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# Putting the classroom to work--a classroom blueprint : how does a classroom environment influence teaching styles and a teacher's well being?

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Putting The Classroom to Work – A Classeum Blueprint

How Does a Classroom Environment Influence

Teaching Styles and a Teacher's Well Being?

By

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## Abstract

This empirical study is written to call attention to and define the role of the classroom environment as an influential teaching tool. Through observation, interviews and extensive reference resources this compilation of work will discuss and assess how the arrangement of a classroom, its furnishings and its aesthetic climate can influence a teacher's sensibilities, well being, motivation, and teaching style.

Putting the Classroom to Work is designed to address four points. First, to investigate the relationship between the teacher and the classroom environment. The second is to recognize the contributing role design plays in establishing classroom climates while dovetailing on the influence of the biophilia effect, which is defined as a natural blend of elements derived from nature to maximize a healthy sense of well being. The third is to investigate whether or not teachers use an aesthetic approach when arranging a classroom and if so how does it effect a teacher's teaching affect. Lastly it asks if teachers are taught to consider how the classroom environment impacts their mood and interactions during the course of the school day?

The result of this research is intended to lead to the development of The Classeum Blueprint, a workshop series and guide, created for educators Kindergarten through fourth grade. This comprehensive offering when complete, will feature the steps and recommendations that will encourage teachers to welcome the classroom as a collaborating partner, remind a teacher of the value of one's own individual strengths and to encourage the use of those strengths and interests to influence a classroom's climate; one that is healthy, happy, imaginative and driven by a teacher with the desire to teach through an enriched aesthetic lens.

## Preface

“The built environment can become an active, three-dimensional textbook or teaching tool, rather than a passive space housing a disarray of things” (Taylor, Aldrich and Vlastos (1988). The prompt behind this Integrative Master’s Project (IMP) is driven from personal observation and participation in educational settings set in schools, neighborhood centers and museums. As a Bank Street student required fieldwork placed me in private and public elementary classrooms in Manhattan, and in Brooklyn, New York and into community centers in Bridgeport and New Haven, Connecticut.

While my teaching assignments only permitted me to be at the school’s only on a part time basis, the teachers at all sites were clearly pleased to have an extra set of hands in the classroom. Early morning teacher rituals and routines were distinctly different from site to site. “Early childhood teachers, in particular, thrive in situations in which adhering to a routine is held in high regard” (Jenkins and Hewitt, 2012). Grade levels dictated the children’s level of independent work. In some cases teachers were passing out assignments detailing the purpose and meaning to the day’s tasks and topics. Some morning work might have been solving a riddle, while others offered a chance to complete last night’s homework. Morning work also included classroom /community jobs such as arranging the calendar, recording the weather and and straightening out the activity corners.

Watching this ebb and flow of the students’ movements made me take note of the teacher’s actions and reactions. This ballet of choreographed chaos energized some teachers while others demanded more a more quiet start to the day. Teachers who designed their spaces with an open floor plan were seemingly as relaxed as the Polizia

Stradale orchestrating traffic in Italy. Morning traditions in a more traditional classroom reflected a more predictable and expected approach. In this setting, books and children alike all had a place to go and a place to be within a grid of evenly spaced desks and chairs and were encouraged to get there as quietly as possible.

More required hours led me to become a staff educator for The Salvadori Center, in New York City. As a Salvadori educator, I taught the principles of math and science through an introduction to architecture and the built environment for grades two to four. While the lesson plan was the same for each class, its presentation was different depending on the space I was working in.

For six weeks I went from classroom to classroom with supplies in tow. I must confess I was not always the best of packers and did not master the art of the seamless transition. When I entered a room, it was either via a shopping cart or with juggling shopping bags. Limited workspace made it necessary for desks to be moved quickly and materials to be stashed away as I introduced the lesson. Limited wall space meant rearranging art work or placing more wall art over more wall art. What was most distressing at times was deciding where to store work in progress or where to put finished work, so it would remain protected and out of the way. Circumstances that made me wonder how teachers felt about having to do so much with either too much “stuff” and so little space to store it. I wondered, What impact does this have on their classroom state of mind? Do teachers become obsessive about their space or do they just go with the flow? It appeared this was not an uncommon problem. Most times when I arrived at the classroom, I was greeted with a warm hello and an apology, asking to be forgiven for not having the materials out or ready, because there is just too much to do and not enough

time or room to do it in. In a post from *Random House Magazine*, (2009) educator Johnathan Kozol, writes,

In the past five years, however, much of education policy has been taken over, to a troubling degree, by people who have little knowledge of the classroom, and no knowledge of the hearts of children, but are the technicians of a dry and mechanistic, often business driver version of proficiency and productivity.

In the community centers where I presented Salvadori after school programs the classroom were unadorned generic multi use space places. I must admit until the children came in, there was no “light” in the space. I would need to work to add an aesthetic touch to the dark wood paneled room without windows or another a bright but institutional looking cinder block rec room. How the room looked became very personal to me. I felt a responsibility to transform the room into one that was more visually appealing. Whether it was a brightly colored series of drawings on the wall or even if the room was arranged differently from the last meeting, when the children came into the room they noticed a difference. They appreciated the effort. What was most rewarding was that because of the small changes made in the room there were big changes in attitude and in the outcome of final projects and even attendance.

The reason why I mention these circumstances and situations is because each of these experiences affected my behavior and mood. Walking into a space that was roomy, organized, well lit made me feel welcomed and comfortable. Easing into the front of the classroom or maneuvering easily around desks gave me more time to smile and greet my students, rather than appearing disorganized and overburdened. Making the effort to be sure the children were comfortable where they sat either at their tables or on the rug

helped me to stay on task. Clear walls and unobstructed views were ideal spots for new lesson word walls. When cleared roomy tabletops allowed for projects and objects to be displayed around the room offering talking points and discussions. Using everyday objects in demonstrations gave the children an “easy pass” to the imagination station. Found elements in the classroom added dimension and a stroke of spontaneity to my lessons. The children were excited because within these four walls was a boxed surplus of new ways of seeing things.

The classroom became a laboratory of inspiration and motivation. The community center became a building space. The museum gallery became alive with color and character. The children were engaged. I was pleased and surprised. What had I done that I had not done before? The answer was simple. I had put the classroom to work. I asked for help and the environment said, I am here.



## Introduction

School spaces are evolving into place-making, problem-solving arenas. They offer teachers the opportunity to consider the significant role the classroom environment plays in their teaching affect. “School environments have a largely untapped potential as active contributors to the learning process” (Taylor, Aldrich, & Vlastos, 1988). It is within these teaching places, teachers are facilitating experiences that are meant to make meaningful connections with their work, their students, the lessons planned and (whether aware of it or not) even meant to make a connection with the space in which they work. “It is difficult if not impossible, to separate instructional activity from the environmental setting within which it occurs” (Lackney and Jacobs, 2000).

School spaces can be manipulated. Like a museum or a theatre, with effort and imagination, classrooms can be transformed into whatever a teacher wills it to be. “A learning space that can be reconfigured on a dime will engage different kinds of learners and teachers” (Trung Le, 2010). Classrooms can provide teachers with unique opportunities that can be used to create a dynamic interface between their lessons and their students. When engaged, the classroom can be used to broaden a young mind’s awareness of the functional use of design; its mechanical components, its textures, its dimensions, its sounds. Even the way the light enters the room can be a lesson launch. For the innovative teacher, an ordinary group of four walls can become the animated “third teacher” that theorists and designers claim it can be.

Today, the demands placed on teachers to be all they can be is a daunting task. Finding a healthy balance of differentiated lessons that meet the needs of culturally and intellectually diverse classrooms, means finding the resources that fulfill those needs.

Finding the patience to allow the flow for lively movement and enthusiasm means to find the confidence in that energy to allow it to find its own pace. Meeting the challenges of interweaving virtual and tactile learning spaces, side by side with vibrant activity areas and silent soft zones, requires knowledgeable know-how and the time to be able to create those spaces.

Volumes have been written on the social and physical elements of the classroom and their direct and indirect influence on children's behavior. Forcing perhaps an uneven and biased portrait of the effects of the environment only as it is seen from the student side of the classroom. With research in hand, it is evident that dated references indicate that this has been an issue for decades, which clearly attests to why the focus of the relationship between teacher and teaching settings should be redirected.

The term "relationship" is key in this instance as it conveys the need for a necessary balance. As in any relationship a give and take approach contributes to a sense of well-being, attitude and purpose. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the classroom as anyplace where one learns or gains experience. This dictionary also defines a museum as an institution devoted to the procurement, care, study and display of objects of lasting interest or value. Seeing the relationship between the classroom and the museum I defined the *classeum*. It is a place where one gains experience found among authentic materials, and ordinary objects, exhibited and studied through engagement and of discovery, for the purpose of nurturing a lasting interest in life long learning and doing.

Therefore, in order to strike a healthy balance, the classroom should provide an enhanced benefit capturing the essence of what makes up that space and who occupies it. A relationship that inspires that says, you matter and I am here to help; a commanding

decalration when considering the many responsibilities and tasks defining today's early childhood teacher.

As an organizer a teacher needs storage space. As a facilitator a teacher needs a stage and space to launch ideas and lessons. As a mediator a teacher needs a private space when conferencing with students and parents. As a curator, a teacher needs wall and display space to present student work. And as a person a teacher need a personal space, one that feels right, where light, color, safety and natural comfort provides the same nurturing aesthetic that is needed for the children and needed to create a positive classroom environment. "The relationships between the physical environment of the classroom and the teachers who work in them ... are relatively unexplored" (Gehrke, 1982). With that perspective in mind, then let the exploring begin!

## **The Relationship Between The Teacher and the Classroom Environment**

Nel Noddings (2006) wrote, “The spaces in which we live shape us and are in turn shaped by us” (p.68). Ask any early childhood teacher and most will take pride in their classroom. Eager to provide a clean, organized and welcoming atmosphere is thought to be essential to influence student behavior and involvement within the daily agenda. Planned furniture arrangements that allow for flexible placement within designated activity centers, help students with their ability to focus on tasks. Research indicates that teachers feel they make heroic efforts to provide children with healthy and appealing classrooms, however not all have the expertise to do that effectively. “... paradoxically, the researchers postulate some teachers lack adequate knowledge about effectively creating and managing classroom space to support their instructional efforts” (Lackney and Jacobs (2000). If, indeed, activities such as teaching and learning cannot proceed without affecting and being affected by the places in which they occur, then educators would do well to look closely at their classrooms to understand how they can use the environment as a tool in improving instruction and achievement (Gehrke, 1982).

A variety of resource and research study responses independent of this original work (included within this paper) reveal that a clean, bright, spacious and well-organized classroom with a small class roster is the optimal scenario for most teachers. Adequate storage space, adjustable lighting and light fixtures, defined activity areas and a professional environment are priorities when the space and budgets allow. In addition accessibility to current technical teaching tools that offer flexibility and green technology would make for a premiere teaching and work setting. Environmental psychologists have demonstrated that people influence and are influenced by the physical environment that

surrounds us. “The performance of a given built environment depends not only on its physical characteristics, but also on the interaction of those characteristics with the needs and requirements of its users (Snow, 2002).

What most teachers seek does not seem like an unreasonable request or does it? One might ask, “are those creature comforts mere “window dressing” or is there more to how the classroom environment affects the behavior of the teacher who uses that space? Will the latest trend in environmental design be the answer tool that influences a classroom’s climate? Are the shiny bells and buzzers only what a teacher needs to be happy? Or is learning the nuances of smart technology just another added “do” to an already overwhelming “to do list”?

While the need to be current in learning, is a common thread, bonding early childhood teachers, a teacher’s sense of effectiveness while working in a physically and emotionally supportive environment rates equally as important as keeping up with trends. “The emotional aspect of the environment weighs just as heavily when it comes to job satisfaction and impact “(Jenkins and Hewitt, 2010). Bing Crosby sang, “let a smile be your umbrella ... and that a smile will always pay” (Kahal and Wheeler, 1927) yet behind that smile there maybe subtle frustrations and concerns that relate to relationships made by a teacher with and within the classroom setting. “Teachers need to feel a sense of satisfaction with their cognitive abilities and emotional connections to their job” (Jenkins and Hewitt, 2010).

