

# An Effective Learning Environment: A Closer Look

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## ABSTRACT

*An effective learning environment of the students must supports and promotes their active learning and development. Students require space, indoors and outdoors, where they can be active or quiet and where they can think, dream and watch others. The space needs to be appropriate for the age and development of all the students so that they can have suitable access to it and can interact within it. The space needs to be secure, appropriately heated and aired and free from hazards. There need to be well-organised areas and resources, both natural and manufactured, which are accessible to the students.*

*There should be opportunities for a range of activities such as soft play, paint mixing, growing plants, mark-making, looking at books, reading stories, or exploring the properties of materials such as clay, sand or water. The space both indoors and outdoors should preferably be available all the time so students can choose activities and follow their interests. The outdoor space needs to offer shade and shelter, and students should have opportunities to experience changing seasons and the passing of time. In deciding what an 'appropriate environment' is it is important to understand the way students learn and to provide for the age and stage of the students concerned. There is no ideal environment as students interests change, and the environment should change in response to these changing interests.*

**KEYWORDS:** Teaching Environment, Classroom Environment, Effective Learning Environment, Learning Experience

## INTRODUCTION

Why the learning environment is important? An appropriate environment is the key both to safety and to effective learning and development. The learning environment involves both the people and the space in which students develop and learn. An appropriate physical environment is one where students feel safe, cared for and relaxed because they are in the continuous care of one, or a small number of, adults who are responsible for them. An appropriate physical environment offers access to an outdoor as well as an indoor space and should provide a place where students have opportunities to explore, learn and develop

with the support of sensitive, knowledgeable adults.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Teachers** should offer a range of experiences and resources which are regularly monitored and refreshed to keep them safe and stimulating; tune in to the student's interests and interact with them to support and extend their learning and development, jointly engaging in problem solving and sustained shared thinking; respond to observed interests and plan new materials and experiences within the environment that reflect these; monitor materials, student's involvement and their own involvement with students to ensure they offer relevant

experiences; provide materials that reflect diversity in order to avoid stereotypical images or approaches; evaluate their provision to ensure that everything that is provided is of the highest quality.

**Outdoor and Indoor environments** - the outdoor and indoor environments should contain resources and materials that children can explore and investigate using all their senses. Some of the materials and resources should be familiar to the students from their home and community environments, and some should be new. The best materials have many uses, such as wooden hoops and pegs in a tin, with unlimited opportunities for children to use them creatively and imaginatively to support their learning and development. Families should be consulted and engaged in choosing the materials and resources the students use in a setting so that links can be made with home.

The **Learning Environment** offers challenges through which students can learn about risk taking and keeping them safe. As well as providing opportunities for moving around, environments should offer a variety of surfaces and levels, places to sit or lie, to climb or swing and to make big movements such as spinning, dancing, jumping, running and so on. Adults need to support student's confidence in themselves and their developing skills as they tackle new experiences and develop a sense of what they can do and what they will be able to do as they practise and meet the challenges in the environment. Students need opportunities to dig, to climb, to swing and to control wheeled toys.

They should be able to touch and feel a variety of textures and to move, stretch and crawl. They may like to make marks, to cut and join materials together or to shape and construct materials. They need to be able to rest and refresh themselves when they are ready. Students need time to play with what interests them and to make choices. They

need opportunities to watch the natural world changing, to explore and solve problems. Students need opportunities to make friends and develop relationships. Students need time to learn and develop at their own pace.

Every learning experience occurs within an environment in which the learner interacts with the content, knowledge, skill, or expert. The environment might be simple—for example, one learner with one resource at home, work, or some other community space (Oldenburg 1999). The environment might be complex, such as several learners with many resources in a classroom, library, media center, or café.

