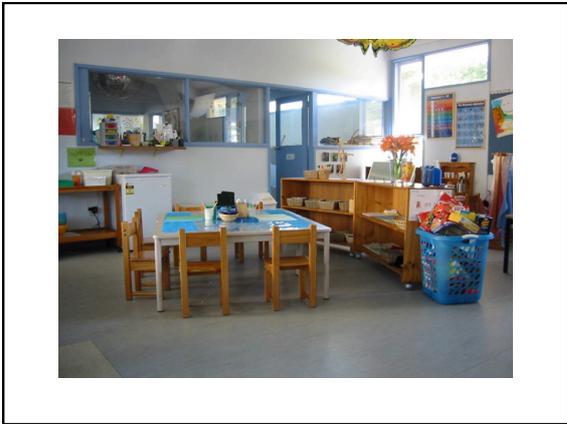
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• **Make use of incidental spaces to create interest.** A truly rich and engaging environment will have things built into it to capture children's interest and attention before you even think about what specific things you are setting up for the day.

*How many things are there to do, and places are there to be in your environment?*

*If you didn't set up anything for the day what would children find to do in your space?*

*Are there enough spaces for different kinds of activities? Quiet and noisy? In a group or by yourself?*

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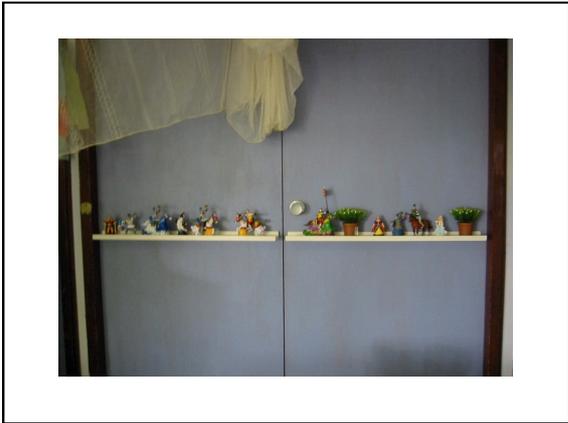
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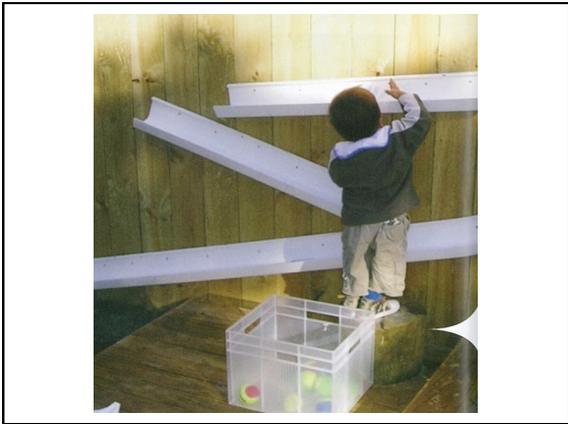
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"Because social development is seen as an intrinsic part of cognitive development space is planned and set up to facilitate encounters, interactions and exchanges among children"  
*Lella Gandini, The Hundred Languages of Children*

*How does your environment help to foster relationships?*

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- The physical environment is not the most important element in determining the kind of experience children have in our service.
- Ultimately it is the quality of relationships that determine the quality of care
- The environment however is a key enabler of relationships - how our environment is set up helps to determine how, and what kind of, relationships will happen within it

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“We value space because of its power to organize, to promote pleasant relationships between people, to create a handsome environment, provide changes, promote choices and activity, and its potential for sparking all kinds of social, affective and cognitive learning”

Loris Malaguzzi

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### References

Quotes from Gandini and Malaguzzi are from:

Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. New Jersey: Ablex.

Kritchevsky, S. & Prescott, E. (1977). *Planning environments for young children - Physical space*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

See also:

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/environment-makeover/>

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