“There is no question that the landscapes on which teachers and teacher educators live and compose their teaching lives are rapidly shifting” (Clandinin, 2008). Indeed the classroom is a landscape with a metaphorical topography of dimensional highs and lows

that create a climate of emotional temperate zones and aesthetic textures. “Climate represents the behavior, the attitudes and feelings of an organization, which in turn affects its operational processes (or life) in terms of communication, problem solving, decision-making and the way in which it (the organization) learns” (M1Creativity, 2012). With more thought given to this comparison of the classroom as a fertile plain placed within a climate that fosters creativity and innovation, based on the “concept of organizational climate” as defined by Lewin, Lippit and White (1939) one is compelled to imagine the teacher as, *Creativity Techniques E-Book* suggests, “a tree”, a tree with roots that go deep and keep things in place. “The climate obviously has an impact on how much our tree can thrive” (M1Creativity, 2012). Apropos, the question then is how much can “our” teachers thrive in the classroom. Does the design of the classroom environment feed the teacher? Or does it drain a teacher of strength and diminish enthusiasm?

Dónal O’Donoghue poses a similar question in his paper, *Classrooms as installations: a conceptual framework for analyzing classroom photographs from the past, (2010)*. If researchers were to consider classrooms as “works of art”, what types of understanding about classroom and classroom life might emerge?

Via the 2009 exhibit, *Ought Apartment* by Reece Terris which features recreated interior living spaces depicting life in Vancouver from 1950 – 2000, O’Donoghue chose to use this visual time capsule as a source of “interpretive possibilities to ascertain the “meaning and culture of classrooms”. O’Donoghue’s thought was to deconstruct the classroom, to consider it an “immersive space” with two types of subjects; the literal subject (of teacher and student) to be the *who*, and then the “philosophical model of the

subject” (the classroom and its objects) to be the *how* and *why* of their use of the space. It is interesting to consider how compelling it is to look at a classroom environment as an image and observe the teacher’s engagement with the space, use of objects and consider the interpretation of placement and movement against an educational backdrop. I will discuss this further in the preview of The Classeum Blueprint.

“Strong, rich and powerful” is a common phrase used in Reggio-Emilia Municipal Preschools to describe its students. Should that same description also apply to teachers? Absolutely.

The image of the child is an integral part of the teacher-child relationship, in which the teacher’s aim is to empower children to explore the world and create meaning. The teacher’s motive is to validate the children’s curiosity, challenge their thinking and facilitate their pleasure in connecting with the world and constructing understanding. (Scheinfeld, Haigh and Scheinfeld, 2008, p.3)

With that as a validation of motive and purpose, the teacher should be in an environment that is enriched and bursting with blooms of productivity. It should be one that allows for a teacher’s continuing self discovery and exploration. An important reminder being, that administrators within this professional environment need to provide teachers with support and the proper setting in which to do so. “When teachers are able to control the work that they do and the environment in which it is done, they often gain more satisfaction in their teaching and in the role they play in children’s lives” (Jenkins and Hewitt, 2010 p. 318).

There is much responsibility placed on teachers today. In my research and when in the classroom, I am reminded of just how much responsibility there is. Creating a

positive environment, one that is welcoming, nurturing (no matter what the grade) and that meets the needs and learning styles of each student is not easy. The environment where learning is taking place is just as important as the content being covered. “People are considered an integral part of, not apart from, the environment. The environment affects people and they in turn, affect the environment” (Taylor, Aldrich and Vlastos, 1988).

Successfully designed learning spaces are conducive to multiple learning styles. Finding that balance can be challenging. As cited from *Round Peg Square Hole*, Donald Norman in his book *The Design of Everyday Things* (2002) writes, “ ... it is really an act of communication, which means having a deep understanding of the person with whom the designer is communicating”. In this case the communication is between the teacher and student within a relationship of mutual respect.

The teacher’s motive is to validate their pleasure in connecting with the world and constructing understanding. Gradually, because this image of the child is in the teacher’s mind, heart and actions, the children grow as active inquirers and constructors of personally meaningful information. (Scheinfeld et al., p.3)

The meshing of intellectual and personal attributes can be the qualities needed for successful teaching yet researchers realize examining the layers of that relationship can be complicated. In Allan C. Ornstein’s article, *Can We Define a Good Teacher?* (1976) Ornstein looks for the answers, and wonders can these answers be found by evaluating a teacher’s intellectual abilities or observing a teacher’s personality and style in action? However when considering all that happens in the classroom a breakdown analysis of teaching may just be too difficult to do efficiently. Ornstein cites, Philip W. Jackson



(1968) *Life in Classrooms*, “In the small but crowded classroom, events come and go in about “200 to 300 interpersonal interchanges every hour of her working day ” (p.204)

In short, classrooms do not constitute neat, orderly places, and in teaching we cannot reduce to a set of predetermined behaviors although many educational theorists claim they can. This does not mean that no logic inheres in teaching, rather the underlying events remain too ambiguous, unpredictable, and complex to reduce to an orderly set of behaviors accurately describable by present science methods. For the moment let us call teaching a craft, a least part a craft, which uses certain processes that social scientists do not yet understand or have not yet learned to translate into terms sensible to teachers or that can help them. (Ornstein, 1976)

Perhaps this lack of understanding leads to a drained stalemate or a tired surrender? Perhaps the lack there of, of an aesthetic component or relief offered by a biophilic sensory element can make a difference in a teacher’s daily classroom routine?

Teaching is not a natural phenomenon, and hence not an easy subject to study. The way a teacher behaves in the classroom is based not solely on controlled decisions or scientific speculation but also on practical experience, hunches and intuition. (Ornstein, 1976)

With that prompt from Ornstein, and based on my practical experience I will pose a hunch, that the classroom setting can affect a teacher’s effectiveness. Might the work setting be responsible for a teacher’s reaction to a question or a lesson’s presentation? Could clutter, disorganized storage areas, coats and book bags on the floor, a hot room be

just the things that can force a teacher's behavior? "It has been found that disorientation brings about a lack of security in people" (Hall, 1976). "Even something as simple being sure enough daylight fills a room can have an impact on a teacher mood. Daylight can also have an uplifting effect on feelings of well being and health (Foster+Partners). Perhaps a bit more space around a work area can have significant impact. Space and place can make a difference. "Space is room, *Raum* and room is roominess, chance to be, live and move .... Lack of room is denial of life, and openness of space is affirmation of its potentiality" (Dewey, 1934).

Most teachers do feel a creative urge to decorate and dictate the aesthetic tone of their work setting. "The physical surroundings in which teachers work on a daily basis has an impact on their happiness and satisfaction with their profession" (Jenkins and Hewitt, 2012). "Teachers also believe that the physical setting can have both positive and negative effects on their ability to teach and a student's ability to focus on learning tasks" (Lachney and Jacobs, 2002). Placemaking gives purpose to a place, but as Borwick notes with a comment on an article by Roberto Bedoya, (2012) " before you have places of belonging, you must feel you belong".

In, *A Teacher's Vision, A Friendly Teaching Environment that Supports Growth and Learning*, Jenkins and Hewitt (2010) address the factors that generate satisfaction within the workplace. "Several factors make a significant impact on the motivation of educators and on their work ... a teacher in the ultimate work environment should display involvement, personal satisfaction, and high levels of enjoyment". Easier said than done? I would say so. A teacher is required to create, provide, react, lead, perform, console and inspire throughout the course of an average seven-hour workday and is expected to do so

at “high levels’ of engagement. All of this usually happens within one room filled on average with twenty-eight (28) children in a space anywhere between 700 to 800 sq.ft. Within that space are tables, desks, books, manipulatives, cubbies, chairs, (hopefully blocks), activity areas, classroom pets and storage space. Note: the minimum average size for a class of thirty (30) students is 960 sq ft. 1025 sq.ft. is the recommended space for Pre-K and Kindergarten. The basic classroom should have a least 72 sq.ft. of windows for natural light.

Running parallel with all of the tangible objects are the sensory connectors, those that cannot be seen but felt. These are the aesthetic connections that create a developmental framework for aesthetic education, the specialized pedagogy that Maxine Greene, writes about in, *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, (2001). Greene defines aesthetic education,

“...as an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what there is to be noticed, and to lend works of art to their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. (p.6)

With this, along with the general administrative responsibilities, a teacher then needs to make room (metaphorically) to let “words like choice, interest, curiosity, discovery and self-direction play an active role within this high energy and demanding space. “ It is not easy to cut through the busy life of such a classroom, to present incidents that capture its intensity and flow and that do justice to its underlying values” (Armington, 1997). To paraphrase Armington is to say that there so much happening in the classroom that perhaps the most intense and valued events may be missed.

With support and with the freedom to teach along with opportunities offered to encourage teachers to go beyond the predictable realm, there can be a formula designed so teachers are attuned to find a classroom's underlying values. This can assist teachers in their quest for a classroom comfort zone. "The physical surrounding in which teachers work on a daily basis has an impact on their happiness and satisfaction with their profession" (Hewitt and Jenkins, 2010). Does the institutional look of a classroom make the teacher feel uninspired?

Research collected by Hewitt and Jenkins find that early childhood teachers look forward to being in their classrooms and commented that when at ease within their environment they find it easier to focus on the instructional tasks at hand. It is not simply whether or not the walls are painted a soothing color or that their instructional materials come from the most popular supplier. "The teacher's views of how that physical environment is organized are critical" (Jenkins and Hewitt, 2010).

"It is the teachers who make the difference: their own cherishing of experience with the arts, their own reflections on the way particular encounters have opened vistas, revealed alternative ways of living and being exposed to some of the ultimate mysteries" (Greene, p. 164).

Indeed a school's budget, its Board of Directors, Principal, academic standards, curriculum offerings, the school's population and architectural footprint will claim a share of influence as to how things are and how things get done. But while acknowledging the perimeters upon which administrations dictate how teachers should teach, through this investigative effort it does become more clear that it is not the portrait

of the school but the backdrop of the class photo that reveals the way teachers do teach and why they teach the way they do.

... a high quality learning environment is essential to educating our children. Yet, in spite of the many hours spent in school, our knowledge of their effects on us and our ability to affect them is really quite small. Often, we focus on understanding the activities of school while giving little attention to understanding the role that the physical environments play. School environments have a largely untapped potential as active contributors to the learning process. (Snow, 2010)

“Utilizing the environment as a teaching tool can help every teacher meet the needs of all the children in her class”(Evanshen, 2011). When Maxine Greene writes about the role of the Lincoln Center Institute, Greene recognizes the positive implications of entrusting teachers with creative autonomy.

What I think we are trying to do at the Institute is to empower teachers to make the kinds of spaces for themselves where they can act on their freedom and choose themselves and their projects in response to what they see happening in the world. (p.159)

One would think the notion of *putting the classroom to work* as a creative metaphor. It is easy to conjure up an image from a Disney film seeing objects becoming animated, whistling a happy tune. But for a teacher it means giving the classroom a voice and purpose. The classroom can be manipulated into becoming whatever a teacher needs the classroom to be. “Teachers construct the classroom environment to function as an ongoing partner in the teaching learning process” Scheinfeld et al. (2008). A sentiment that warrants support and approval but what if the tables are turned and rather than seeing

the classroom as a whole why not deconstruct the classroom into its smaller parts. For example, calling attention to the shapes make up the classroom opens the possibilities for a geometry lesson. Examine how components of the classroom work ... how do the doors and windows open? What shapes can be found by looking at the furniture in the room? Observing the details, the texture, the patterns in the ceiling, the floor tiles, the windows. Arranging intentionally placed objects as discussion prompts. The use of adjustable lighting (if available) could offer a sense of change in time or climate and suggesting the use of colors that surround the children to be viewed as a palette to express a mood or a sensation. This “use what you see, to see what there is to learn” approach to teaching combined with project based activity areas can be fundamental elements for a highly stimulated learning environment.

