Chapter 8 The Environment

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After exploring this chapter, you should be able to

- 1. Explain how physical space and aesthetics influence children's development and play options.
- 2. Outline types of environmental conditions that influence children's conversations, socialization, behaviours, motivations, and connections to people and things.
- 3. Explain what is meant by the phrase "the environment as a third teacher."
- 4. Discuss the types of design elements that are considered when planning for indoor and outdoor spaces.
- 5. Explain why early learning professionals incorporate risk-taking, self-regulation, and environmental design principles in early learning environments.
- 6. Describe environmental design principles from the perspective of children in the environment.

A CHILD'S STORY Sophia

Grandma is taking me to school today. She has never been to my school and she wants to see where I play. I tell her all the time about the stuff I get to play with. We have a real sunflower that is so big and full of seeds that we are looking at it with a magnifying glass. We have our own garden that we started from seeds right in our classroom, and we are going to put the plants in the garden outside today! I want to introduce Grandma to our pet hamster, Charlie, and show her the portrait that I made of him on the wall. She will be able to find it because I wrote a big S like a snake on my picture. S is for Sophia. I am so excited because it is my turn to feed Charlie and Grandma said she would stay and watch. She is going to stay all morning and sit on the couch to wait for me, and then she is taking me out to lunch. I think she is going to want to talk to Rosanna because they both are artists. Rosanna loves to paint and my grandma is a sculptor. I am sad that Grandma has to go back to Montreal where she lives, but it is so great that she can stay with me in school today.

Sunflower representations. Rosalba Bortolotti



CHAPTER PREVIEW

Modern life means democracy, democracy means freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness—the emancipation of the mind to do its own work.

—John Dewey (1859–1952)

Never before have environments for children's play and learning been so important. Because environments have such an influence on learning, researchers and practitioners in a wide range of disciplines, from early childhood education to psychology and architecture, are identifying the need for professionals to clearly examine environments to ensure that they respond to the children's ways of learning today. Both the physical and the social space should be examined to determine their effectiveness (Fraser, 2011) because the learning environment influences children's sense of wonderment and mystery and their ability to engage in meaningful learning. Recognizing the relationship of the environment to learning has led to the phrase "the environment as a third teacher" becoming prevalent in the literature related to children's learning.

THE ENVIRONMENT AS A THIRD TEACHER

Gandini (1998) identified that children require environments that are flexible and adaptable so that they may be changed or reconfigured to respond to children's needs as they create new knowledge. Fraser (2011) further noted that spaces that function successfully as a third teacher "will be responsive to the children's interests, provide opportunities for children to make their thinking visible and will foster further learning and engagement" (p. 67). Gandini and Fraser clearly identified that the environment is directly correlated to the depth of learning that children will experience. In Reggio Emilia early learning environments, the use of space encourages encounters, communication, and relationships (Gandini, 2004). Much care is taken in preparing the environment because according to the educators, it acts as a third teacher (Fraser, 2011). There is an underlying order and beauty in the design and organization. Every corner of every room has an identity and purpose, is rich in potential to engage and communicate, and is valued and cared for by children and adults (Cadwell, 2003).

With such attention to detail everywhere, from the colour of the walls to the shape of the furniture and the arrangements of simple objects on shelves and tables, children are easily engaged. They are experimenting with and manipulating the objects. There is so much to explore in these environments, which are built upon the theories of Piagetian and Vygotskian constructivism. Children are actively engaged, lessening the need for adult supervision (Isbell & Raines, 2003). A significant part of Reggio Emilia learning environments is the physical space devoted to specialized atelier learning, reflecting and embedding the constructivist philosophy of education.

Environments that are third teachers invite children to exercise their curiosity, exploration, discovery, and collaborative connections with other children, adults, and their natural environment. Creating a responsive environment that supports children's play, learning, and being is an important role for early learning students and professionals. The indoor and outdoor environmental surroundings influence how children exercise their curiosity. It is in the environment that children exhibit positive behavioural attributes and develop relationships with their peers and with adults. The learning environment is where children develop competency (Gorman, Lackney, Rollings, & Huang, 2007; Greenman, 2005). Adults and children can collectively create early learning spaces that express the children's personalities, values, cultures, and ways of knowing, while offering them challenges (Greenman, 2006). Greenman (2006) suggested that we think of children in their environment as trying to make sense of their world and attempting

to construct or discover the properties, patterns, relationships that exist in the material world of people and things and to figure out where he or she might fit in. The path of learning and development is more like a butterfly than that of a bullet. Our job is to provide a setting where a group of energetic, idiosyncratic [children] seeks to go about this task and where all—adults and children—thrive amidst the daily rigors of group living. (p. 53)

People in a wide variety of disciplines are examining how physical space influences child development. Within environmental psychology, *proxemics* addresses how physical space influences social interactions (Gorman et al., 2007). The concept of proxemics, identified by Edward T. Hall (1966), suggests that the distance and space available between two or more people strongly influence social behaviours. For example, early learning spaces that have defined reading and science areas or *nooks* improve children's interest in exploring literacy and science (Gorman et al., 2007). Consider the definition of a nook as a corner of the room, offering seclusion or security. Do you remember as a child spending time in a nook? What did it look like? How did it make you feel?

The people, the space, and the materials within the environment contribute to early learning programs' effectiveness in offering children the opportunity to express their individuality. According to Evans (2006), a number of studies have concluded that young children socially withdraw when they are exposed to crowded and noisy spaces. A lack of space, in addition to crowding and noise in early learning programs can lead to attention deficits and children not being able to concentrate or stay on task (Evans, 2006). More recent research looks at how the design of physical space in programs for children can maximize their movement, because moving their bodies in various ways is a strategy that could reduce childhood obesity rates (Gorman et al., 2007). Other research focuses on how natural and outdoor play spaces contribute to children's self-regulation skills and mental wellness (Warden, 2007). Environmental designs, then, have a correlation to children's

social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Think back to the opening story of Sophia. What do you know about the environment from this short descriptor? What does it tell you about the space and the things within the space? How does the environment support Sophia in connecting her knowledge about Rosanna with her grandma?

