

Week 12: The Learning Environment

Chapter 13

&

Facilitating Self-Care

Chapter 14

I. Highlights

- A. The environment is the “second teacher.” It makes a big difference in how children learn.
- B. Environment includes what goes where, how cluttered it is or not, how materials are presented, the lights and sounds, the building/ architecture/ accessibility, and the daily routine and transitions.
- C. IDEA is about providing care in natural environments. ADA is about accessibility in all public accommodations. (Both apply to child care/ preschool. Everything has to be accessible to everyone.)
- D. Inclusive environments = accessibility, developmentally appropriate, individualized care, well-organized and home-like environment, reduced loud/ distracting noises, make room for special equipment and modifications if needed.
- E. A consistent daily routine gives everyone predictability and security. Transitions = hardest part of the day, so need to plan activities/ strategies for those times.
- F. The environment should usually promote independence: activities on open shelves, long periods of time where children can make choices, able to handle self-care without asking for teachers to reach things for them, etc. The exception is children who have been abused or who have certain kinds of special needs, who need to learn to trust and depend on and communicate with adults. Set up a more dependent environment to help them.

- G. "Closed activities" = puzzles, the game "Simon Says," most Montessori equipment = toys with a single right answer. "Open activities" = playdough, water, climbing structures, dress-up, crayons etc. = more room for creativity, not one right answer. Need both in the environment.
- H. When children get bored, add complexity / details / more loose parts to extend what they were playing with instead of pulling them into a totally different activity. Extend playdough by offering cookie cutters, sea shells, etc.

II. Homework

- A. Individual project due soon! Last name A-L presents May 6th, everyone else the week after that.
1. Handout must include:
 - a) project / activity title or topic
 - b) children's age the project is meant for
 - c) objective (most important part: what are you trying to teach through this project? Which areas of development are involved -- cognitive development, fine motor, hand-eye coordination, etc.?)
 - d) materials needed (everything, including water and trays and simple stuff — recommend you set it up yourself to see what all the little things are)
 - e) Presentation (Description step-by-step of how you show it to children, similar to how we wrote the detailed task analysis last week. Instead of "put toothpaste on the toothbrush," get detailed: "Take the cap off the toothbrush. Get the toothbrush head wet. Squeeze..." etc. Describe how you invite the child to participate, where you position your body, whether it's on the table or the floor, etc. Follow this while doing the presentation in class.)

- f) extensions (other things you can do with this project, such as doing the same filling/ dumping activity in the water table outside after you do it at a table inside)
 - g) modifications (how to modify it for children with special needs: note which special need(s) and how you would adapt for that. Also show the modification when you present in class.)
2. Bring 25 copies of the handout.
 3. Run through it yourself to see what's involved. Which body parts and senses do you use? What materials do you need? Then how could you adapt that for special needs?
 4. Should be very descriptive in the handout so someone can read it 6 months from now in their classroom and know what to do.
 5. The syllabus says to write an "essay" about the project. The handout counts as the essay. There's no separate written assignment.
 6. Allowed to change the project from what you originally wrote, but only if you clear it with Ms. Zarghami first.

III. Discussion: what are you doing to preserve the planet?

- A. Reduce, reuse, recycle, conserve, and teach children to do the same
- B. We are responsible for raising the next generation! Our country makes more trash and uses more water than any other country on the planet. We need to be more conscious of the world we're leaving for future generations.
- C. Plant a garden in the school, grow our own fruits and vegetables. Be aware of seasons, build activities and conversations to help grow their awareness of the natural environment. Help them learn not to waste food, not to throw recyclable things into the landfill.

- D. Teach the children to respect and care for the school environment/yard. (People do beach/park clean-up on weekends sometimes. We can do this at school too, especially if we give children gloves to wear.)
- E. As much as we respect the planet and are careful not to waste water/electricity/materials, the children will learn to do the same. (Remember in ECE we have to say what we're doing and why, don't just do it and expect them to understand why. That's how children learn.)