The classroom is a multi-sensory environment. It has become the core of a child’s learning. It is Head-Quarters for a young learner’s social, intellectual and emotional sense and sensibilities. No wonder the classroom has become the source of discussion. Theorists, educators, architects, designers, psychologists look to the classroom as a laboratory for guidance; a barometer for understanding how children learn. Its role in education has received so much attention that its has undergone a make-over of sorts. By definition a classroom is a room where lessons take place. A place where students in a particular grade meet a certain number of times, under the supervision of a teacher who takes attendance and does other administrative tasks.

By today’s standards, that definition only skims the surface. Now it sees the classroom’s place in learning differently. In fact so much attention has been given to its role that it has been given a title and a elevated position in the hierarchy of the

educational organizational chart. The educators in Reggio Emilia call it *the third teacher* (Danko- McGhee). Anne Taylor and George Vlastos (1988) refer to the classroom as the *silent curriculum*. If I may add my own label, I see the classroom as a *mirror*. For the reason that it not only reflects the personalities of who is in the space but also offers a reflection of a teacher's view of learning. Is it a learning space or a teaching space? Most would say both, but if only one dominant style is prevails, it will be that style that will reveal itself as a teacher's teaching MO (mode of operation).

A more revealing view might be gained by gathering evidence of a teacher's awareness of how students use a learning space. Marilyn A. Read poses a few questions that a teacher might consider when arranging a classroom design. In her article, *Contemplating Design: Listen to Children's Preferences about Classroom Design (2012)* Read states, "Numerous decisions about the application of the elements and principles of design in the classroom are determined primarily by the teacher in the setting. The following questions were listed: 1) Does my classroom design reflect a welcoming learning environment? 2) Does my classroom design represent the curriculum or theoretical perspective of the center? 3) How do the children in my class perceive the designed classroom? 4) What type of design characteristics do children in the environment prefer and why?"

While these questions are designed to meet the needs of the students, they also heighten the teacher's sensitivity to the impact of design, thereby creating a customized win win situation for both teacher and learner. What a teacher can learn from these questions can provide a developmental blueprint for a classroom floor plan.

Young children understand and appreciate the aesthetics of their near environment in both a complex and visceral manner. As they work on projects, create new environments, eat lunch and rest, their eyes are scanning and focusing on the designed classroom environment” (Read, 2010)

Lynn Flood, a literacy coach writes in *Blueprint for a Middle School Classroom*, “Classrooms must run like a well-oiled machine, built with strategic hardware and functional software”. Perhaps not a warm and fuzzy approach for early childhood educators but organization and routine are highly recommended to assure a teacher’s productivity, efficiency and well-being. The classroom is a hub of activity. It is a proving ground of sorts in the most gentle of terms.

For a teacher, his or her classroom is a personal space. There is a sense of ownership attached to every class. As a teacher goes about her day or his week, there is guaranteed talk from the teacher about, *my kids*, *my classroom*, even *my parents*. The use of the term “my” means accountability, responsibility and a connection. Teachers take pride in the vibe that the life in their classroom emits.

Pamela Evanshen and Janet Faulk, educators in Tennessee, authored, *A Room to Learn, Rethinking Classroom Environments*, (2011). In its introduction both women reflect on their ten years of research and experiences and affirm, “the learning environment is the foundational element for teaching and the learning process” (p.11). Evanshen and Faulk reiterate the benefits of the collaborative relationship between teacher and classroom. “Utilizing the environment as a teaching tool can help every teacher meet the needs of all the children in her class” (Evanshen, p.12). Faulk’s reflection, recalls her work and the great joy she feels as an educator. However Faulk



does acknowledge a void that weighs on her career choice. “I believe one of the great disappointments of our profession is the gap that exists between knowing and doing in many of our early childhood classrooms” (Faulk, p. 13). Faulken also writes,

There are two vital questions that teachers need to ask themselves, What do I do to ensure that my legacy will be children who will be life long learners? “ and “What do I do to provide the educational environment- social, emotional, physical, and intellectual – that will maximize the time my children are engaged in meaningful work?

Research and resources are readily available to offer support and solutions for these concerns. In fact, Evanshen and Faulk wrote their book to address those very issues, with the intention of helping other teachers to realize what an effective teaching tool the classroom can be. Their interest, along with articles and books regarding the collaborative relationships between educators and their spaces, raises the following questions in the context of this paper:

1. Are teachers taught how to use the classroom environment as a teaching tool?
2. Is there an opportunity for teachers in training to be taught how to give the “silent curriculum” a voice?
3. Should the aesthetic value of the physical arrangement and enhancements of a classroom be a lesson topic in a classroom management or a curriculum development course?

If the answer is yes, then new teachers will be provided with a preliminary advantage of viewing the classroom as a space of relationships, as a place of encounters, as a place of exchanges and interaction, with objects and arrangements that allow the

classroom, to become an extension of themselves. And if not, is that the reason why some teachers find it difficult to find *their place in their space*?”

The accumulated research for the answers to these questions leads one to think that these questions are not addressed by teachers who teach teachers. “Rather than simply a tool for organizing and beautifying space, the design and aesthetics of a pedagogical space can be a point of entry into how the classroom and the curriculum are activated, engaged and embodied” (Apps and McDonald, p.49).

In a 2008 volume of *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, D. Jean Clandinin submitted an editorial, *Creating learning spaces for teachers and teacher educators*. Within this text, Clandinin makes mention of the ever changing challenges presented to teachers that include shifts in policy, classroom demographics and technology. These “profound changes” seen in classroom technology might be considered progressive progress to some, but for those teachers who are not as eager to accept the latest classroom accessory, their impact can be a stagnating deterrent. Managing diversity in the classroom, incorporating new techniques and the impact of space and function can be overwhelming. With an acknowledgement to this, Clandinin speaks to the preparedness of new teacher’s and questions their readiness to look to the classroom, as not only an educative space but as a place for self expression, reflection and growth. This reflects a needed interest to address the bigger picture of the evolution of a teacher’s personal and professional development.

Architects, designers and theorists acknowledge the importance of what happens in the classroom but believe that the definition of the classroom has changed and attitudes about teaching need to be viewed through a more progressive lens. “If you really want to

shift a culture, it's two things; its habits and its habitats – the habits of the mind, and the physical environment in which people operate (Sir Ken Robinson). “We haven't learned how to be learners. We've learned how to be teachers, and it is different” (Amelia Gambetti). “I think schools in the future are more likely to resemble children's museum or exploratoria “(Howard Gardner).

Clandinin also supports an earlier point, referring to the changing landscapes of how a teacher develops and composes a teaching agenda. Clandinin makes mention of a recommendation by Nel Noddings (1986) who wrote, “that research *for* teacher education would be more beneficial than research spent *on* teacher education”. Another relatable point is raised in an editorial by Anne Phelan (2007). Phelan writes about stressing the purpose and importance of research. Phelan recommends that research should be, “for the sake of”, rather than an instrumental stance of “in order to”, when the goal is to create a “distinction between meaningfulness and utility”. Therefore, *for the sake of*, recognizing the meaningfulness and purposefulness of the connections made between a teacher and the classroom, I would agree that the study of how classroom environments effects teacher behavior is well worth the effort.

In, *Teacher's Perceptions and Use of Classroom Space* (2002), Sue Ellen Snow examined the opinions held by six secondary teachers in Georgia who revealed their perceptions and judgments about their classrooms, their size, conditions, efficiency, their physical arrangements and the affect these environments had on their behavior and morale. Though Snow's participants were high school teachers, I came to realize that opinions regarding the classroom were not that different from the early childhood educators I met with. While a science lab is different from a kindergarten and an urban setting is different from a rural suburb, concerns about storage, lighting, wall space, seating and temperature control were common issues any of which could be labeled as a need or a want. What was a constant and regardless if the teachers were from Georgia or Brooklyn, taught first grade or fourth, the needs of their students always came first.

The theoretical perspective of Snow's study was based on symbolic interactions. This theory was developed by George Herbert Mead (1863 – 1931). Mead believed that one's self evolves through one's own personal interpretations of language and occurrences. It is the way we learn to interpret and give meaning to the world.

“We must remember that the gesture is there only in its relationship to the response, to the attitude. One would not have words unless there were such responses. Language would never have arisen as a set of bare arbitrary terms which were attached to certain stimuli. Words have arisen out of a social interrelationship. ... It is such significant symbols, in the sense of a sub-set of social stimuli initiating a co-operative response, that do in a certain sense constitute our mind, provided that not only the symbol but also the responses are in our own nature. What the human being has succeeded in doing is in organizing

the response to a certain symbol which is a part of the social act, so that he takes the attitude of the other person who cooperates with him. It is that which gives him a mind. (*Mind, Self, and Society*. 1934)

Snow's paper offered fascinating insight into how perception of symbolic interaction is used when attempting to understand how individuals respond to different environments. Snow, featured an article of Danile Stokols cited in *The Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (1976). In it Stokols, presented three (3) comprehensive definitions for how teachers relate to a teaching environment. They were defined as Orientation, Operation and Evaluation. In their purest form each word defined the essence of a relationship with the environment.

Orientation related to finding one's bearings in the space (a more current trend known as placemaking). Operation, related to the way a teacher operates and behaves within a space and how outside factors, such as lighting, temperature or noise can prompt a reaction. Evaluation is the final assessment – providing a two fold review; one featuring the results of a teacher's personal and professional style. The second notes the achievements of the class resulting from the teacher's personal and professional style.

“The best teachers are not merely the technicians of proficiency; they are also ministers of innocence, practitioners of tender expectations. Teachers like these believe that every child who has been entrusted to their care comes in their classroom with inherent value to begin with” (Kozol).

While classroom management courses may help teachers, especially new teachers to manage student behavior it is imperative that teachers also learn to define their own levels of symbolic interactionism; ie, teachers should be taught to be aware of and to

understand how their own methods of Orientation, Operation and Evaluation will give meaning to their role as teacher. Training should also be provided to guide teachers to learn how to develop purposeful connections with their classroom. Thereby engaging in methods that manage and cultivate their classroom's level of sensory experiences. These steps can lead to awaken the classroom wonders that wait silently to be called on, providing a teacher's teaching space with a chance to say, what it has been thinking all along.

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### **Design and the Role it Plays in Creating a Classroom**

“The ancient Greeks saw a school as any place where a teacher and his students happen to gather, often outdoors. Then, the teacher as a depository of knowledge was central to learning, while the setting was considered inconsequential” (Streifling, 2003). As populations grew so did the need for enclosed teaching structures, but the thought of a school or a classroom, as a teaching tool was never a consideration. Times have changed and classrooms have been given a new job description and responsibility. Today roles have been redefined and the classroom has become an equal contributor to the teaching process.

By tradition a classroom is a room where lessons take place, where students of a particular age meet in a particular grade, at a particular time under the supervision of a teacher who takes attendance and does other administrative tasks. “Rather than simply a tool for organizing and beautifying space, the design and the aesthetics of a pedagogical space can be a point of entry into how the classroom and the curriculum are activated, engaged and embodied” (Apps and MacDonald, 2005).

When one considers the classroom as a multi-sensory environment, or a nucleus for a young learner’s discoveries, or a prompt for nurturing social and intellectual senses and sensibilities, one cannot help but recognize, how vital it is that a classroom does its job and does it well. And while a teacher may think she is doing her best with what she has to work with, there are techniques and practices that can help the classroom environment to do even better.

Reviews read as a broken record, often stating that classrooms are not working to their true potential. In the Article, “*Architecture Can Teach ... and the lessons are rather*



*fundamental*”(1998), Anne Taylor and George Vlastos are loud and clear about their disapproval of schools in general and the classroom’s performance. This educator and architect writing team, claim that considering how much time children spend in classrooms, “it is an environment that offers no sense of ownership and make no effort to consider the needs of children.” Taylor and Vlastos claim these environments are “antagonistic, hostile or incomparable to self-expression”. Their research has brought them to the conclusion that, ‘ ... the architecture and physical settings of most American schools is deplorable. It almost always follows the passive “egg crate” closed classroom format of 200 hundred years ago, and all too often it is more like a prison than a place of discovery, wonder and creativity” (1998). “Even after almost a century, John Dewey’s 1915 exhortation, that “nature has not adapted the young animal to the narrow desk, the crowded curriculum, nor the silent absorption of complicated facts” still remains largely unheard” (Nair and Fielding, (2007).