PHYSICAL SPACE

Creating an orderly, functional, healthy, and inviting environment for young children is an ongoing and challenging role for early learning professionals and the children (Roskos & Neuman, 2011). Aligning the **physical space** with the options that children require to explore, experiment, and discover requires early learning students to think about the space as fluid. In what ways can it be transformed to meet the children's play aspirations? In most spaces, early learning professionals try to look at constraints, such as the amount of space available, the configuration of the space and its pathways, the flexibility within the space, and accessibility of materials and resources. They then begin to consider ways that the space can be reconfigured. There is a constant need to balance what is possible and what is not possible within the space (Roskos & Neuman, 2011). Children's play is enriched when space and materials accommodate their ideas and images of what they need in order to execute play episodes. In Box 8.1, we ask you to think about how you can bring your creativity and aesthetic appreciation to the children and the play environment.

Roskos and Neuman (2011) emphasized the need to focus on **design** principles in early learning spaces, as opposed to decorating the space. This requires adults to consider design principles related to space, colour, and order, and how the space may be used in ways that promote play and learning. Space design influences how children play, socialize, and experiment. One of the challenges for teachers is that there is no well-formulated body of knowledge

physical space The indoor or outdoor environment in which early learning programs take place.

design Applying elements such as colour, space, scale, size, and order to the early learning environment.

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viding children with an aesthetically pleasing and stimulating learning environment.

on creating effective spaces to support children's play (Roskos & Neuman, 2011). Although the literature defines best practice, rather than following a defined model of practice, early learning students and professionals benefit from creating space for and with children by listening to the children and by thinking about how the people, materials, colours, and opportunities available within the environment support children's play. As a way to think about space for young children, we will introduce you to some environmental concepts that influence children's spaces and play.

One of the first considerations when designing space for children is to link the environment with purpose, as "the amount, arrangement, and organization of physical space influences human behavior" (Roskos & Neuman, 2011, p. 111). This fundamental principle was noted by Kounin and Sherman (1979) more than thirty years ago when they suggested that "what people do is markedly influenced by where they are" (p. 145). Early learning professionals strive to create spaces that are flexible so that children may actively engage in experimentation and exploration, either individually or in small groups, and so that the space may be used for various types of play.



A beautifully designed dramatic centre created to provide a sense of aesthetics and space.

Angela Brant and Fox Hollow Child Care Centre

AESTHETICS

Aesthetics have long been an important part of early learning environments. For example, John Dewey (1934) identified a relationship between the aesthetic experience and children's learning. He suggested that to understand the aesthetics of one's environment, you must first examine the events and scenes of daily life. Children need to shape their environment so that both the indoor and outdoor play spaces contain materials and organization that support them in carrying out their current areas of interests and focus. This is particularly important in children's outdoor play spaces, where they will find materials that they can manipulate, such as sand, water, and loose parts.

Early learning students and professionals focus on the aesthetics of the early learning space for many reasons. One of the major reasons is that aesthetics influence how children interact with the people and things in their environment. Children and adults are more engaged in their activities and experiences when they are in pleasant spaces (Greenman, 2005). Another reason to examine aesthetics is that "designers of child development centers are typically using colors and materials that are aesthetically pleasing to adults" (Read & Upington, 2009, p. 491), rather than designing space from the children's perspectives. Aesthetics are concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty, especially in art. From a philosophy perspective, aesthetics focus on dealing with the principles of beauty and artistic impression. Epistemology is also a branch of philosophy and is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge. Vecchi (2010) quoted Mauro Ceruti, a professor of philosophy in Reggio Emilia, who stated that "epistemology and aesthetics are synonymous" (p. 14). Does it make a difference to the learning environment if it is aesthetically pleasing? If environments are stale, pale, or stagnant places—for example, with damaged tables and chairs-do you think that learning would be enhanced or diminished? The photo here depicts a Reggio-inspired learning environment. Think of this when reflecting on the connection between aesthetics and epistemology.

If we draw a connection between aesthetics and epistemology, will it mean, as Vea Vecchi (2010) suggested, that art is no longer left to the walls of the gallery and museum but



aesthetics A set of principles related to the examination of beauty and the artistic aspects of environments.

A Reggio-inspired toddler room at Acorn School.

Diane Kashin

is brought to the environment because it will enhance learning for children? If we don't consider the "marriage of epistemology and aesthetics" according to Vecchi, we will be deprived of "a deeper understanding of things." Vecchi quoted Gregory Bateson, who said, "I hold to the presupposition that our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake" (p. 19). Take a look at the Reflective Moment box to think deeply about this quotation. What does this mean to you? How might this influence the materials and environmental design that you think about for children?

We all may have different visions of what constitutes an aesthetically pleasant environment because we are each unique, with our own experiences and lenses that help us determine what we deem beautiful. What constitutes pleasant space differs among early learning programs also because of the uniqueness of the children, the families, the community culture, programming philosophy, and personal preferences about beauty and aesthetics. Differing approaches to aesthetics are part of diversity.

No two early learning programs will offer the same aesthetics or physical space arrangements. Greenman (2005) suggested examining early learning spaces to determine what the environment "says" to children and adults. He encouraged early learning professionals to stand back and look at the environment from an adult perspective and then consider what children might see, stating that

most would likely reduce the psychedelic kaleidoscope of every wall and window covered with riotous color and huge amounts of information; the too-lush rain forest of hanging materials from the ceiling; and the proliferation of cute, commercial images, permanent murals, and cheesy décor. (p. 4)

There is a difference between the psychedelic kaleidoscope and the untidiness that comes from children's need to create props and ideas for their play episodes. As you begin to interact in environments with children, think about what works and what doesn't. Then try to determine what could be adjusted to make a difference in the aesthetic presentation. Think about the types of questions that you might pose to children when seeking to understand what they might like to see in their environment. Think about how you could incorporate their ideas into the environment.

In addition to hearing the children's perspectives, examine the wall colour(s), the amount of **white space** that is available, and how the wall space is used and organized. Each of these elements is linked to human learning (Lackney, 2005; Roskos & Neuman, 2011). Wall space either becomes an important place of learning or an area that detracts from learning. When the displays are more aesthetically pleasing, more interaction will occur among the children, early learning professionals, and families. When the wall space is more cluttered, children are less likely to explore the displays, thus reducing opportunities for learning. Early learning professionals are role models to children. As aesthetics and the appreciation of beauty begin to develop early in life, the time invested to create pleasant environments, such as in preparing pedagogical documentation that adorns the walls and captures children's experiences, helps them to develop their personal sense of aesthetics.

white space Empty spaces, such as walls, in an early learning centre. White space is used to separate or mark transitions between displays. White space is not always "white"—it is the empty parts of the walls or display areas.