IV. Chapter 13: Learning Environment

- A. The environment is the "second teacher." It's very important to how young children learn.
- B. What is the impact of IDEA and ADA in ECE environments?
 1. IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, law that says we have to provide education to children with special needs in "natural environment" (child care, public school, play groups, sports teams, etc.) with non-disabled peers of the same age
 2. ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act, law that says we have to allow children with disabilities to enroll in our centers (provides for disability access in public accommodations in general, including child care)
 3. Laws mean everything has to be accessible to everyone, we have to take care of all children in an inclusive program, everyone has to have equal access. Can everyone move freely from the front door to activity areas, bathrooms, lunch area, cubbies, etc.? Is every piece of material accessible to (and safe for) every child in your care? If not (if they eat all the playdough or put small pieces in their mouths), put that material away. You can't make it available to everyone else but tell the child with special needs to play with something different.

C. What are the components of inclusive environments?

1. Accessibility
 - a) Ramp instead of stairs to the front door
 - b) A child in a wheelchair can get a puzzle off the shelf, take it to the table, and work on it just like the other children
 - c) No loose area rugs (tripping hazard). Wall-to-wall carpeting or linoleum.
 - d) Braille signs if needed
2. Developmentally appropriate for the children's age (all materials aimed at 4s and 5s, even if some have special needs)
3. Provide individualized care
4. Organized environment, everything in its place, not crowded or piled on top of each other. Label the shelf with pictures to hold its space and enable children to put toys away by themselves.
5. Home-like environment, comfortable/soft/welcoming, pictures of the children's families down on the children's level, anything that connects the classroom to the child's home
6. Modifications and special equipment specific to the special needs you're actually serving in that room (don't have to prepare for every possible scenario, just the ones relevant to your classroom, sometimes on-the-fly if the child comes mid-year)

D. Starting points

1. What are the issues presented?
 - a) Cost of adapting the building/materials
 - b) Teacher training to know how to adapt
 - c) Parents of typically-developing children sometimes resist inclusion at first
 - d) All children have this legal right, so we are all obligated to figure this out and do it. Inclusion isn't because you're being nice. It's required by law.

2. What does it mean to us as early childhood educators?
 - a) Environment is the second teacher.
 - b) Environment must be developmentally appropriate AND inclusive, according to the law
 - c) Environment includes furniture, room arrangement, materials, lights, teachers, everything.
3. So what?
 - a) Inclusion builds self-esteem in all children
 - b) Provides better care, builds trust with families
 - c) Provides role model in the community
 - d) Professional growth and self-fulfillment for teachers

E. ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act

1. Creating accessibility
 - a) Child care facilities must be readily accessible
 - b) Issue of cost
 - c) "Alternative accessibility" (maybe easier to modify the back door than the front door, that's allowed if that's the best way to make it accessible)
 - d) Ok to have a temporary ramp or piece of wood if you can't afford a real ramp. Have to try to do something.
2. Public Accommodations
 - a) No refusal or denial of services. (Against the law to say we're not trained or don't take children with special needs!)
 - b) Reasonable accommodations:
 - (1) modifying policies and procedures (set up the rules and how we do things so we're accommodating)
 - (2) providing auxiliary aids and services
 - (3) remove physical barriers (widen doorways, add ramps, etc.)

F. IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

1. Must provide services in a natural environment
2. Emphasis on providing education with non-disabled peers (Ratio matters: should have at least 5 typically-developing children for every child with special needs. There won't be enough role modeling if it's half and half. If you have 10 kids, only 2 should have special needs at the most. Otherwise can't meet everyone's needs effectively. This is based on experience, not specified in the law.)

G. Inclusive environment

1. Arranging play spaces
 - a) Blocks and dress-up need larger space
 - b) Book area needs smaller space
2. Special or therapeutic equipment (such as a wedge pillow or special chair for that child to use on the floor) may need storage area when not in use
3. Reduction of loud and distracting noises
 - a) Turn off the CD player in the background! Or play it quietly and teach children if they can't hear it, they're being too loud.
 - b) Soft voices. Move across the room instead of yelling across the room to talk to someone.
 - c) Arrange centers/learning areas based on how much noise is made there. Don't put noisy area next to quiet area. Pretend play/dress-up can be loud, which will distract the book area people and make it hard for them to whisper to each other.
 - d) The louder the room gets, the softer you should speak.
 - e) Have carpeting and curtains and soft pillows in the room to help absorb sounds.