Without doubt some teachers and parents will react to these reactions, as ridiculous and say that current classroom style is better than what they remember. A few might think of the environment as a secondary concern and choose instead to only focus on curriculum, test scores and the teacher’s ability to teach. Some might say, a good teacher can teach anywhere. Some teachers make do with a classroom’s limitations and do with what they have, “ ... not because they want to, but as an overriding concern for minimization of disruption rather than maximizing instruction” (Snow, 2002).

Our sensibility to adapt is probably why bad elements of architecture are so widely tolerated. After a while they cease to be noticed by those who are “exposed to them. This does not mean, however, that adaptation is without cost to

humans. It requires energy to move to a new level of adaptation and it requires energy to stay there. Environmental factors that do not conform to some modal value on each of the perceptual dimensions are expensive to live with; we pay for tuning them out by using more energy or by being less effective in our work or play. (Veitch & Arkkelin, cited by Snow para 6)

Further investigation in Snow's study revealed teachers' solutions to getting around their room's design limitations. One teacher, asked students to work out in the hall, another grouped desks together to provide more room to move around. Some teachers stored materials in their cars simply because there was not other alternative. Snow cited Gump (1987) "Teachers manage to function in minimally adequate milieu conditions but not without affecting their health, morale, time or energy". Snow also notes that Gump pointed out that, "the human capacity to make do with minimal provisions often means that optimal milieu arrangements are not developed". This and further examination of this topic featured later in this study, supports the research that reveals that design does matter.

Design matters because, to quote Steve Jobs in the New York Times, November 30, 2003, "Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works" In teaching, design shows how the classroom works. Design is an arrangement. Deliberate design defines an intention. A curriculum's developmental framework is a design layout that reveals how lessons are intended to work. The form and function of a room is designed to enhance a learning task's possibilities or probabilities. When considering design the word "aspiration" is a room's inspiration. It is not longer about having a room

assigned for a particular task but it is more about what one wants to see happen in that space making teaching more of a blended process.

But how do we as educators, educate ourselves about the value of design? The idea that the physical layout of a learning environment can influence the success of students learning has been overlooked. Part of the problem is that educators, planners and architects cannot seem to come to an agreement when planning and addressing the needs of teachers or understanding them.

“ ... spaces entered and inhabited by students and teachers, are structured in accordance with a set of particular ideas about what constitutes teaching, learning, and the teacher and the learner. The layout, design and associated disciplinary and spatial practices of this space, to a large degree, determine in advance the types of engagement students will have here. In other words, similar to art installations, classrooms are immersive spaces to be entered into, but are constructed with a particular purpose in mind; they are to be experienced in particular ways”  
(Donoghue, 2010).

In the study, *Perspectives of School Facility Design Held by Planners, Architects and Educators* (2005), Tanner and McMichael discuss the “active and vital” relationship between the principles of environmental design and the achievements in the classroom for both teacher and student. There are indications in the literature that the educational environment in which human beings learn does indeed have a definite influence on a child’s learning processes and growth in the areas of affective, behavioral, and cognitive development. In the study Tanner and McMichael refer to Dejong, “the physical layout

and design of a school could enhance certain instructional strategies, discourage others, and have a significant impact on discipline” (1997).

Imagine two styles of classroom. One traditional, with desks in orderly rows, the teacher’s desk front and center. It is quiet, the teacher stands at the front of the room orchestrating the tasks, while the children are individually working on the same assignment but at different desks. The other classroom is more engaged with each other and their setting. Taken from the Constructivist playbooks of Lev Vygotsky, one can see how the children are problem solving at small discovery stations, sharing opinions. A teacher is present but instead of lecturing, she is walking from station to station acting as a facilitator or an initiator, prompting questions *as the students* provide the answers.

While these examples present involved engagement at different levels of intensity, a review of the room’s interior design might infer that it influenced the teachers teaching style. Not only does the room plan, influence the social interaction, but it also influences how the tasks were executed, how the lesson was taught or the way in which a lesson or discussion is introduced. In the *Design for Everyday Things*, (1988) Donald Norman writes,

Design should: (1) make it easy to determine what actions are possible at any moment, (2) make things visible, including the conceptual model of the system, the alternative actions, and the results of actions, (3) make it easy to evaluate the current state of the system, and (4) follow natural mappings between intentions and the required actions, between actions and the resulting effect, and between the information that is visible and the interpretation of the system state.

If a teacher (of course the application and/ or interpretation will be dictated by an age /grade level) would wish to apply Norman's definition to a classroom with an aesthetic lens, I suppose the definition could be rewritten as follows: Classroom Design: (1) let the space guide you, (2) let it inspire you to take a three dimensional approach to problem solving, (3) present work in the present and then offer a then and now theme, using variations, of light, objects etc. (4) visualize concepts through building and creating maps and charts, (5) document the steps towards a solution by staging the process, using what is around you. When utilizing what surrounds them, teachers can become more active participants and use a "cause and effect approach" to lesson planning and presentation. Using the classroom assigns purpose to the space. Using the classroom as design reveals its form and function. And, while a teacher can apply these recommendations to create inspiring environments for the student, it becomes apparent that these applications can spark a teacher's thirst for knowledge as well.

In the article, *Classroom Aesthetic in Early Childhood Education* (2012), Linda Apps and Margaret Macdonald, write about the attention given to the relationship of aesthetics and its impact on the early childhood classroom. Apps and Macdonald recognize the differences found in each classroom and concur that those using the space define a classroom aesthetic. Due to the classrooms moment-to-moment transitions, and its differentiated needs, it is better to describe a classroom as "holding" an aesthetic rather than simply "having one".

Integrating the elements of room arrangement, materials and classroom schedule with the individual learning needs of children in conventional elementary classrooms is often challenging. While many contemporary architects are willing

to explore space creatively and would enthusiastically accommodate requests for natural lighting and dedicated space for meals, play and rest time typically teachers work with in traditional classrooms constructed with deference to children's holistic, social and physical learning needs, interests and biological rhythms. Traditional classrooms were designed to support a transmission model of teaching, an archetype that framed the teacher as "sage on stage" whose power and position drew support be a classroom envelope where students were assigned to desks in rows facing to the front of the class. Apps & Macdonald, (2012)

Bob Pearlman, a notable leader in school reform is quoted to say, "getting the classroom right as the center of learning and students at work is the essential building block for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School". Pearlman who has spent thirty years as an education advocate sees that there is a need," to design the classroom from out, rather than from the classroom in" (2011). When asked what does a classroom look like that is "getting it right"? Pearlman replied, "that it is an environment where students are working in workstation area, group work areas, and lecture areas. Collaborating and problem solving in a project-based curriculum is key". He also states that lighting; windows, green spaces and technology are all important however if the curriculum climate is not engaging, all the "new" nuances are simply, "old wine in new bottles".

Design solutions are everywhere. Educational paradigms are shifting and Pearlman's recommendation for having collaborative chats, sound as though they can lead both teachers and designers down the right path. But what if the powers that be could look to the earlier paradigms?

In *Master Classroom: Designs Inspired by Creative Minds*, Fielding, Lackey and Nair, (2006), recommend teachers to look to design recommendations from two revered masterminds and a young contemporary Englishman for design formulas that can lead to success. Using prompts the writers wonder, if teachers chose to think like DaVinci, would the classroom would transform itself into a living laboratory of experimentations and discussion? Defined subjects would blend into one and the open floor plan would become a triptych of studio, lab and model shop. If a teacher were to think like Albert Einstein, this workspace would reflect a quiet room of contemplation with a spot for creative reflection. A walking path would provide a route for pacing and thinking out loud. English chef and entrepreneur, Jamie Oliver sees the classroom as a kitchen/café; in the kitchen, lesson subjects are active ingredients and the lesson plans become recipes. Each task and selected materials are mixed with the proper balance to create a “flavored” teaching treat. When complete the lesson is served up with a side of discussion. “Once you begin to think of how creative thinkers actually work, the classroom as factory becomes a mere enforcer of conformity, and far more satisfying possibilities arise. Unless you have the good luck to be able to start from scratch, the trick is to adapt new design ideas into existing spaces. It's a tricky trick, but one well worth mastering” (Fielding et al. 2006).

A little outside the box? Yes. A little outside of reach? No. What this paradigm provides is something for everyone. It lets teachers become actively involved in how they learn the subject, by considering the setting and then using that setting to learn how to teach it. Awareness of what surrounds us, increases possibilities, prompting us to sit a little taller, strain our necks a little farther and look as if what we have imagined is there

for the taking. This reminds me of Donoghue's recommendation of how to look at a classroom, "Classrooms like installations acquire and transmit meaning in several ways" (2010). "Proper design begs the designer to ask, what is the purpose of this object? Educators should ask the same question, but in terms of the environment they are in and the culture of learning they are providing their students" ([rpsedu.wordpress.com](http://rpsedu.wordpress.com), 2007).



### **The Use of an Aesthetic Approach in the Classroom**

For any teacher, the classroom is an office or it can become a home away from home. “What happens in a classroom can range all the way from the doped dullness of rote learning to the sudden ecstasy of revelation – again not only for the children but for the teacher as well” (Montgomery, p. 8). Arranging a classroom to be ready for that roller coaster of emotions can be a labor-intensive feat. While classrooms have been undergoing a makeover of sorts there is concern and wonder if a classroom can live up to its expectations.

When considering classroom design the word “aspiration” becomes its design’s inspiration. That mind set just may be what is now driving classroom reform. It is no longer about having a room assigned for a particular task. Rather it has become more about what one wants to see happen in that space; what one hopes will happen in that space; encouraging learning to be recognized as a collaborative blended process. “A learning environment’s design should be executed so that rather, than separating concepts, it reflects the way the world is constructed and the way children perceive it.” (Taylor, Aldrich & Valstos, 1988). And to that thought, it should also support the style by which the teacher chooses to teach while in it.

Because this paper focuses on the relationship between the teacher and the environment, an emphasis is placed on how the teacher perceives her role and to what lengths a teacher will go, to imaginatively collaborate with the classroom setting. The intended result of such a partnership through the discipline of aesthetic education is meant to provide the teacher with the methods to encourage students to achieve their goals, with tools that prompt an emotional response for both teacher and learners, set

within the fullness of their abilities. And while this paper calls attention to a classroom's physical details and the objects found in it, this work also refers to citings and resources that question if teachers are driven by a desire to teach through an enriched aesthetic lens and if they are, what steps can be taken in order to create a classroom blue print to help them to do so. This concept of aesthetic education is one I have come to value and to recognize as an artfully inventive approach to teaching. Influenced by the insight of Professor Maxine Greene and Greene's book, *"Variations on a Blue Guitar"*, "I have come to appreciate what can be the unseen value of imagination and possibility. "Aesthetic education is a process of initiating persons into faithful perceiving, a means of empowering them to accomplish the task – from their own standpoints, against the backgrounds of their own awareness" (p.45).

Sourcing from a variety of disciplines brings a variety of views into play as to how a teacher can bridge the gap between the inherent beauty of objects, the form and function of a teaching space, and how each of those elements can be integrated into a daily lesson plan. Journals, articles, and studies written by educators, theorists and space planners abound providing forward thinking analysis of the relationship between a classroom and those who use it. Titles such as *"Classroom Environments: Does Space Make a Difference?"* *"Reasons for Changing the Classroom Environment"*, *"Teachers Need a Positive Classroom"* and *"Teachers as Placemakers: Investigating Teachers' Use of the Physical Learning Environment in Instructional Design"* provide the nuts and bolts, the brick and mortar if you will, of the importance of managing the classroom details. However Greene's impressions, in addition to literature from Lehman College (2012), the Journal of Education and Learning (2012) and the Journal of Teaching and

Teacher Education (2012) raise the discussion to new heights and bring the dimensions of aesthetics in education to a whole new level.