A Reflective Moment

Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) was an anthropologist and social scientist whose work has been very influential. What do you think Bateson meant in the quotation on this page about the connection between aesthetics and epistemology? For more information about his work, go to http://bit.ly/10VaHr5. Bateson was married to the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901–1978). Their daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson, continues the work of her parents. An internet search for any of these great thinkers will give you other quotations that will help you think more deeply about your professional practice. Children absorb visual stimuli from the colours, textures, and materials that are found throughout the centre (Read & Upington, 2009). The types of colours found within an environment influence how children feel about their space and how they navigate their surroundings. The tone of the environment has a direct correlation to how children find their way in the surroundings (Helvacioglu & Olgunturk, 2011). **Wayfinding** is the process that children use to reach a destination in familiar or unfamiliar environments. Helvacioglu and Olgunturk (2011) defined it as "the organization and communication of our dynamic relationship to space and the environment" (p. 410). From a young child's perspective, the space and place must offer them the comfort to be involved in the environment. They try to understand the setting they are in, how the environmental conditions speak to them, and the types of information that they obtain from the aesthetics and overall presentation of the environment.

Colours within early learning environments create environmental information that supports the hierarchy of spaces and expectations, as well as clarifying prominent features within designated spaces. Children require their environments to be interesting. Because children make associations with colours and shapes rather than form, they benefit from environments that provide visual interest through the use of warm hues and accent colours throughout the space (Helvacioglu & Olgunturk, 2011). The softer and more subtle the environment, the more likely children are to find comfort in that space. This influences their play options and the depth of their play experiences.

Children's play is challenged by the barriers and the feelings of transparency within the space. Space that does not have clear visual sight lines and barriers lessens children's feeling of comfort within the space, thus reducing the amount of time and the level of exploration that will occur in the space (Stankovic, 2011). Children require space for uninterrupted play. When space is broken into spatial units, the types of partitions and degree of transparency correlate to how children will use the space. Aesthetically appropriate environments support children in being able to see their friends, teachers, and materials that will support them in their exploration and engagement within the environment. The transparency in the environment should ease supervision while providing children with spaces to be alone. In order to achieve transparency in environments, early learning professionals benefit from analyzing the space to determine the materials that children are using at a particular moment and removing those materials that haven't been used for several days as a way to reduce feelings of clutter and promote minimalism in both the indoor and outdoor space.

ORDER AND SPACE

Messy, disorganized space detracts from children's play. Organization is fundamental. Children gain comfort in early learning programs where there is a sense of order and the space is pleasant. Children require space that is organized but not rigid, giving them the flexibility to use the space in ways necessary to execute their play episodes. When children have space where they have the option for it to be "right-sized" or reconstructed depending on the play, the types and levels of play that they engage in will be deeper and more intense. Gorman and colleagues (2007) advocate for programs to examine space and to create small, resource-rich activity pockets within the larger space that will accommodate active, small-group, and large-group play.

Children in early learning programs appear to function more comfortably in spaces that have defined boundaries and provide access to a variety of materials that will enhance their play (Roskos & Neuman, 2011). If the play space design is not balanced in presentation and overall space allocation, children may find more comfort using some spaces rather than others. For example, if there are large areas of unused space that appear to have no defined use, young children often will avoid that space and choose to use wayfinding The process children use to find their way in familiar and unfamiliar environments. smaller spaces, even though they may feel cramped together; this reduces the types of active play in which they will engage (Evans, 2006).

The organization of the environment should be organic instead of rigid to allow for changes. In Reggio-inspired practice, the environment serves a larger purpose. The spaces are not neat and tidy; instead, they reflect the complexity and order of the universe. The universe evolves and is flexible, and so is the learning environment. It has a flow and movement, growing from a group working and learning closely together (Kashin, 2009). From the collections, arrangements, and care of materials on a shelf, to the daily preparation and serving of nutritious meals for children and adults, to the thoughtful selection of experiences and perspectives, to the layered agenda and inclusive dialogue of an evening meeting with parents (Cadwell, 2003), the environment must speak to the children in a way that does not add stress to their lives.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Environmental conditions can either support children's play or cause stress for an individual child or among children. These conditions can influence a group's experience of working and learning together. Conditions such as light, temperature, air quality, and noise influence the children's conversations, socialization processes, behaviours, motivation, and connectedness to the people and things within the learning environment (Graetz & Goliber, 2003; Nixon, 2011).

Climate control, acoustics, crowding, ergonomics, and lighting directly influence children's activity patterns, levels of and abilities to handle stress, and appetite (Gorman et al., 2007). For example, Gorman and colleagues (2007) and Evans (2006) suggested that exposure to high levels of noise affects various aspects of children's learning, such as their attention to experiences and the peers with whom they choose to socialize. Noise levels may also affect early learning professionals, which may in turn influence the types of experiences and options they are able to extend to children (Gorman et al., 2007). Ideally, early learning professionals and children work together to create and promote an environment that encourages conversation and play that is respectful of the needs of individuals within the play setting.

For some children, new environmental arrangements can increase their stress levels. For example, when major changes are made to the play space, or the play space becomes disorganized in ways that are different from what children have experienced, they must adjust to how the space may now be used. Adapting to new environmental designs can take several days—or weeks—depending on the types of changes and the involvement that children have had in redefining the space (Boyle, 2006). Children may also react to environments where there is conflicting information or an abrupt shift in design elements, such as colour, texture, types of materials, and overall stimulation. Using more natural products in early learning environments, such as seed pods, leaves, and sticks for collages and sorting, and even bark, twigs, and rocks, connects children with items from their environment (Boyle, 2006). These materials lead children to make connections between nature, the items in their environments, and their play and learning.

SPECIALIZED SPACES

Many early learning programs develop specialized spaces within their environments. These specialized spaces may reflect their program philosophy and the interests of the children. Specialized spaces are usually defined spaces designated for particular types of exploration and discovery. Although the spaces are constant, the materials and experiences that children

engage with vary depending on the children's interests and the materials that are made available to stimulate curiosity and interest. One of the most famous specialized spaces designated in early learning programs is the atelier that is a feature of the Reggio Emilia approach. Other specialized spaces that are becoming common in outdoor play spaces are discovery and edible gardens. Each will be introduced below.