- f) Can play “the silence game” to help children learn that their movements and bodies make noises other than talking. Helps them learn self-control. Don’t play it when the room is crazy noisy. Do it when they’re really relaxed so they’re aware.
- 4. Moving around safely
 - a) Asking them to walk instead of running because running makes them fall into furniture or crash into each other and get hurt. (Tell them why we want them to walk.)
 - b) Us too! Set the example of walking.
 - 5. Minimize clutter and confusion
 - a) Clutter makes children more noisy.
 - b) Make it a habit for everyone in the room to clean up after themselves.
 - c) Not too many colors. Keep the walls and floor and furniture in earth colors (calmer, less distracting) because the toys, children’s clothes, and artwork are colorful enough! Don’t overstimulate the children with too many bright colors. Put up fewer pictures. Use one or two posters of nice paintings instead. Frame children’s artwork in construction paper, label with their name, etc. to show respect for their art. Can be great to let children choose what goes on the wall (instead of teacher choosing).

H. Arrangement of the environment is critical in determining children’s learning and behavior.

- 1. Every single thing you put out in the classroom should have a goal. Why is this out? What should children learn/benefit from this?
- 2. Consider different types of learning:
 - a) Self-help (is an important goal for every child, such as getting their own materials off the shelves and cleaning up, hanging up their own coats, can reach the toilet paper while sitting on the toilet, can reach their own

change of clothes when needed, mirrors so they learn to groom themselves appropriately, teach them to put on their own coat and how to help other children put on their coats, etc.)

- b) Teacher-structured activities (where teacher shows how to do it, teaches the child the right way to use the material)
- c) Discovery learning (where the child explores and figures it out on their own)

I. Use preventative discipline

- 1. Communicate to children how they're expected to behave
- 2. This helps facilitate children's learning
- 3. Example: In Montessori, children have to ask each other for permission to watch a classmate's work or sit by them at lunch.
- 4. When they have a conflict, sit with them to help them talk it through until they find a solution both sides can agree to. This is how they learn problem-solving.

J. Planning the environment

- 1. Safety (No area rugs!!)
- 2. Visibility (every area of the room should be visible, no hiding places or solid furniture you can't see around)
- 3. Ease of movement (able to move without bumping into furniture)
- 4. Activity concentration (think about where the majority of the children usually gather, make that area bigger)
- 5. Teacher's availability (stand with your back to the wall so you can see everything, be available to children, fully mentally and physically present, not spaced out thinking about your family drama)
- 6. Structured flexibility (find the balance between having enough structure to make the children feel secure and the environmental predictable to build self-

esteem, no surprises for children, but still flexible enough to meet your individual children's needs and interests which change all the time)

K. Daily routine (What happens every day, in order)

1. Transitions are the hardest part because kids may not be done with whatever they were doing before and we're not planning/preparing transition time well.
 - a) We plan all the other parts of the day, also need to plan transitions.
 - b) Twice as hard for kids with special needs. We need to give them more reminders that a change/transition is coming.
 - c) When half the children are ready and half are not, best to send the ready half outside with one teacher while another teacher stays inside.
Otherwise have special songs or books saved for occupying them during transition time. Practice humming, head/shoulders/knees/toes, whatever it takes to give them something to do besides poke each other and get in trouble while they wait.
 - d) We have at least 10 transitions a day, so have at least 10 things ready in your mind to keep the children busy while you're waiting for all the children to join you.
 - e) If the problem is that kids aren't ready to let go of what they were doing, can have "saving signs" (tags with their names written) to save the project for when they come back inside.
2. Need a schedule for the full day, every hour we're open. For 7 am to 6 pm, need two circle times, 2-3 outside times, 4-5 eating times, one nap (2 hours), other activities in between.
3. Teacher's job to make sure we spend "alone time" with every child every day, do a mix of small and large group activities every day, make sure children have highly active time and calmer time, etc. This is part of how we meet

- their needs. (If you're a director, did you spend alone time with some of the teachers today?)
4. We have to provide developmentally appropriate care, individually appropriate care, and culturally sensitive care. We have an ethical responsibility to meet all three of these. This is why we need alone time with each child: this is how you get to know them individually and get to learn about their home culture.
 5. Having the whole class together at circle time/group time, it builds a sense of community. This is how the children learn they belong together, get that sense of belonging. This is why NAEYC standards require group time every day. That sense of community is important!