There are layers to aesthetic education. In, *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, Greene, defines it as an, “intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed ...” (p.6). Just as Greene sees it as “integral to the development of a person”, I see aesthetic education as an integral part toward the development of a classroom’s climate, its rhythm, its mindfulness and the soulful well being of its teacher.

Our view is that you who are teachers will only be in a position to make such experiences available to your students if you take the time to cultivate your own informed awareness, if you allow your own minds to be activated, your feelings to be aroused, your imaginations to be released for the sake of bringing these works into yourselves. (Greene, p.46)

Aesthetics is presented as a prompt to increase awareness and to have the ability to transform something from its most abstract form into something more concrete. It is a powerful experiential process that provides an understanding as to why we might like or prefer something to something else. It is the ingredient that formulates an opinion based on reasoning or experience. Further review reveals aesthetics as a launching point for discussions, value judgments and rationale based on personal choice. Classrooms are personal spaces. They can reflect the personalities of a space with just one look.

### **The Classroom and The Natural Order of Things: The art of placemaking**

What's trending in the realm of classroom instructional design is "placemaking".

It is a term that emphasizes an evolution of a space that evolves into a place made for connections and belonging. Mike Bennett a "placemaking" blogger in Bristol England (2012) posts one of the definitions of placemaking as "... making places that have meaning to people, enduring patterns of community use and memorable physical qualities". Certainly a description that could represent a classroom; a place that has meaning and purpose used by a community of learners, where a teacher is responsible for transforming it into a physical space that is stimulating, adaptable and comfortable. Embracing the concept of "place" and placemaking – as opposed to space design- is critical to understanding the way in which design principles for optimal learning environments are intended to be approached. "When designing for optimal learning environments, design must be approached in a holistic, systemic way, comprising not only the physical setting, but also the social, organizational, pedagogical, and emotional environments that are integral to the experience of place. (Lackney, 2012)

If the teacher is still unsure of just how powerful of a duo, she and the classroom can be, it might be just be a matter of trust; the trust one finds within oneself through a connection with one's work and where that work is done. "Teachers need to pay consistent attention to the bond between themselves and their professional environment. In focusing on themselves, they need a sense of satisfaction with their cognitive abilities and with their emotional connections to their job" (Jenkins and Hewitt, 2010). The depth and reach of this venture knows no bounds when the teacher becomes in tune with her own abilities and derails any sense of self doubt.

The classroom environment can become the teacher's collaborator even an instigator. Depending on the teacher's interests and through collaborative thinking, her teaching place is where she feels the most comfortable and eagerly welcomes her students with opened arms, limitless expectations and a willingness to do so. "Most of us have had the special experience of learning in the companionship of a teacher, who along with his knowing and loving a certain field, wanted to find and was able to find ways by which we could be inducted into it" (Montgomery, 1986). And for many of us that teacher's classroom became, the place where we needed to be.

Place is essential to education because it provides researchers and practitioners with a concrete focus for cultural story, and because it expands a cultural landscape to include related systems, bioregions, and all the space-specific interaction between the human and the more-than-human world ... Places, and our relationships to them are worthy of our attention because places are powerfully pedagogical. (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 43)

This theoretical perspective of place provides an understanding of how information is processed and with whom, how and where that information is gathered. As a place-maker the teacher designs a space that supports teaching and learning to the greatest possible extent. "An individual's actions are based not on predetermined responses to predefined objects, but rather as interpreters, definers, signalers and symbol and signal readers" (Snow 2002). The method of this interaction between environment and an individual leads to an acknowledgement of "self", a merger of social, symbolic and natural experiences. Where this meeting of how we come to know who we are as in "I am" takes place, is as

important as how that meeting comes to be. Synergy is defined in the context of mergers and acquisitions. It examines whether or not the performance value of two companies will be greater as the sum of the joined venture rather than the value of their individual worth. Through an emerging collaboration of interests also known as synchronized synergy the teacher and the classroom become a valued commodity.

“The great teacher of children needs deep roots in experience if he is to bring the distilled quality of his living into that productive relationship with children’s living which is the essence of teaching” (Montgomery p.2). With tools and guidance at the ready, teachers can become the place-makers who design place based learning curriculums. “The physical environment should not be constructed to manipulate or influence a particular style of teaching or learning, but rather be responsive to and adaptive by individual teacher and student needs” Lang (1996). With objects, spatial arrangements and accounts of personal experiences there comes a new appreciation for the place in which they teach.

A fifth biophilic design element is place-based relationships. This element refers to the successful marriage of culture with ecology in a geographical context. The connection of people to places reflects an inherent human need to establish territorial control, which during the long course of our species’ evolution, facilitated control over resources, attaining safety, and achieving security. Locational familiarity – the yearning for home- remains a deeply held need for most people. Eleven attributes of place-based relationships are

described, the last (placelessness) being the antithesis of the others rather than a stand alone attribute. (Kellert, 2008, p.12)

The classroom can remerge as a unique place in the hope that the teacher can continually be intrigued by its transformation and recognize the role she plays in doing so. “What does a house, apartment, or a room say about the person who lives there?” What are the person’s interests? How are they represented? Is the space an authentic extension of a real person or that of a human impersonator ...? (Noddings, 1996). Finding that authenticity and natural genuineness for a teacher may be difficult, especially if it lies hidden among the latest in technology trends, evolving demographics and political attitudes toward today’s evolving classrooms.

In an earlier reference to *Creating Learning Spaces for Teachers and Teacher Educators* (2008), Clandinin, cites Sonia Nieto who writes that teachers, ... need to continually rediscover who they are and what they stand for through their dialogue and collaboration with peers, through ongoing and consistent study, and through deep reflection about their craft. (p.125). The challenges present themselves in a variety of ways including the responsibility for designing a workable and inviting learning space. With that in mind Clandinin also writes, “*to succeed, they must learn to cross the new, previously unexplored hinterland between old and new practices*” (p.386).

Throughout Clandinin’s editorial, landscape is used as a pictorial backdrop for the lives of educators. It does not surprise me then that the terms “climate” and “biophilic design” have also made their way as part of the new classroom’s identity. “Biophilic design is about recognizing humanity’s place in nature and using the built environment to maintain, restore, and enhance our physiological

and psychological connections to the natural world” ([www.terrapinbrightgreen.com](http://www.terrapinbrightgreen.com), para 3). These environmental labels as well as place-making call attention to the physical, cognitive and emotional conditions of a space.

“A classroom climate is the combination of variables within a classroom that work together to promote learning in a comfortable environment” (Conway p.42). It is a tone. It is the feeling you get when you first walk into a room.

“Healthy, positive organizational climates are typically characterized by high energy, openness, trust, a collective sense of the ability to get things done, and a shared vision of a mission” (Jorde-Bloom, p. 30). When considering a classroom as a mini organization that positive and healthy energy is key to its success.

In, “*A Great Place to Work, Improving Conditions for Staff in Young Children’s Programs*” (1988), Paula Jorde-Bloom provides insight to early childhood educators and administrators. Though published twenty-five years ago Jorde-Bloom’s concern of the wellness of the teacher has a current edge to it. She writes about an organization climate as the teacher’s and the school’s barometer as well as its influence on a learning center’s physical setting.

Temperature, light, color, noise, ventilation, design and furniture layout can help or hinder staff and children as they work. Poorly equipped environments, or those that have insufficient or ineffectively used space, are frustrating and stressful places to work” (Connors, 1983: Jorde, 1982, Makower, 1981) Early childhood programs that have a positive organizational climate on the physical setting dimension pay particular



attention to the importance of spatial arrangement and the design of the classroom and support space. (p.13)

While Jorde-Bloom highlights the contributing factors that lead to a healthy climate, there are reminders that those same environmental factors have an affect on the teacher. Recognizing the needs of children is a driving force, however her texts remind the reader that accommodating and supporting the teacher is as important. “The physical layout of a program conveys strong non verbal messages that affect employee and parent perceptions about it” (p.50).

The individual efforts made by a teacher to create, that just right space, is acknowledged but there are circumstances that are not in a teacher’s control. Older buildings, awkwardly designed floor plans, poor lighting, ambient noise even disproportioned cabinetry and lack of storage space can become inherited “out of my hands” circumstances.

Open instructional areas are perceived as being too distracting and noisy by teachers, while self-contained classrooms perceived as too constraining and restrictive. In addition, teachers may have a real or perceived lack of efficacy over their physical classroom. They may expect their school administrators to address these issues through appropriate educational policy. (Lackney & Jacobs, 2009)

Let it be noted that *new* does not always mean better. The latest in technical trends such as white boards, tinted windows and some might say even air conditioning creates uncomfortable and unnatural interior climates. “Today while we are less subject to the

changing forces of nature, we have also become increasingly separated from the benefits of interaction with the natural world” (Cook, Kallianpurkar, Garvin, Browning (2011).

Efforts to make schools “green” place all good eco-aware intentions at the heart of school-based environmental discussions. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) leads the effort addressing issues such as mindful master planning, acoustics, site assessment and health concerns. However the naturally “green” emotional aesthetic aka the nature of the space, is often not addressed in this black and white architectural approach. Nature in the space refers to the fact that spaces feel better when they are thoughtfully filled with fresh air, natural daylight, water features, and plant life (Terrapin Bright Green, 2012). “Biophilic design incorporates elements derived from nature in order to maximize human functioning and health” (Molthrop, 2012). Its originator E.O Wilson defined biophilia as “the innate tendency to focus on life and life like processes”(1984). Simply biophilia is an appreciation of life and the living world. “This need is linked to our emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, and spiritual development” (Kellert, 1993).

Within the built environment particularly in hospitals and schools, biophilia hosts a variety of benefits from reducing stress, to lower glucose levels in non-insulin -- dependent diabetics by more than 30% to expediting patient recovery. There is also evidence that time spent within or exposure to a natural setting may help to reduce the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder and /or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD). Research also finds that day lit classrooms have a positive impact on student’s performance when compared to those artificially lit. A1999 study published by the Heschong Group suggests, “That classrooms in a certain school with the most amount

of day lighting are associated with a learning rate that is 20-26% greater than classrooms that have the least amount of daylight” (Cook et al. 2011).

Creating a healthy classroom for students has been the topic of discussions and hearings for decades but the purpose of this work is to apply the same concerns to their affect on a teacher’s teaching style and sense of self. One could theorize that the conditions that effect student’s well-being and motivation can generate similar results in teachers. Attempting to separate teaching from the classroom is close to impossible yet studying this alliance is not often the topic of discussion. “Poor arrangement of space can cause a host of potential health and safety hazards. (Child Care Employee Project, 1982). Poor lighting, improper ventilation, and high noise levels can make it difficult for teachers to carry out their responsibilities (Makower, 1981). Further, the arrangement of furniture and the allocation of spaces within the classroom can greatly affect what can be accomplished within a given instructional period. (Weinstein, 1981). “According to Ronald Kotulak in his 1996 book , “inside the Brain”, an enriched environment can contribute up to a 25%increase in the number of brain connections both early and later in life. Our environments need to allow for active manipulation” (Lackney, 2012). “The physical environment of the classroom is often neglected as an integral component of the instructional design that should reflect learning objectives and teaching methods” (Lackney & Jacobs, 2000).

When examining how the classroom environment affects teacher behavior, evidence bears witness to the interest raised by government based concerns in a document referred to as House Bill #443, an act relative to the consideration of Ergonomically Designed School Buildings presented by Karen Jacobs, EdD, ORT/L,

CPE, FAOTA on October 6, 2009 as part of the General Court of Massachusetts Public Hearing of the Joint Committee on Education.

At this hearing Jacobs stated her support for this House Bill #443 to consider ergonomic design features in all aspects of any new or rehabilitated school building entitled to receive state money, as part of the “green school” initiative developed by the US Green Building Council. I have included this event, because Jacob’s testimony supports the foundations of biophilic design and the impact of school environments on student attitudes, performance and a teacher’s ability to teach. Environmental factors included in the research were: Full spectrum and natural lighting, Noise, Thermal conditions, Indoor air quality, Classroom size density and Furniture. Data collected through international researchers was presented in Jacob’s testimony.