Atelier Learning

In Reggio Emilia early learning programs, an *atelier* and an *atelierista* are included in every site. The atelier is a common space in the learning environment where adults and children can explore, create, and express themselves; it is similar to an art studio. The atelierista is the studio teacher who supports the children's experiences in the atelier. In the atelier, children express themselves in many languages or through different avenues, including the arts, technology, science, and math.

Fundamental to the role of the atelier are the materials that are available to the children. Schwall (2005) described the atelier as "a workshop for children's ideas that manifest through the use of many materials" (p. 17). By examining the ideas from Italy, early learning students and professionals can think of ways of designing environments and choosing types of materials that will support children's freedom of expression wherever they congregate.

Piazzas

The *piazza* is a specialized indoor space in early learning programs, especially those in Reggio Emilia. These spaces echo the piazzas of the city, which are the traditional Italian town squares. Piazzas are the gathering spaces for the community, whether it be the citizens of the town or the citizens of an early learning environment. This is the central space where children can get together for social encounters in small or large groups. All rooms, including the kitchen, open directly off the piazza. The piazza is "the place of encounters, friendships, games, and other activities that complete those of the classroom" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 64).

Discovery Gardens

In response to the ongoing concern that young children are losing their connections to nature and not acquiring an appreciation for their outdoor environment, interest is growing in establishing discovery gardens in early learning programs. Discovery gardens have many learning features. For example, they have the potential to provide children with new social skills and knowledge about ecological perspectives (Wake, 2004). Discovery gardens provide children with a venue of interactive exhibits that have been created by early learning professionals, children, and the community, in space specifically designed to intrigue children and encourage them to explore (Wake, 2004). Wake (2004) determined that discovery gardens "allow children to direct their own learning while in a secure and receptive environment of 'having fun, at play.' The resulting strong sense of 'ownership of place' that is engendered sets learners up well for gaining knowledge, independence and feeling empowered" (p. 222).

Discovery gardens follow the constructivist approach, as they are intended to offer children places to discover new knowledge and integrate it into previous perspectives. Similar to other aspects of their role, early learning professionals coach and support children in their discoveries in the garden. They prod, they offer open-ended questions, they research with children, and they collectively learn and discover things about their external environment. edible landscaping Using foodproducing plants, trees, and vines for landscaping rather than traditional trees and plants. It involves growing food within one's living environment.

Edible Landscapes

In some jurisdictions, edible landscapes in early learning programs are gaining consideration. Edible landscapes date back hundreds of years, when gardens were filled with fruits and vegetables. As farming became more associated with peasantry and gardening with upper classes in society, edible landscapes were replaced with more prestigious plants. With the resurgence of the desire to help children connect with nature and their environments, edible gardens offer a new environmental feature for children to explore. For example, rather than planting ivy vines along a fence or wall, grape vines could be used. Not only do grape vines offer interesting aesthetics to the environment, but children benefit from the process of caring for the grapes as they grow and harvesting the grapes. Children may care for herbs, peppers, or tomatoes in pots that are strategically placed within their play spaces. Think about the learning that children would acquire from caring for herbs or tomatoes. What might they learn about the bugs that these vegetables attract? What will they learn about blossoms and why tomato blossoms are "tickled"? What might they discover about harvesting tomatoes and using the combination of tomatoes, peppers, and herbs to produce edible food?

Discovery gardens and edible landscapes offer children many options for exploration. For example, the sensory spaces and experiences of discovery gardens and edible landscapes differ from those they would have exposure to in indoor environments. These spaces also provide options for children to explore the relationship of plants to habitat spaces. Such environments offer many alternatives for children to learn about their environment. To think deeply about these types of specialized spaces, take a moment to answer the questions in the Reflective Moment box.



Children pick green beans from their play environment.

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A Reflective Moment

Think about specialized spaces in early learning programs and then respond to the following questions:

1. Why might early learning programs wish to establish specialized spaces?

INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS

There are many debates about which environment is more important—indoors or outdoors. Experts in the fields of geography, psychology, and landscape architecture are joining forces with early learning professionals to gain an understanding of how children use and experience space. Such interdisciplinary teams are also examining how the design of space can create barriers and constraints on children's use of space and their play options (Woolley, 2008). A major issue in the debate is the overwhelming change in the nature of childhood and the loss of outdoor play in the lives of children (Waller, Sandseter, Wyver, Arlemalm-Hagser, & Maynard, 2010). Waller and colleagues (2010) suggested that the loss of outdoor play and of space available for outdoor play have been influenced by legislation, social perspectives on what children need, and urban design, as well as technological and pedagogical factors. These combined changes have led to a "new type of childhood" that correlates with many early learning programs focusing their programming on experiences and opportunities in the indoor environment, rather than viewing the indoor and outdoor environments as having equal importance (Karsten, 2005).

In this book we view the indoor and outdoor environments as equally important and suggest that programming should move between the two spaces as children execute their play. We view early learning environments as the children's laboratories, where they should feel empowered to engage in action and where they explore and discover things. These laboratories are found within the indoor and outdoor spaces, where unique, open-ended materials are placed as a way to attract children to exploring.

Indoor and outdoor spaces are intended to support the various types of play in which children may engage. Figure 8.1 outlines fifteen categories of children's play



Figure 8.1 Fifteen categories of children's play

2. What types of knowledge about specialized spaces would you require in order to support children in their exploration of these spaces?

(National Playing Fields Association, 2000), each of which requires different kinds of space and materials. To effectively support these types of play, indoor and outdoor play spaces should be designed in ways that allow changes to the space to be made with ease in order to accommodate children's choices, experiences, or identified interests.

Woolley (2008) expanded the typology of play. She is an advocate for designing space that accommodates active movement and play, rather than more sedentary options such as sitting, talking, and watching. By building on Woolley's play perspectives, outlined in Figure 8.2, early learning students and professionals can examine the play space to determine which space best accommodates the high levels of verbal, imaginative, and physical play contents and to design the environment accordingly.

A common issue highlighted in the research is that space design and children's use of the space are influenced by the control that adults have over children's experiences (Woolley, 2008). Adults generally exercise control over what can be done in the space, how children may use it, and what materials are appropriate for the space (Woolley, 2008). In addition, adults may express their social fears related to the potential play options within the space. This is particularly evident during children's active outdoor play experiences.

