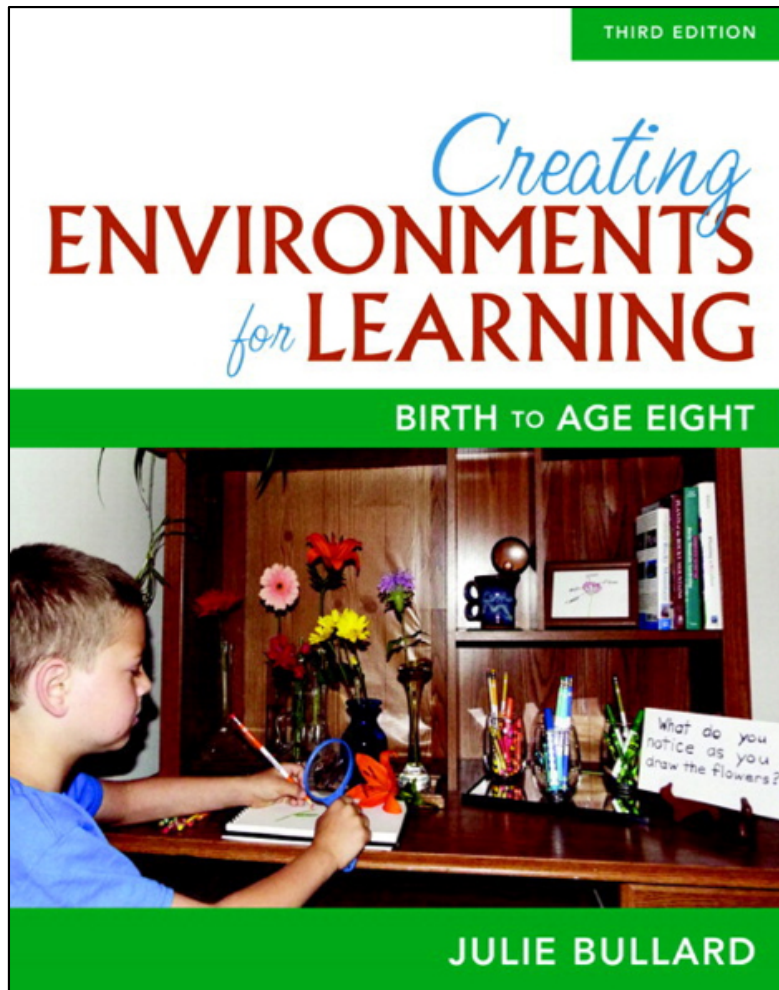


Creating Environments for Learning: Birth to Age Eight

Third Edition



Chapter 1

Understanding the
Importance of the
Environment

The Environment We Are in Affects Our Mood, Ability to Form Relationships, Ability to Learn, and Even Our Health

The Early Childhood Group Environment is Especially Critical Because

- Young children are in the process of rapid brain development
- They spend many hours in the early childhood environment

Did You Know? (1 of 2)

- Children spend up to 12,000 in infant/toddler and preschool group environments and 4,000 in K-3rd grade classrooms.

Why is Play-Based Learning Important?

- Play has been recognized globally as an important learning tool and as an important right for children
- An effective environment supports play-based learning

Play Promotes Development in All Domains (1 of 2)

- Builds social skills
- Allows practice of cultural roles
- Alleviates stress
- Allows construction of meaning from emotional experiences
- Provides health benefits

Play Promotes Development in All Domains (2 of 2)

- Is a vehicle for optimal cognitive development
- Encourages flexibility in thinking and risk taking
- Encourages self-regulation
- Enhances language and literacy skills
- Allows children to practice skills in an authentic way

Did You Know? (2 of 2)

- Several studies have found that play-based programs have better long-term outcomes than programs that rely primarily on teacher-direction.

A Well-Designed Environment Supports Developmentally Appropriate Practices Through

- providing rich opportunities for play
- providing multiple opportunities for children to construct their knowledge through first-hand experiences
- facilitating development across domains
- providing materials that meet a wide range of developmental levels
- providing materials that allow a child to increase complexity of learning over time

An Effective Environment Supports Positive Behaviors

- provides children with many choices
- reduces stress by allowing children to learn in developmentally appropriate ways and by providing private spaces where children can escape.
- includes a variety of activities that assist children to manage emotions
- promotes positive relationships
- is intentionally designed to prevent common behavioral issues

Early Childhood Approaches and Theorists Support the Importance of the Environment (1 of 3)

- Jean Piaget believed that children learn through active involvement in play within their environment
- Lev Vygotsky also stressed that children actively construct their own knowledge, with play as the vehicle for doing so

Early Childhood Approaches and Theorists Support the Importance of the Environment (2 of 3)

- Steiner (the Waldorf approach) emphasized the need for an environment that promoted imaginative play
- Maria Montessori stressed the need to provide a carefully prepared, orderly environment filled with child-size furnishings and beautiful materials

Early Childhood Approaches and Theorists Support the Importance of the Environment (3 of 3)

- Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, referred to the environment as the “third teacher”
- Reggio Emilia environments are aesthetic, containing beautiful materials and spaces that are filled with:
 - affordances (opportunities to learn)
 - provocations (activities, materials, or questions that provoke thought, problem solving, and creativity)

Effective Environments Can Support Current Elementary School Initiatives

- ASCD's Whole Child Initiative adopted by 70 national organizations and several international groups
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills adopted by 19 states

What Affordances Does This Light Table Provide? Do the Mirrors Add to the Opportunities?



The Teacher is Critical in Establishing and Facilitating Learning through the Environment

Prerequisites for Designing an Effective Environment Include the Teacher's Knowledge Of

- Child development and developmentally appropriate practice
- Individual children's developmental level and interests
- Children's cultural backgrounds
- Curriculum standards and early learning guidelines
- The teacher's and program's philosophy

In Designing the Environment the Teacher Must

- develop an effective room arrangement considering health and safety and design outcomes
- design each learning center
- supply each learning center with an abundance of developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, interesting, and intellectually stimulating materials
- provide an effective schedule and transitions so that learning through the environment can occur

The Teacher Needs to Interact with Children within the Environment to Scaffold Learning Through

- modeling
- asking open-ended questions and extending and expanding children's speech
- using rich descriptive language and new vocabulary
- presenting additional information and enhancing children's background knowledge
- assisting children to carefully observe and reflect upon their learning

The Teacher Needs to Interact with Children within the Environment to Support Learning Through

- supporting peer interactions
- acknowledging learners
- helping children engage in sustained play
- reminding children of the rules and intervening when needed to provide for safe play
- observing and documenting learning

Teachers Also Enhance and Extend the Learning Beyond the Learning Center Time Through (1 of 2)

- introducing centers and materials
- providing relevant background information
- introducing challenges
- helping children to plan and recall experiences

Teachers Also Enhance and Extend the Learning Beyond the Learning Center Time Through (2 of 2)

- encouraging children to share their creations
- assisting children to synthesize and discuss their work
- enriching and changing centers as needed
- helping families understand the learning center approach

"The First Lesson We Must Learn is That the Tiny Child's Absorbent Mind Finds All Its Nutriment in Its Surroundings. Here It Has to Locate Itself, and Build Itself up from What It Takes In. Especially at the Beginning of Life Must We, Therefore, Make the Environment as Interesting and Attractive as We Can" (Maria Montessori, 1995, P. 97)

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