Excerpts from individual entries (as cited in Michele Newman (2009) Post-Occupancy Evaluation of Primary Schools: A Multi-stakeholder Perspective, Unpublished doctoral thesis. note that:

- “Students in the most day lit classrooms progressed faster than those in the least day lit rooms” (Plympton, 2000).
- Lighting can affect the health of students including the regulation of internal body clock or circadian rhythms (Alexander, 1977), the production of Vitamin D, mood swings, depression and headaches. (Guzowski 2000; Benya 2001, Benya 2013)
- “Temperature is probably the most important air quality parameter in schools ... surprisingly small variations in temperature and humidity may feel uncomfortable and disturbing” (Jaakkola, 2006).

- Approximately half of the of the schools in the United States are estimated to have at least one building defect (GAO, 1996) which results in indoor air problems.
- Jacobs’s testimony also included recommendations by Jeffrey A. Lackney, R.A., Ph.D. “School buildings which have classroom environments that give teachers more control (e.g., adjustable desk layouts, visual displays) may best support specific education goals (e.g., collaborative environments, student productivity)”. (2008).
- In addition, the quality of the learning environment is known to affect teacher behavior and teacher attitudes towards continuing to teach (Johnson, 1990), (something we have not been able to touch upon here, which can have an additional mediating effect on student behavior and attitudes. (Lackney, 1991)

Jacobs’s act was amended to the House Bill Act #443. She is an occupational therapist, board certified professional and Boston University Professor and a former president of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

As place-makers teachers will make every effort to create a place that is welcoming. Intuitively those methods incorporate some element of nature. “Anthropologists tell us we are hard-wired to respond to nature. People viscerally respond to the same relationships in architecture because they make us feel good ” (Cook, Kallianpurkar, Garvin, Browning, 2011). The integration of biophilic design and consideration to place-making in the classroom may not be initially apparent to the early years teacher but when addressed by administrators and designers, it can relay a message the she is respected and valued.

### Support Studies

In an attempt to illustrate the steps towards broadening the awareness of creating a classroom that offers enrichment, interest and inspiration, three studies and a research summary are included as method examples. Presented with an international point of view from Australia, Canada, and the United States these papers discuss and examine the following topics. Here is an overview of the works:

In **Classroom Aesthetics in Early Childhood Education**, Linda Apps and Margaret MacDonald (2012) Simon Fraser University, Canada, examines the ways an aesthetic lens can be applied to early childhood classrooms; **The Environment as Third Teacher : Pre-Service Teacher’s Aesthetic Transformation of an Art Learning Environment for Young Children in A Musuem Setting**, Katherina Danko-McGhee, (2009)

University of Toledo, asks, will time spent in an aesthetically driven learning environment influence young teachers, “to design their own classroom in the same spirit?”; **Teachers as Placemakers: Investigating teachers’ use of the physical learning environment in instructional design**, Jeffrey A. Lackney, Ph.D., A.I.A and Paul J. Jacobs, PH.D. (2009) is a summary of research that examines how early childhood teachers arrange and use physical components of their classroom as part of their teaching.

**Learning in Place: Pedagogical Pathways for Placemaking**, Monica Green (2008) a conference paper that examines the stages of the place-making development of a re-imagined environmental education program within an early years learning center, located in Melbourne, Australia.

## Study One

Classroom Aesthetics in Early Childhood Education. Linda Apps and Margaret MacDonald (2012). *Journal of Education and Learning*; Vol. 1, No. 1, pp 49-59: 2012.

In Classroom Aesthetics in Early Childhood Education, Apps and MacDonald, get to the point immediately by citing, Neil Postman, who cites Marshall McLuhan, “The environment itself conveys the critical and dominant messages by controlling perceptions and attitudes of those who participate in it” (Postman 1969, p. 8). A perfect point of entry to begin the process of designing a living classroom that offers a custom, organic and comfortable developmental framework. “Aesthetics along with classroom design and curriculum generates implicit and explicit messages that impact and inform and contribute to the process of learning and teaching” (Apps and Macdonald p. 49).

Apps and MacDonald set out to examine how students in the Learning in the Early Years (LEY) program offered at Simon Fraser University, in British Columbia, would respond to participating, in a critical reflection about working with and assessing classroom elements and their arrangements. The students were asked to deconstruct their classrooms, discuss the process and then offer a critical reflection of their experience. “Using the lens of critical reflection we suggest that every niche or play space and the materials that they are provisioned with should be considered in light of the possibilities to link functional elements with form, to both yield greater complexity and engagement and a more sophisticated pedagogical aesthetic”(p.50). In other words, to challenge what has been set as standard in classroom environments and to reconsider the ordinary or more predictable approaches toward interactions with a learning space, and instead be replaced with something more innovative.

To support that statement Apps and MacDonald, (as is the growing trend among designers and educators) look to the principles of room design set by Reggio Emilia. “The classrooms of Reggio Emilia have been a source of aesthetic inspiration in early childhood learning communities in both Canada and the United States” (p.50).

In the Reggio Approach, teachers provide rich environments for children. They listen to and observe children’s expressions of interest, feelings, and thought as the children engage with the environment. Building on these observations, the teachers challenge the children’s thinking and join the children in constructing understandings about their world, often engaging in environments outside the classroom. (Scheinfeld, Haigh and Scheinfeld, p1).

Reggio’s pedagogy is based on the constructivist theory, shared by the social developmental philosophical principles of Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget. While Piaget believed that individuals construct their knowledge based on the organization of events and information, Vygotsky placed more emphasis on social interaction and learning. Vygotsky’s “social constructivism” translates to constructing learning through contact and reactions to a new experience based on previous one.

The thirty-nine (39) participating Learning in Early Years (LEY) teachers were experiencing social constructivism first hand. What they previously knew of classroom arrangements was greatly realigned by their new activities and assignment. Using the Reggio inspired design principles such as: 1) an emphasis placed on community centered teaching, 2) the blending of interior and exterior spaces, 3) the inclusion of natural materials, 4) establishing activity areas, 5) displaying children’s art work reflecting to new ways of learning, these LEY teachers were now experiencing a new way of looking



at the classroom. What made their experience more insightful was that most of the teachers were working in spaces considered conventional, with few of the functional items found in a typical Reggio classroom.

“Following a discussion of child-centered room arrangements, furniture, materials and design elements, teachers in the LEY program were challenged to break free from conventional thinking and particularly the confines of traditional classrooms by playing a design game using moveable gaming pieces representing furniture and materials that could be arranged any way imaginable within a rectangular structure” (p.51). Their talents were a bit tested when asked to think, how one play/learning space can influence another? Tasks asked the teachers to consider how they might add softer touches to what was an institutional styled space. In addition considerations were given to introducing authentic objects, the concept of theme zones, movement and flow, and other areas offered to children in open and closed activity zones such as dress-up, block areas and board games. After this segment of the study, the teachers were then asked to bring in photographs of their classrooms and to offer a critical reflection of their spaces based on their analytical conclusions from earlier discussions.

Using their photographs they evaluated the use and aesthetic overtones. They traced lines around the edges of placed objects in order to evaluate the fluid lines of movement in their classrooms as opposed to the harsh rigid lines of placed furniture. “As the LEY teachers viewed their photographs, they began to examine and compare how line flowed through a space and to notice the affect, line and movement might have when applied to a classroom” (p.52). The value of this exercise provided possible solutions to questions such as, how often do teachers ask their students to slow down? Do teachers

allow for accommodating the restful reader and restless athlete? Why is there gridlock in one part of the classroom and not another? While one answer may not satisfy these and many more questions, an effort to make even the slightest adjustment might make for more fluidity. IT might also help to ease anxious moments, interuptions and distractions for the teacher as well as the students, Segmenting the classroom or deconstructing the classroom clearly shows the many layers of a classroom's aesthetic dimension. In addition to line and movement, foreground, middle ground and background, patterns, texture and rhythm, Apps and MacDonald also reviewed shape and color.

Most teachers, parents and administrators think that the early childhood classroom is naturally meant to be overwhelmed with color, and it usually is. Color and shapes predictably make up and create the nature of the learning space. Apps and MacDonald were not surprised by the use of color in the LEY teachers' photographs. But what did peak their attention were the colors that were often dismissed but still completed the classroom palette.

“However as we continued, we also became aware of the more neutral colours in places such as lights, the ceiling, the flooring and the doors, areas that are often overlooked as part of the overall colour composition. In some classrooms, colour had been marginalized, placed in small amounts against the walls and way from the pale, neutral desks where students were expected to be sitting” (p.53-54).

Color has power. “According to Taylor and Gousie (1998) warm colors increase the blood pressure and muscular activity, while cool colors lower both” (as cited in Dyck, 2002 p. 56)” (p.54). Color evokes emotion, contributes to mood affects activity levels,

and sets the tone for the classroom. It is easy to be seduced by color. Teachers might see color as a quick design solution but too often do not recognize its long lasting impression. Color choices and its style of application and use can affect how a space is used and regarded. Predictably the primary colors of red, blue and yellow are found in early childhood classrooms, play and learning toys and toys and the playgrounds. Their bright hues announce their presence but can be distracting and over stimulating. Could these colors also have the same affect on teachers? Cool colors (blues and greens) and neutral colors (beige and browns) contribute to the creation of a comfortable and relaxed environment (Hathaway, 1987), cited by Apps and MacDonald (p54). “These are the colors that help create a backdrop for productive and focused learning” (Evanshen and Faulk p. 59).

Apps and MacDonald consider how color, its placement and dominance can affect a room’s form and function. Like most, the LEY teachers’ classrooms were vibrant with shapes of colors. Their spaces predictably followed the standards of most western classrooms. The use of the primary colors in their most saturated form seem to be the color of choice by adults. These the colors even extend beyond the classroom into the playground, on packaging, toys and manipulatives.

In their aesthetic mindfulness Apps and MacDonald concur that in a work of art, the intense treatment of color can cause an image to be strongly dominant. With such attention paid to the primary colors does a child’s or a teacher’s sophisticated color balance suffer? “ A play house (painted by children) displayed in one of the LEY teachers’ photographs revealed that colours were used only to punctuate a more neutral predominant background area.... If children demonstrate an initial lack of discernment in

their use of color, it can be seen as an opportunity to further develop their relationship with colour through the use of purposeful activities that engage them to the experimental use of color in a manner than contributes to the classroom aesthetic” (p. 54).

As more photographs received critical reviews, the teachers recognized that busy classrooms can be and look chaotic. Finding the right balance was key. Efforts to organize and display objects and activities in an orderly but purposeful way would be challenging. “however, ordering may simply be a way of purposefully and intentional managing the diverse details comprised in a classroom so that they are less likely to be lost or compromised” (p 54).

Deconstructing the classroom allowed the LEY teachers to see the relevance of the components that contribute to the classrooms aesthetic value. Further examination and in time as these teacher gain more experience they will recognize that the beauty of the classroom does not rely on the surface of its walls but finds itself through the depth of the many textures, movement, color and rhythm that work as a collective. “A living pedagogical space is constructed hopefully in a manner that honors the personal, visual and sensed aesthetics that determines the life of a classroom” (p.58).

Results of the Apps and MacDonald study conclude that new teachers need to be guided through the layered veils of aesthetic appreciation. “While discrete elements of classroom design can be defined and taught to early childhood educators, the aesthetic element is less accessible as a point of entry, particularly in relation to how classroom and curriculum are activated, engaged with and embodied” (p.49). The peaked aesthetic awareness of the teacher will determine just how far the relationship between teacher, children and classroom will go.

## Study Two

The Environment as Third Teacher : Pre-Service Teacher's Aesthetic Transformation of an Art Learning Environment for Young Children in A Museum Setting. Katherina Danko-McGhee, (2009), University of Toledo

In order to encourage twenty (20) pre-service teachers to construct a living pedagogical space that sees itself as the “third teacher”, Katherina Danko-McGhee at the University of Toledo, designed a course, *Art for the Pre and Primary Child*. Danko-McGhee, like Apps and MacDonald, recognizes the social constructivist philosophy of Vygotsky and the teaching style of Reggio Emilia as the under current support for the course. The preparation for the class and its course work was set within the Toledo Musuem of Art Family Center. This area is a pre-visit space where families can engage in a variety of activities related to the collections.