Whether children are playing indoors or outdoors, Woolley (2008) has suggested that the following four elements are necessary when thinking about creating a child's play space: "a place to play, a time to play, friends to play with and what the child actually does" (p. 498). These four elements reinforce the need for children's play spaces to be flexible and diverse. There are many perspectives on how to assess the physical play space for children. Drawing on recommendations from the seminal work of Coffin and Williams (1989), many early learning professionals design play spaces for children so that they offer

- space to meet and socialize;
- opportunities for climbing, jumping, and balancing;
- places to explore and take risks;
- a place to pause and be alone;
- places to participate in fantasy and imaginative play;
- landscaping that supports various types of play; and
- different types of materials, textures, heights, and experiences.

Stine (1997); Frost, Brown, Suttenby, and Thorton (2004); and Woolley (2008) offered additional perspectives on ideals that support creating complex spaces for play. For example, more than fifteen years ago, Stine determined that outdoor play space should support a series of dichotomous relations, such as being accessible and inaccessible, natural and people-designed and built, private and public, simple and complex, active and passive, permanent and fluid. These considerations continue to guide the study of outdoor play space (Dietze, 2013). Accessible and usable space will be discussed further



in the upcoming section on universal design. Frost and colleagues (2004) identified the importance of thinking about design by examining a sense of place/uniqueness, stimulus shelters, variety, and complexity. Woolley (2008) reminds early learning professionals of how changes to landforms can support children with opportunities for movement, such as climbing and sliding, while mounds can offer barriers and wind shields for children in their active play. Moving or loose parts (Nicholson, 1971) increase the depth of play from an imaginative and language perspective. The levels of problem solving and creativity are also enhanced. Early learning play space should be examined for its "playful spaces" (Gill, 2006) and for the inspiration that the space extends to children. Deviney, Duncan, Harris, Rody, and Rosenberry (2010a) advocate for examining children's classroom space because how and what is presented in the indoor environment reflects on the depth and breadth of learning in which children will engage. They encourage us to view spaces to determine what level of inspiration is found within them. Attention to nature, furnishings, texture, displays, and focal points is essential in early learning programs because each influences children's conversations, their level of interest in wanting to explore in new ways, and their desire to embrace their space. See http://bit.ly/11O2ct7 for principles of creating inspiring spaces.

RISK-TAKING ENVIRONMENTS

Children require environments that allow them to engage in risk-taking play. Risky play helps children learn about their world; test out what is and is not possible; learn about making mistakes; and discover new things about their space, place, and environment (Pye, 2013). Risk-taking contributes to children's in-depth problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Children in over-regulated environments have significantly fewer opportunities to master the challenges in active play spaces (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012).

Early learning professionals benefit from understanding the differences between risk and hazard. Crossley and Dietze (2002) defined **safe risk-taking** as "the opportunity for the active child to carry out an action involving risk in an environment that decreases potential for harm" (p. 141). Similarly, Frost and colleagues (2012) described risk as "an action chosen by an individual that poses a chance of injury. The level of the risk may vary widely, depending on the nature of the hazard, the abilities of the individual, and related factors such as weather, adult supervision, and maintenance" (p. 409). A hazard is an act or experience that children do not visualize or predict (Greenfield, 2003). The child makes the choice about if and how to pursue the experience.

As identified in Table 8.1, Frost and colleagues (2012) determined that there are generally three hazard levels considered within the environmental design and **risk management** plans that early learning professionals use to support children's risk-taking options. Early learning professionals examine their environments to determine how they can provide children with risk-taking opportunities that can be scaffolded so that they gradually increase the level of risk they can safely undertake as they acquire more experience, confidence, and success. The outdoor play space should be designed to provide a variety of graduated experiences that require children to use new skills, while building their confidence from the types of risk that they take in their play.

Table 8.1 Hazard Levels Level I—Limited Hazard Level II—Moderate Hazard Level III—Extreme Hazard Conditions that lead to minor injuries, such as craped knees. Conditions that cause serious injury, such as a broken leg. of life. Conditions that cause of life.

Source: Adapted from Frost et al., 2012.

safe risk-taking "The opportunity for the active child to carry out an action involving risk in an environment that decreases potential for harm" (Crossley & Dietze, 2002, p. 141).

risk management A planning process used by early learning professionals to reduce potential hazards within children's play environments.



Figure 8.3 Six categories of risky play

Source: Adapted from Sandseter, 2007.

Children require environments created by early learning professionals who understand the importance of children being challenged within their environment. Sandseter (2007) identified six categories of risky play, as outlined in Figure 8.3.

These categories further support early learning professionals in viewing spaces where children play. Think about why it is important to accommodate each of these risky play types into children's environments. How might they look? Why are they important in the lives of children?



Risk-taking in the playground. Kelly McPherson

SELF-REGULATING ENVIRONMENTS

Many aspects of learning occur during children's time in early learning programs. As identified in Chapter 6, children develop the foundational skills for self-regulation in the first five years of life (Galinsky, 2010). Children have different needs and they flourish in their environments in different ways. For example, some children are comfortable in places that are messy—the messier the environment, the more they explore and seek out innovative materials and ideas for their play. Others require a place where there is neatness, order, and structure (Greenman, 2006). Children's environments influence their self-regulation skills.

Florez (2011) noted that as we think about self-regulation and environment, we need to consider the relationship between the two. She suggested that there are "several complicated processes that allow children to appropriately respond to their environment" (p. 46). Early learning professionals focus on creating environments that support children's ability to self-regulate because there is a relationship between self-regulation and being able to master skills, concepts, and experiences that require more complex thinking and problem-solving skills. Similarly, each time children experience something new within their environment, they need to learn how to evaluate their feelings in addition to what they see, hear, and smell, and then compare these experiences to previous ones (Florez, 2011).

| Table 8.2How Environmental Conditions Can Influence Children's Behaviour | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Response to Environmental Conditions | How Environmental Conditions Can Influence Children's Behaviours | | |
| Apprehension and nervousness | • Children's brain functions try to accommodate the feeling of anxiety which changes the normal functioning of the processing mechanisms, coding processes, and memory function. | | |
| | • Apprehension, nervousness, and anxiety contribute to children being distracted, reducing their ability to fully concentrate on particular activities, or fully engage in tasks or play experiences. | | |
| | • Children's stress levels reduce their desire or ability to be creative or take risks. | | |
| | Children who feel anxious or nervous have more challenges participating in social networking skills and pro-social behaviour. | | |
| Feeling overwhelmed | Feeling overwhelmed may contribute to children having reduced attention span in their play or their ability to take risks that support engaging in discovery learning and expanding learning in new areas. Feeling overwhelmed interferes with children's use of imagery in play and learning, which is necessary for language, literacy, and creative thinking. Distractions and lack of focus leads children to exhibit higher levels of agitation and negative behaviour, such as biting, hitting, and kicking. | | |
| Psychological discomfort | When children feel discomfort in environments, this impedes their spontaneity to verbally interact with peers and adults, reducing language acquisition and vocabulary expansion. Children's abilities to engage in social interaction and social networking are reduced in environments that cause them discomfort. This contributes to them having limited self-regulation skills needed to adapt to environmental conditions, including tolerance for cultural, gender, family, or atvpical-development differences. | | |

Source: Adapted from Dietze, 2006, with permission.