Another type of environment might be a synchronous virtual meeting place, such as when several students collaborate online with many resources in different locations. The faculty member's involvement and presence can vary in any of these environments. The question to be anticipated by faculty when they are designing a set of course experiences is where, when, with whom, and with what resources will any particular instructional event be likely to occur, and what are the expected outcomes? Will this experience be a small group meeting planning a team project using a synchronous meeting tool? Will this event be an experience where a team of two students interviews restaurant workers about their knowledge of public health regulations? Or will this experience be an individual experience where the student is working through a complex simulation? In designing an effective learning environment, faculty will face a range of options as they seek to find the best combination of learning experiences available for their students.

Whatever the specific environment, a well-planned course provides a variety of interaction choices for students. For example, a well-planned course balances three levels of interaction: faculty-to-student, student-to-student, and student-to-resources. Additionally, a well-planned

course balances three types of activities: individual activities, small group activities, and large group activities. By ensuring multiple channels of communication, engagement, and collaboration within the design of a course, faculty members provide a richly textured environment that can accommodate a full range of student needs and learning styles. For education in school to be effective, the environment needs to be conducive to learning, allowing the pupils space and time to interact within the learning and teaching process. Creating and maintaining stimulating learning environments can be achieved through effective classroom organization, interactive and whole school displays and a climate of innovation.

Points arising from research for education in school to be effective, the environment needs to be conducive to learning, allowing the pupils space and time to interact within the learning and teaching process. Creating and maintaining stimulating learning environments can be achieved through effective classroom organization, interactive and whole school displays and a climate of innovation. The best learning environment is one of high challenge and low stress.

## REFERENCES:

[1] DfES (2006) Early Years Foundation Stage Consultation Document, DfES Publications, Nottingham (ref. SESCO6\_18).

### Further resources

Bilton, H. (2005) *Learning Outdoors: improving the quality of young children's play outdoors*, David Fulton Publishers, London. Using examples of good outdoor practice from a range of early years settings in the London Borough of Brent this handbook is an accessible source of guidance. *Early Years Outdoors* is a dedicated service from Learning Through Landscapes that offers advice, materials and

training to support practitioners in creating a seamless indoor/outdoor environment. Working with a number of interested experts, a shared vision for outdoor play and set of core values for high-quality outdoor experiences for babies, toddlers and young children underpins and drives the service. *Learning Through Landscapes*: [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk); [eyo@ltl.org.uk](mailto:eyo@ltl.org.uk); tel: 01962 845811.

Edgington, M. (2002) *The Great Outdoors: developing children's learning through outdoor provision*, British Association for Early Childhood Education, London. Starting from clear principles and considering the outside spaces that practitioners have available, this short publication helps them to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of those spaces and how to organise and develop them.

Gura, P. (2001) *Resources for Early Learning: children, adults and stuff*, Paul Chapman Publishing, London. This book draws on effective practice and explores the value of a range of resources in the learning environment to support children's learning and development.

Lewisham Early Years Advice and Resource Network (2002) *A Place to Learn: developing a stimulating learning environment*, Lewisham (tel: 020 8695 9806; [ey.s.advisers@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:ey.s.advisers@lewisham.gov.uk)). Drawing on their work in many early years settings in Lewisham, south London, the early years advisers have published this flexible resource with many examples and colour photographs.

Lindon, J., Kelman, K. and Sharpe, A. (2001) *Play and Learning for the Under 3s*, TSL Education Ltd, London. This is a practical book underpinned by sound theory and research which offers many ideas for adults who work with and provide environments for babies and toddlers.

Ouvry, M. (2000) *Exercising Muscles and Minds: outdoor play and the early years curriculum*, NCB Publications. Using examples of good practice this accessible guide looks at how to plan the outdoors as a learning environment – and addresses many of the assumptions that may obstruct this process.

Ryder-Richardson, G. (2005) *Creating a Space to Grow: the process of developing your outdoor learning environment*, David Fulton Publishers, London. Using illustrated

examples of case studies from the Kent ‘Spaces to Grow’ project, this book guides practitioners through the process of changing and developing their outdoor environment to maximise the learning potential for babies, toddlers and young children.

[www.forestschools.com](http://www.forestschools.com). This website gives information about how this movement began and how it develops the natural outdoor environment for learning. It includes a detailed early years case study and links to other relevant sites.