Of the twenty (20) undergraduate participants, eighteen (18) were juniors and two (2) were sophomores. In its introduction Danko-McGhee presented the students with an open-ended survey related to the importance of the setting's style and to gather data to assess the student's value and/or awareness of aesthetic influences in the Family Center.

Responses to the survey were telling. Results indicated that while the teachers were aware that the learning environment is important to young children only two (2) thought the environment needed to be inviting. Two (2) thought the environment should provide multi-sensory experiences, One (1) believed that children's artwork should be displayed and another teacher thought the environment should be creative. However, fourteen (14) teachers did recommend the environment be bright and colorful. When asked if believed they had artistic or creative skills, nineteen (19) of the twenty said, they

have very little creative skills. When asked if that had the ability to create a Reggio inspired environment, eighteen (18) said, no and two (2) said very little. “As a result of the data, it was determined that these students needed to be provided with appropriate learning experiences in order to be more competent in designing an aesthetic learning environment. These experiences were provided for them in the course” (Danko-McGhee).

After being emerged in the Reggio Approach, the students were asked to return to the Family Center, to re-evaluate the setting and use what they had learned for Danko – McGhee’s lectures. “As one allows one’s attention to focus intensely upon the multi-faceted, multi-layered presence of feeling- visual feeling, tactile feeling, olfactory feeling, kinesthetic feeling, gustatory feeling, and emotional feeling – one comes into aesthetic consciousness and into aesthetic behavior” (Flannery, 1977).

Divided into teams the teachers once again used the process of deconstructing the area, to study the individual exhibits and what the activity area intended to provide. For a study of a stained glass window, the student’s created geometric shapes of colored acetate placed on a light table. This open ended activity provided the children with color mixing and placement of the shapes, which led them to recreate the featured Tiffany stained glass windows found in the Museum. For the dramatic play area, the teachers thought dimensionally and recreated a child friendly vignette of one of the Museum’s featured paintings of three children in an autumn forest scene. Costumes and props were placed in baskets next to the small set, encouraging the children to transfer from the present into the imaginative possibilities of what it is like to step into a painting.

The results of the teachers’ efforts were as rewarding as their revised assessments of themselves. A fresh approach with a wide open-ended agenda blossomed into new

methods of exploring the exhibit space. The new designs for the Glass Pavilion and the Country Gallants (the dramatic play area) were met with high praise by children and adults. Observations and recordings noted a more innovative use of the space. A post – test survey revealed a surge in self-confidence in the teachers’ abilities to meet the criteria for designing an aesthetically appealing teaching environment. Collectively the students agreed that a suggested open-ended approach to teaching aligned with an aesthetically supported environment can inspire and sustain innovative thinking for young students.

The papers presented by Apps and MacDonald and Danko-McGhee remind educators that while new teachers are taught the principles of classroom management but may be in need of more awareness of managing classroom space. Many teachers attempt to create learning environment that foster healthy social interaction (Loo, 1972), provide places for student privacy (Moore, 1986) as well as facilitate and maintain an appropriate level of sensory stimulation. To a great degree, teachers feel that they have a significant control over classroom adaptability, instilling a sense of personalization and ownership within their students ( Lackney & Jacobs, 2002). Managing the classrooms’ own sense of well being is vital. “While discrete elements of classroom design can be defined and taught to early childhood educators, the aesthetic element is less accessible as a point of entry, particularly in relation to how classroom and curriculum are activated, engaged with and embodied” (App and MacDonald, p.49).

This merger of a classroom’s physical space and its curriculum is what gives the classroom its breath. “I am eager to say again how much this has to do with the kinds of aesthetic discoveries and experiences some of us are living through – and the effect it can

have on the spaces we open, how much it has to do with encouraging a sense of agency on the part of teachers and learners both” (Greene, p. 119).



### Study Three

Teachers as Placemakers: Investigating teachers' use of the physical learning environment in instructional design. Jeffrey A. Lackney, Ph.D., A.I.A and Paul J. Jacobs, PH.D. (2009).

There has been an imbalance with a predominance of the relationship between student behavior and the environment. Findings for this thesis agree with Lackney and Jacob, stating that the primary interest surrounding the classroom environment and its affect on children is a driving force in pedagogical trends. Desk arrangements appear to be the most prominent of topics followed by debates such as Quiet Zones versus Active Areas, New Technology or Old School methods, to have a teacher's desk or to not have one. These are all considered as components to evaluating their impact on the student's learning as well as measuring a classroom's emotional climate but they are not necessarily used to reveal how those same elements can influence a teacher's teaching style and motivation.

To imagine teaching without a backdrop, without a setting is almost impossible. Lackney and Jacobs reminds the reader that regardless of the classroom setting, whether the class is indoors or outside, in a museum, in a field or a lab, the relationships between the lighting, temperature ranges, cleanliness, organization and desk arrangements can effect a teacher's ability to teach and the level of a student's attentiveness.

In a paper, *Teachers as Placemakers: Investigating Teachers' Use of the Physical Learning Environment in Instructional Design*, Jeffery A. Lackney, Ph.D. A.I.A. and Paul J. Jacobs, Ph.D. discuss their research efforts to assess how teachers incorporate a classroom's design into their curriculums.

Research has focused primarily on student behavior in relationship to various physical dimensions of the classroom such as seating positions, classroom furnishing arrangements, spatial density, privacy, noise and acoustics, climate and thermal control, windowless classrooms, vandalism and play yards, (Gump, 18987; McGuffey, 1985; Weinstein, 1979). (Lackey and Jacobs, para 7)

To further their quest to learn if teachers use management strategies and physical design to support their “instructional objectives”, Lackney and Jacobs examined the results of a study of twenty National Board certified teachers (grades 1–3) in Mississippi. This examination was done through in classroom observations and interviews, using a constant – comparative analysis method (Janesick, 1994; Lincoln & Guba) 1985. Emergent themes of design principles from three of the teachers interviewed and observed are as follows:

- *From the first grader teacher:* The rooms should be “bright and homey” with wide-open spaces so that movement about the classroom is not hampered. Arrangements should provide individual and group work with desks that can be positioned to do so. Furniture should follow the prescribed reading program and facilitate academic and social success. Storage is important.

- *From the second grade teacher:* The classroom should foster community building between students and teacher as well as offer opportunities for hands-on learning. Learning centers and “alcoves” would be helpful for small group meetings. The room should be arranged to meet the needs of the individual students as well as be flexible to be placed in ways that enhance lesson themes and topics. Classroom space should grow as the children grow.

- *From the third grade teacher:* All floor and wall space should be available for displaying children's work. The classroom should be colorful and exciting to promote interest and learning. There is value to have access to the outdoors as well as have a designated private space for teacher – parent conferences. Furniture should be easy to move around. Rooms should have self-contained bathrooms and water fountains for convenience and to ease distractions.

Lackney and Jacobs assessed from these responses (which were in line with those from the other eighteen teachers) that each teacher had a particular pre-orientation to the dealing with the classroom environment. This evolved from their training and preparation.

However, each teacher shared that their pre-service training did not prepare them for the challenges of making the physical classroom setting complementary to the curriculum. In particular issues regarding the physical school context, prescribed instructional programming, variability in child behavior, and personal needs create unique logistical challenges that either were not or could not be addressed in formal education. (Lackney & Jacobs para 25).

“Teacher preparation programs must create authentic in-service opportunities for student teachers to gain practical experience in the physical manipulation of the classroom with a reasonably broad range of classroom settings” (Lackney & Jacobs, para 26). “To achieve environmentally pleasing classroom spaces teachers need to get in touch with what feels good to them and attend to the specific population that will be using the room” (Klein, para 15).

The early years classroom teacher seemingly is more aware of surroundings due to the fact that space influences movement and behavior. “Although some alterations are more permanent than others, classroom design is ultimately a tool whose flexibility can be enhanced through planning and modeling before actual change occurs” (Colbert).

What one needs to remember is that the teacher is the immediate and personal designer of the space, whose input and experience can offer designers great insight. The objective of The Classroom Blueprint is to provide teachers with the tools needed to put their classroom to work and finding the solutions to make personalize the space in order to make it work for them.

## Study Four

Learning in Place: Pedagogical Pathways for Placemaking, Monica Green (2008)

Learning in Place: Pedagogical Pathways for Placemaking, conducted by Monica Green, directs its focus to a school's garden as a learning site. The intention of the study was to see what roles the teacher and the school might play in developing lessons within natural settings. Green spoke with the eco-teacher, the school principal and the art teacher. The interviews lasted a little bit over one hour. Green also had ten-minute interviews with 25 students (grades 3-6). "By focusing on place and place based thinking and practice, educators have an opportunity to consider how they might take an active role in engaging students with coming to know the places in which they live" (Green para 4).

The Pumpkin School (a pseudonym) is located in picturesque northeastern Melbourne in Victoria. A primary school (grades K- 6) at the time of the study (2008) its student body was approximately 337 students. In 2005 the eco teacher had introduced environmental sciences into the curriculum through the use of a somewhat neglected grassy area on the school grounds.

The "enviro" project was designed to meet grade standards and differentiated to meet the children's capabilities. It was a collaborative and integrated effort. While the older children were designing an interpretative nature trail the lower grades were designing personal fairy gardens. While the garden and trails acted as the classroom the eco-center (nearing completion at the time of the study) was an inviting, colorful, well-lit space.

Pumpkin's eco-center met the biophilia parameters. To confirm the innate appreciation for natural connections, the teachers observed and listened closely to what the children wished to interact with: a natural landscape, natural colors, variety of natural things, animals and pond life, "surfaces they can use but don't hurt", and comfortable places to sit on or under.

The teachers and the eco teacher drew comparisons to the outdoor and indoor learning spaces. The garden tasks at hand improved and encouraged social interactions; broaden awareness of the environment, developed aesthetic appreciation for the natural world and improved academic performance.

The goal of the project was a want and need to design place making lessons that foster connections between learning and the community. "Sanger (1997) maintains that the use of place in educational contexts provides students with knowledge and understanding of a particular place, emphasizing that the land and students' personal knowledge and experiences outside the classroom have value" (Green, para 20). "Teachers generally believe that they have some measure of responsibility, influence and control over their physical setting" (Lackney, 1996). Excerpts from Green interviews support Lackney's comment when the school's environmental teacher speaks about outdoor classroom settings and place making:

So the kids from prep are used to sitting around in a circle and having questions posed and having turns of listening to everyone's views and changing their views if they think that's actually a good explanation. It develops a greater respect for differing opinions and views and the ways people think. (Green, para 30)

It's extremely satisfying to see something you have had a hand in. Now they haven't all planted corn, they haven't all planted the tomatoes, but they've all been part of a process and it's such a collaborative one. (Green, para 36)

Green makes the point to say that the teacher's are pleased that they are able to have had the option to offer their students alternative learning settings, where students can flourish in a place that meets their learning style.

And they say self-esteem grows on the end of a shovel and I really see that because those kids with low self esteems are often the kids who are not achieving in the classroom and so when they come down here they're the ones that are putting their hands up first to be the initiators and the team leaders.

(Green, para 39)

It is interesting to read this excerpt because teaching with objects is as rewarding for the teacher as it is for the student. There is a wonderful sense of accomplishment and motivation a clear reaction to the teacher's relationship not only with the students but where this interaction is happening as well.

This time I want to teach them the leaves, the fruits, the roots, the fallow kind of pattern so then we can be ready for each bed, say well we've had a leafy vegetable in there this time so what do we have next, we need something that has a fruity body, then we'll have something like a root vegetable and then leave it for the season. (Green, para 43)

Green states that the physical space of the Eco-Center reflects an exciting learning space that is authentic and inviting.

The composition of this classroom produces its own authentic knowledge and experiences. The teacher uses the design of the room to educate the children about the sustainable building practices and how this particular building encompasses those principles. The room is acknowledged as integral to the garden and not viewed as a separate classroom removed from the other learning that may occur in and around the garden. (Green, para 50).