As Table 8.2 on the previous page illustrates, children's self-regulation is affected by the environmental conditions within their play space. The environmental conditions are reflected in the feeling tone that is created among children and adults. "Children and adults tell us how the room should be by their behavior" (Greenman, 1988, p. 136). When the environment is not right for children, they may become anxious, feel overwhelmed, or experience psychological discomfort. Think about a three-year-old child who is high energy with an interest in climbing, running, and playing ball. If this child is required to be indoors in small experience centres for long periods of time, it is likely that this child will react with behaviours that do not support a harmonious play environment. The opportunity for children in this situation to develop self-regulation skills is generally more challenging because of their need to invest great amounts of energy in controlling the various emotions they feel within the environment. When children exhibit behaviours such as aggression or anxiety, early learning students and professionals examine their environments and observe children within them to determine if specific elements of the environmental design may be triggering or contributing to the behaviours.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

Applying design thinking to reflections on learning environments helps early learning students and professionals understand the relationship of environments to educational philosophy. When you engage in design thinking, you recognize that the learning environment is the most visible symbol of your philosophy. According to Nair, Fielding, and Lackney (2009), sometimes what is being made visible is a philosophy that assumes that a predetermined number of children will learn the same thing at the same time, in the same way, and in the same place for hours a day.

As pointed out by Nair and colleagues (2009), during the early twentieth century, the standard for designing a classroom or learning environment was based on automotive factory design. The following website provides an extensive array of resources to help educators consider the design of the learning environment: http://bit.ly/125xX0H. Today, design thinking is being used in elementary and secondary schools. Early learning students and professionals can easily apply this type of thinking to the early learning environment.

Particularly intriguing when thinking about design are the archetypal ideas of the campfire, watering hole, and cave space. Archetypes are original models that have been around for thousands of years. According to Thornburg (2001), thinking about the campfires, watering holes, and caves as archetypal learning spaces helps educators think of ways to incorporate these ideas in to the environment. These are metaphors; obviously, inside a learning environment you would not see an actual campfire, but you can design spaces where children have opportunities to experience what our ancestors did when sitting by campfires. Campfires are places where stories are told and wisdom is shared with the younger generation, who, in turn, become storytellers for the next generation. Watering holes are places where we learn from our peers; each person at the watering hole is both learner and teacher at the same time. The cave is a place where you can find solitary solace in order to gain personal insights. Later in the chapter, we will present design thinking as a pedagogical tool and offer you opportunities to think about how you could add campfires, watering holes, and caves to the early learning environment.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Inclusive practice is intended to offer all children access to programs and services. Ronald Mace, founder of the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, coined the term *universal design* to describe a thinking and action process that began with the architectural and design fields proactively considering human diversity and

inclusiveness in the design of public spaces (Welch, 1995; Wilkoff & Abed, 1994). Universal design evolved from a concept in 1998 to a scientifically validated framework in 2008 (Edyburn, 2010). The Center for Universal Design website defines universal design as follows:

Universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The intent of universal design is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by as many people as possible at little or no extra cost. Universal design benefits people of all ages and abilities. (Center for Universal Design, 2008)

Early learning programs that embrace universal design principles focus on how products, materials, and the overall environment may be designed to be accessible for all children and family members. Scott, McGuire, and Foley (2003) used the example of the integration of a ramp into building design. Although initially the ramp may be viewed as a necessary entry and exit point for children or adults using a wheelchair, it also is beneficial for adults with children in strollers. This approach requires staff and children to discuss the characteristics of the space, the potential use of the space, and how the space may need to be reconfigured to accommodate the idea for the space. Accessibility and usability principles are consistently examined when discussing potential space designs and ways that children may use the space.

Table 8.3 outlines three essential qualities of universal design that have merit in early learning programming.

A relationship clearly exists between early learning environments and children's sense of worth. Universal design principles reinforce the importance of early learning professionals designing spaces, creating policies, and implementing practices that are welcoming and inclusive. As we discussed in Chapter 6, early learning professionals create a climate of respect for and among all children and families within the program. Think about how conversations with children and families might change the use and the design of environments. What guidelines from the universal design concepts are relevant to early learning programs? Who are the core stakeholders who should be trained in universal design, and what would universal design look like in early learning programs? Who are the producers of early learning products and materials that embrace universal design principles? By answering these core questions, early learning students and professionals think about the users of space and the importance of space accommodating their diverse needs.

| Table 8.3 Three Esse | ntial Qualities of Universal Design for Learning |
|--|---|
| Essential Quality of Universal Design | Implications in Early Learning Environments |
| Curriculum provides multiple means of representation | The experiences of children are displayed in a variety of ways, such as through pedagogical documentation, video clips, portfolios, displays, and children's stories. |
| Curriculum provides multiple means of expression | The environment, materials, and people within the environment support diverse expression of self through a variety of experiences, such as art, literacy, construction, dramatic play, and technology. |
| Curriculum provides multiple means of engagement | The environment and the experiences encourage children, teachers, family, and the community to be partners in learning. |

Source: Adapted from Center for Applied Special Technology, 2002.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN FROM A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

Carter and Curtis (2003) offered a list of ten statements written from a child's perspective to help early learning professionals assess the effectiveness of the environment. They suggested that "instead of evaluating your space from a set of standards, regulations, or curriculum models" (p. 12), early learning professionals reconsider the environment from a child's point of view. Think of Sophia's story when reading the statements that follow:

- 1. I can see who I am in the space and what I like to do here and at home.
- 2. There are places that are comfortable for Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, or Auntie to sit and talk with my teacher or me.
- **3.** I play with and learn from lots of things from the natural world, including objects and animals.
- 4. There are magical things here that are sparkly, shadowy, and wondrous.
- 5. There are special objects that I can play with to try to figure out more about them and how they work.
- 6. There are materials here that I can use to make representations of what I understand or imagine.
- 7. I feel powerful when I play here, and I can be active.
- 8. I learn to see things from the perspectives of others when I play, especially when I take on roles in dramatic play.
- 9. I get to see my name written and I get to write my name and other words in this space.
- 10. In this space, I get to know my teachers—what they like, what they do when they are not here, and what people and things are special to them.