V. NAEYC Video: Environments for Young Children, with Elizabeth Prescott & Elizabeth Jones (two developmentalists from Pacific Oaks)

- A. Environment give messages to children
- B. It's easier to change environments than to change people. You can regulate/influence/plan for children's experiences by how you organize the environment and what you put in that environment. To change behavior, move the furniture first.
- C. Behavior does not occur in a vacuum. We are all influenced by the space around us. Therefore have to plan the environment based on your program's goals.
- D. If the program wants children to be dependent on adults, arrange the environment so that:
 1. play things are out of reach so they have to ask permission to play with them
 2. teachers control when activities start/stop
 3. have fewer things available so children have to check with teacher to be able to use things

4. plan activities that children can't do independently, need teacher's help
 5. more "closed" program where there are right ways to do things and adults know what they are
 6. This could wear out your teachers, but would teach children to trust and depend on adults. Can be useful with children who are not used to paying attention to adults, who have not had experiences with trustworthy adults.
- E. If the program wants to promote independence and initiative, set up the environment with:
1. many activities/materials directly available to children, open shelves with a variety of things to do stored where children can get to them directly
 2. have long time periods in which children make choices about what to do
 3. have things well-organized and clearly labeled so children know what belongs where
 4. more "open" program where children make their own decisions about what to do and how
- F. Open vs. closed activities
1. Closed = puzzles, Simon Says, stacking cups, Montessori equipment = teaches that the way things fit together matters, there is a right answer, gives children clear signals when they do it right (such as a puzzle making a complete picture)
 2. Open = playdough, paint and crayons, climbing structures, sand or water or other sensory, dress-up, etc. = doesn't have a set right/wrong way to do it, has room for the child to bring her own ideas and try different things, material doesn't give any signals that you did it wrong
 3. Need some of both in any environment because they do different things.
 - a) Closed activities teach about constraints/rules, in some ways controls the child

- b) Open activities teach about your own power in the world, offer sensory / tactile input, responds to the child, gives the child a feeling of control
 - 4. Soft open-ended things: rugs, laps, playdough, cloth swings/hammocks, pillows, water, sand, dirt, grass, mud, shaving cream, etc. These are relaxing for children, offer tactile / sensory stimulation, especially important for kids who are with us 11 hours / day.
- G. Build on playdough: cookie cutters, add macaroni and shells and buttons, carry it to the play house to have a cookie party with friends... keep it going. Makes simple play more complex by adding different props / materials to it.
- 1. Same thing happens in the sandbox when you add digging equipment, water, shovels, trucks, etc. These add complexity to play, takes the play in a variety of different directions, gives children more of a sense of what can be done with the materials.
 - 2. Can play with basic playdough for 15 minutes, but with add-ons, can do it for more than an hour.
 - 3. If a goal is to help lengthen children's attention span, it helps to offer things that complicate their play. Especially good to link it to dramatic play.
 - 4. Each thing she added / offered gave a natural suggestion about how to use it, but doesn't close it off.
 - 5. Much less learning when the teacher says, "You're done with playdough, come find something else to do instead." or "Too bad, keep using it."
 - 6. Adding props gives the child more of a sense of what can be done with this material. After that, sometimes is great to introduce the plain material again and see if the children approach it in new ways because of those more complex experiences.

H. Part of our goal as teachers is to find ways to make our days enjoyable and sustainable.

1. You can be more energetic in a 3-hour preschool, but you can't sustain that all day for 8-9 hours.
2. Promoting independence (so children clean up after themselves) makes the adult's life easier and makes the children feel like participants in the program.
3. A tired teacher is not a fun teacher, so an important factor in setting up the environment is how to make your life easier. Usually this requires making children more independent so you're not running around cleaning up after them and trying to control everything all day.
4. Make the classroom a loving, nurturing collaboration. It's not about making the kids do your job for you, but it is about making sure you don't go home empty and exhausted every night.

I. The goal in this area is usually independence. Two cases when you would NOT want to promote independence:

1. Taking care of abused children, because they have to learn to trust adults to meet their needs. Set it up so the children can come to you to help meet all of their needs, and make sure you're available to meet those needs right away.
2. Taking care of children with certain special needs (such as autism) so they have to practice the social skills and language/ communication every time to ask for what they need.