From Sophia's story, what ways can you see that the early learning professionals have set up the environment to reflect the child's perspective?

ARCHITECTURE AND EARLY LEARNING

What can early learning students and professionals learn from architects? Every time a new early learning space is created from a blueprint, architects are involved. The principles that architects use in planning new learning environments can be applied to thinking about spaces already in use. The Architecture of Early Childhood blog (http://bit.ly/125CJep) provides information about a study designed to raise awareness of the significance of architecture on early learning. These architects hope to instigate discussion about making environments conducive to learning and children's well-being by bringing together designers, architects, and early learning professionals.

How would you design a space for young children—from scratch—that is conducive to learning and well-being? Take a blank piece of paper and begin to sketch your ideas. Next time you are in a space for early learning, compare and contrast your sketch with the physical space you see. Look for ways in which the children use the space, and then think of ways you might make changes that build on the principles that architects use in design. For inspiration, you can find out more about the architecture of early learning on Pinterest: http:// pinterest.com/archofec. Table 8.4 provides examples of program designs used to support children's environments.

Table 8.4 Program Design and the Environment

INFANCY

| Program Example | Description | For More Information |
|---|---|-----------------------|
| A Landscape for Learning | A Landscape for Learning is a process for planning that can be built into the design or renovation of any environment for infants and toddlers. Through the use of platforms, lofts, recessed areas, low walls, and canopies, all placed along the periphery of the space, the room is sculpted to provide a variety of age-appropriate activity areas, including private spaces for rest. | http://bit.ly/1aQi0SX |
| EARLY CHILDHOOD | | |
| Program Example | Description | For More Information |
| Boulder Journey School | In Boulder, Colorado, young children were given extensive and meaningful opportunities to be included in a design process for a local civic area. The project lent credibility to the assumption that children have a great deal to offer about possibilities for planning and design. The website offers information about the time, space, and resources given to children and their families to include them in the design process. | http://bit.ly/1aQkdOa |
| MIDDLE CHILDHOOD | | |
| Program Example | Description | For More Information |
| School Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) | SACERS is part of a series of program assessment instruments that originated with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and includes a scale for infants and toddlers as well. These scales are used to assess the effectiveness of environments for children. They focus on space, furnishing, health, safety, activities, and interactions. | http://bit.ly/15J4L0F |

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EARLY LEARNING PROFESSIONALS

Inspiring, intriguing, well-organized environments that are carefully created by early learning professionals and children open up many possibilities for children to play differently, think differently, and use different approaches in their social and environmental interactions.



Figure 8.4 Preconditions that support creative, inspirational environments

In Figure 8.4, we outline Burke's (2007) environmental preconditions that support children in having access to creative and inspirational environments.

In the programming bubble in Figure 8.5, we examine the relationship of art and creativity to aesthetics, environments, and learning by focusing on programming that brings the art of famous artists to children.





Investigating Van Gogh's Starry Night.

Rosalba Bortolotti



When inspired by the art of the great masters, deeper connections are possible. Exposing children to world-famous masterpieces offers them an opportunity to explore aesthetics in their own learning environments. This photo illustrates what a four-year-old is capable of after a long-term investigation of the work of Vincent Van Gogh, focusing specifically on his masterpiece *Starry Night*.

FEATURED RESEARCH

In this section, we feature the work of an Ontario kindergarten teacher, Joanne Babalis, who has transformed her learning environment to become a place of wonder and discovery. Children have the right to reside in a space that is both functional and inspiring; that stimulates their learning and exploration; and that welcomes beauty, awe, and inquiry into their lives (Babalis, 2013). The question that acted as a springboard to the transformation was, How does one create a space that honours children, educators, and the curriculum? This became the foundation for an inquiry into kindergarten learning and environmental design. Joanne is a teacher in a full-day kindergarten program. In Ontario, provincially funded kindergarten programs are staffed by both a designated early childhood educator (DECE) and a certified kindergarten teacher. As early learning professionals, they work together to create transformative learning environment. They shared the view that if they wanted children to thrive in their new school setting, it needed to meet their physical and developmental needs. It also had to be an environment that provided security, respect, and nurturing (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007).

Joanne and her partner discussed bringing beauty into the classroom—for example, fresh flowers or mirrors, and whether or not it would change the way that the children used the space and ultimately learned. Slowly, intentional changes were made to each learning area. Eventually, the classroom transformed from a traditional brightly coloured kindergarten classroom to a

inquiry-based learning

practices Practices that involve the learner in the learning process by creating an atmosphere for wonder and investigation of the learner's questions, ideas, and theories. Inquiry-based practices can be used with learners of any age.

neutral-toned home-like environment centred on **inquiry-based learning practices**. The evolution took into consideration time, space, materials, listening, planning, and documenting student feedback, in order to create the ideal space for learning (Babalis, 2013). All areas of the program were slowly transformed together, rather than following a particular order or formula. When the transformation was complete, it became easier to engage with small groups and form research teams. This paved the way for the blog, Transforming Our Learning Environment into a Space of Possibilities (www.myclassroomtransformation.blogspot.com), where this transformative journey is documented and you can see the images of change for yourself. Designing an inspiring place for young children to engage in inquiry-based learning is possible when time, space, materials, listening, planning, and documenting work together in complete harmony (Babalis, 2013).

PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS

A pedagogical tool that early learning students and professionals may consider when critically reflecting on the effectiveness of the learning environment is *design thinking*. Design thinking helps learners develop creative confidence as they employ their imagination. Educators can provide experiences where learners apply design thinking in their daily lives, and they can use the tool to benefit their professional practice. By applying this creative approach to developing an effective learning environment, possibilities are enhanced. For more information on design thinking and how you might use it, see http://stanford.io/14cwVDf.

PROFESSIONAL CASE STUDY

For seven years, Mickala had been employed at a private early learning program working with children between the ages of three and four years. When beginning at the facility, Mickala was enthusiastic about considering what types of experiences would be triggers for children's imagination and sense of wonderment. She and her colleagues appeared to have freedom and encouragement from their director to offer children experiences in their environments that supported children in their play and learning. She was particularly excited to listen to the children today, because late last evening she and a parent from the centre placed a large fallen tree at the back of the yard for the children to explore.

When Mickala arrived at work, she was surprised by her colleagues' reactions to the tree. Two colleagues in particular were concerned that the children may not have the skills to climb on the tree, and they felt that the sharp branches may cause children to get scratched or cut. Mickala was pulled between knowing the importance of children having the freedom to explore and needing to consider the comments and concerns expressed by her colleagues. What if a child got hurt? What was the worst-case scenario?

Mickala and her colleagues determined that they needed to have discussions with the children before they actually began exploring the tree. The staff and the children gathered as a group to look at the tree and discuss the potential risks of playing on the tree. The children determined ways that they could use the tree in their play that would be safe. They determined that six children would play first around the tree and then others could join them.

As the children began to play, one of Mickala's colleagues began using language such as "Be careful," "Are you sure that you want to go there?" "Make sure you hold on," and "Watch your eyes." Mickala was concerned that the constraints and messages that children were receiving from her colleague would inhibit the children's play experience. She realized the importance of colleagues thinking about risk-taking and how different colleagues react to children's play. Mickala wondered why a tree was causing such discomfort for her colleagues, and yet it was such a rich learning experience for the children.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR SELF-LEARNING

The case study in this chapter outlines a scenario where comfort levels toward risk-taking, active play, and approaches to new experiences differ among colleagues. Reflect on the following questions as a way to consider your perspective on the situation and how you might react if you were one of Mickala's colleagues. Why do you think the tree caused such discomfort for Mickala's colleagues? How might Mickala and her colleagues have benefited from a discussion prior to bringing the tree into the play space?

- 1. Since there was such discomfort with the colleagues, would it have been better for the colleagues and the children to avoid stress by not bringing the tree to the play space?
- 2. In what ways did personal philosophies influence how this situation played out?
- 3. How does this scenario connect with children's need for new experiences, risk-taking, and exploration to create new knowledge? Could the same objectives have been met with a different experience? Why or why not?
- **4.** How does your philosophy fit with this experience? Would you pursue having the tree in the play space? Why or why not?

BIG IDEAS FOR DIALOGIC LEARNING

Blogs are online spaces that can be used for sharing and learning. Many early learning professionals, like Joanne in the Featured Research section, use blogs. Blogs can serve as a vehicle to share ideas among professionals or to include contributions from children and families. Blogs can easily incorporate text, images, audio, and video. Readers of the blog can leave comments. There are numerous sites that can help you as you learn to maintain a blog. This site from New Zealand provides guidance to early learning professionals interested in creating a platform for dialogic learning: http://bit.ly/11LhgLC. Consider the following as it relates to using blogging as a way to support your learning:

- 1. What do you think about blogging as a way of learning?
- 2. In discussions with others, what do you collectively think are the pros and cons of early learning professionals having a blog?
- **3.** How might blogging contribute to the building of relationships in early learning environments?
- **4.** How might you begin the process of blogging? What would you need to do to prepare for the process of blogging?

VISION

In a perfect world, every early learning environment would have the spaces, resources, and structures in place to offer children and early learning professionals environments that are intriguing, experiential, active, engaging, and inspirational. The environment would reflect the voices of the children and the diversity of children's interests, cultures, families, and community. Given the ongoing research that connects environmental conditions to children's learning and self-regulation, we envision a world where early learning professionals are provided with preservice and in-service training that looks at early learning environments for their strengths and the ways in which they can be reconfigured to support the needs and interests of the children and their play. We see the possibilities of combining creative spaces with active spaces, active spaces with new spaces. We see children and early learning professionals having dialogue about their spaces, and having the resources to design the spaces that represent their areas of exploration. We see using technology as a resource tool to imagine and explore the "what-ifs" and the possibilities of creating vibrant children's environments.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

One interesting way early learning professionals from around the globe are making connections and supporting children's creativity is through International Dot Day, which takes place on September 15 every year. Launched by a teacher who introduced his class to Peter H. Reynolds's book *The Dot*, the day has been celebrated since 2009. *The Dot* tells the story of a teacher who is able to encourage a reluctant student to trust in her own abilities by being brave enough to "make her mark." According to the International Dot Day website at http://bit.ly/1aiFOjC, "What begins with a small dot on a piece of paper becomes a breakthrough in confidence and courage, igniting a journey of self-discovery and sharing, which has gone on to inspire countless children and adults around the globe." The website also features resources and examples for Dot Day celebrations.



KEY TERMS

Aesthetics 181 Design 179 Edible landscaping 186 Inquiry-based learning practices 198 Physical space 179 Risk management 189 Safe risk-taking 189 White space 182 Wayfinding 183

Dot Day documentation at Acorn School.

Diane Kashin

Figure 8.6 Key terms wordle

AESTHETICS PHYSICAL SPACE EDIBLE LANDSCAPING WAYFINDING DESIGN RISK MANAGEMENT WHITE SPACE SAFE RISK-TAKING INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING PRACTICES

SUMMARY

This chapter illustrates the importance of the early learning environment as it relates to programming. To summarize, we will discuss the most salient points made by reflecting back on the chapter's learning outcomes.

- 1. Early learning students and professionals reflect on research to understand that physical space and aesthetics influence children's development and play options.
- 2. Environmental conditions influence children's conversations, socialization, behaviours, motivations, and connections to people and things. It is the responsibility of the early learning professional to be aware of these conditions and to facilitate creating environments that support children's needs.
- 3. "The environment as a third teacher" is a phrase that originated in Reggio Emilia and refers to creating and maintaining a learning space that is organized to maximize learning.
- 4. Many design elements can be considered when planning for indoor and outdoor play spaces.
- 5. Early learning professionals incorporate risk-taking, self-regulation, and environmental design principles in early learning environments to support children's learning and well-being in the physical space.
- 6. By reflecting on design principles from the perspective of children in the environment, early learning students and professionals broaden their understanding of how to create an effective environment in practice.

An article that offers early learning professionals support in making their environment a "third teacher" can be found at http://bit.ly/1grL7xY. Read the article and think about the advice given. Do you think this is possible in every early learning environment?

For Further Thought