A parent was noted to say that the room held the same tone and style of the teacher. “If teachers are conscious of the sources and development of their own tastes, they will understand the importance of including the kinds of things to work with which will be most helpful in the aesthetic development of children” (Montgomery p.19). It becomes clear from Green’s study that the environmental teacher has used her classroom as the inspirational launch center for both she and her students. “The environmental education teacher has engaged in some vital thinking about what the (new) place might do, what it might provide and what it might represent for children. (Green, para 55).

Green’s conclusion draws attention to the value of teacher awareness of the use and manipulation of place making. The eco –teacher saw an opportunity to put an used parcel of land “to work”. In doing so the teacher extended classroom space, created new experiences for the student, faculty and parents and offered an interdisciplinary portal to learning.

The aesthetic dimensions in teaching, asks administrations and teacher teachers to be mindful of the connections teachers make to their subjects. Research by Siskin (1994) into the culture of subject in secondary schools found that what mattered for the teachers



in her study was “not simply that they teach, but what they teach” (p.155). And may I add, *where* they teach matters too. Whether in a classroom, a family center, a garden or within one’s self, aesthetics holds a presence. When called upon, it can trigger a transformation and in the process can become a classroom’s “third teacher”.

### **The Classeum Blueprint : A Research Conclusion and Suggested Solution**

The result of this research is intended to lead to the development of *The Classeum Blueprint*, a workshop series and guide, created for educators Kindergarten through fourth grade. In addition to serving as a professional development supplement, I suggest that the Classeum Blueprint's on line availability be considered as a data source for collecting and evaluating qualitative and quantitative information as it pertains to teacher's relationships and personal assessment of their classroom environment. An ibook mock-up is attached.

The Classeum Blueprint features the steps and recommendations encouraging teachers to welcome the classroom as a collaborating partner. Its topics covering themes such as classroom arrangements, use of authentic objects, the biophilia effect, building aesthetic appreciation, the power of space, and placemaking are designed to spark an awareness of the connections between the educator and his or her environment. The ibook features activities created to help teachers examine how their teaching space effects their teaching style, motivation and sense of well being. Tasks are designed to prompt early learning educators to reflect on their dialy routines and to contemplate if the elements of their classroom meet the needs of their day.

It should be noted that while this interactive guide has been conceived to provide design solutions for K- fourth grade teachers it is also meant to strengthen support for the importance of teaching teachers (of all levels) the value of the relationship between a teacher and a teaching space. This organic combination of spatial mindfulness naturally layers a classroom's landscape. And when it does it feeds the soul and nurtures the mind. But the questions remain, "Are teachers aware of this blended layering? Are teachers

taught to recognize the value of their relationship between the environment, their teaching style and their learners' learning style? Should teachers be taught to be environmentally competent? Are teachers asked, "How does your classroom make you feel?"

The demands of the spirit require that attention be given to the classroom. How the teacher sees and uses her environment adds to her aesthetic dimension. That level of an aesthetic experience says, "learning is something to be swept-up in, ..." (Girod, pp 575-576). Tools are made available to teachers to improve their organizational, management and method skills. And while they can be helpful, it is necessary to develop parameters that define a well rounded and content teacher.

Being clear about what constitutes a quality teacher is essential for teacher educators preparing the next generation of teachers, for principals making decisions about who to appoint, for schools setting up school leadership teams, for those writing and implementing policy on education, and for researchers as they unravel the many complexities of the education scene. (Hobbs p.1)

Cheryl Richardson in "the Art of Extreme Self Care, wrote, "the power of being in a space that feels fully aligned with our soul is sorely underrated" (2009). As an educator and a designer I agree with that statement. Mentioned earlier in this work it is the impetus for this project and hope that the proposed Classeum Blueprint will energize a wave of spatial mindfulness that will empower teachers to seize the power that their teaching space has to offer.

"In some sense the joy we experience is a function of the work we are willing to do, as it is a function of our capacity to use our imaginations – to break with the

routine and the useful and the conventional and enter into another, often magical space” Greene, (2001).

Not many people might consider their functioning workspace as magical, unless perhaps they work for Disney. Yet even during Disneyland’s embryonic stages, Walt Disney himself found that in his search for a magical space, a perpetual current of imaginative thought had its limitations. While his intentions were grand he recognized that, “dreams offer too little collateral” for others to appreciate their value. In order for his backers to see the pay off of their investment, the Disney experience had to be one that beckons. “People won’t go down a long corridor unless there’s something promising at the end. You have to have something that beckons them to walk this way” (Aldridge, 2003).

Especially for a new teacher, visualizing a learning space as “the Magic Kingdom” takes vision and courage. It is not an easy task. A page out of the Disney playbook, likely will emphasize opportunities for role-playing, nostalgia and carefree moments. Seeing the world from a child’s perspective was key to Disney’s design plan. It was noted that he would often kneel or stoop down to view his buildings from a little person’s point of view to remind his designers, “this is how the majority of visitors will see things”(Aldridge, 2003).

Disney’s thoughtful simplicity of positioning himself from the physical perspective of how his visitors will not only see but use the space is refreshing. This prompts me to pause and wonder if architects do place themselves in the role of teacher. I casually asked an architect, a teacher and a principal about their thoughts on that topic. Not surprising the architect said, “no”, implying that the teachers don’t understand design

concepts and the educators' reactions inferred that designers could not possibly consider a teacher's point of view, because if they did classrooms would not be designed as they are. Chandler Montgomery (1968) writes in "Art for Teachers" about the many impersonal and technological accessories that can impose themselves on a teacher. (Perhaps referring to the elements in a classroom that an architect believes should be there). Montgomery applauds the teacher who bypasses those distractions and instead teaches from a more "how I see it" point of view. "... Teachers, after all must be personally involved in creative experiences before they can effectively guide others to it" (p. 2).

How Disney saw it, was how he felt it. While his audience was so much larger than a classroom of twenty (20) or so five year olds, Disney saw the benefit of being in tune with his audience rather than risk a chance of disconnect. "Every child at play behaves like the creative writer, in that he craves a world of his own, or rather, rearranges the things of his world in a way that pleases him" (Freud, 1958).

This intervention of visionary thinking to the likes of Walt Disney and Sigmund Freud can offer a powerful yet pleasing support to a teacher's approach to classroom design. Both of these visionaries who claim that it is a teacher's individual style that can satisfy a craving to manifest a pleasing and soulful environment. Just think how empowering it would be for a teacher to have more control of the look of the teaching environment! Just as Disney encouraged his designers to "place something that beckons" I recommend the teacher create the same appeal that feeds one's passion and fullfills a sense of purpose. The classroom can be the place where a teacher can say, "this is how I see education, this is how much I value teaching, and this is how I create a learning

experience”. Factor in biophilic design, meaning additional attention is paid to incorporating natural shapes and patterns, increased daylight, plants and animals, etc...when these organic and naturalistic dimensions are infused within territorial and functional zones, the classroom can become a naturally supportive and supported environment. “This need is linked to our emotional, cognitive, aesthetic and spiritual development” (Kellert, 1993). Through this need we develop an “environmental competence” (Steele, 1973). “Think of what that means for teaching and learning, the suggestion that imagination follows us to reach beyond, to reach – not toward the predictable, but toward the possible. It is as important for those of us who teach as it can be for those we hope will become different by learning to learn”(Greene, p. 163). It is in these awakening moments of possibility that teachers can begin the task of designing their Classeum Blueprint.

It is imperative to remember that the teacher is the immediate and personal designer of the space, whose input and experience can offer designers great insight. The objective of The Classeum Blueprint is to provide teachers with the methods that offer guidance to make their space work in the style that works best for them. The Blueprint will also collect data and responses from teachers in order to guide architects, space planners and designers of classroom fixtures and furnishings to be more design conscience of teacher’s emotional, ergonomic and natural needs and wants.

As a teaching tool, The Classeum Blueprint is designed to help a teacher explore the classroom’s physical elements, to examine their form and function and then to evaluate their impact on the teacher’s teaching style and well being. As a learning tool the Blue Print is designed to prompt teachers to reflect on what drives them; build upon their

learning and living experiences and in turn encouraging teachers to be placemakers in a place where they can make a difference.

As a comprehensive program The Classroom Blueprint Series will feature the steps and recommendations that will motivate a teachers to create a classroom climate that is healthy, happy and one that “feels just right” for not only the students but for themselves as well.

## Appendix A

### **maria freda**

36 Autumn Street • New Haven, Connecticut • 06511 • 203 915-8115  
[mariafreda@comcast.net](mailto:mariafreda@comcast.net)

Nancy Schulman  
 Division Head, Early Learning Center  
 Avenues -The World School  
 259 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
 New York, NY 10001-7020

February 26, 2013

Dear Ms. Schulman:

I am a graduate student in Museum Education at Bank Street College of Education in New York. I am currently conducting research for my Master's thesis, **Putting Your Classroom to Work - How Does a Classroom Environment Influence Teaching Styles and a Teacher's Motivation.**

**Putting the Classroom to Work** is designed to address four points. First, to investigate the relationship between the teacher and the classroom environment. The second, to recognize the contributing role, design and biophilia (aka elements of natural imagery) play in establishing classroom climates. The third is to investigate whether or not teachers use an aesthetic approach when arranging a classroom and if so how does it effect a teacher's teaching affect. Lastly it questions, if teachers are taught to consider how the classroom environment impacts their mood and interactions during the course of the school day?

The result of this research is intended to lead to the development of *The "Classeum" Blueprint for Teachers* ©, a workshop series and guide, created for educators Kindergarten through fourth grade.



On a recent visit to Avenues, with Betsy Grob, my thesis mentor and Bank Street faculty member, I took photos of the school's classroom interiors. The classrooms were unoccupied. I would like to use one or more of the attached photos as graphic/photo inserts for a sample mock-up of *The 'Classeum'* *Blueprint for Teachers* ©.

Please note that the name Avenues – The World School will be changed, to “a school” to protect its privacy. Please also note that the completed study will be submitted as a pdf to the Bank Street College Library where it will be catalogued as part of the collection and entered into an international database. This thesis may serve as a model for other educators, designers or administrators interested in this topic.

Please complete the attached form to indicate that you grant information for the use of the photos/information to be used in this purpose if this study.

Thank you for interest and participation in this project. If you are need of further information or have concerns, my contact info is [mariafreda@comcast.net](mailto:mariafreda@comcast.net).

With kind regards,

Maria Freda  
Graduate Student  
Classroom Environment Researcher

Encl. (1) consent form and return addressed envelope.

**maria freda**

36 Autumn Street • New Haven, Connecticut • 06511 • 203 915-8115  
[mariafreda@comcast.net](mailto:mariafreda@comcast.net)

Kimberly Cisneros  
School and Tours Manager  
Cooper- Hewitt National Design Museum  
2 East 91 Street  
New York, NY 10128

February 26, 2013

Dear Ms. Cisneros:

As you know I am scheduled to observe two sessions of The Cooper- Hewitt in school program, Design in the Classroom, on Wednesday March 13, 2013 at St. Hilda's & St. Hugh's School located at 619 West 114<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan.

The purpose of the attending these workshops is to see how educators present the classroom as a teaching tool. I would like to document what I learn from these sessions and obtain your permission to do so, for the purpose of enhancing my Integrative Master's Project, **Putting the Classroom to Work - How Does a Classroom Environment Influence Teaching Styles and a Teacher's Motivation**, is designed to address four points; first, to investigate the relationship between the teacher and the classroom environment. The second, to recognize the contributing role, design and biophilia (aka elements of natural imagery) play in establishing classroom climates. The third is to investigate whether or not teachers use an aesthetic approach when arranging a classroom and if so how does it effect a teacher's teaching affect. Lastly it questions, if teachers are taught to consider how the classroom environment impacts their mood and interactions during the course of the school day?

The result of my thesis is intended to lead to the development of *The “Classeum” Blueprint for Teachers* ©, a workshop series and guide, created for educators Kindergarten through fourth grade.

Please note that this completed study will be submitted as a pdf to the Bank Street College Library where it will be catalogued as part of the collection and entered into an international database. This thesis may serve as a model for other educators, designers or administrators interested in this topic.

Please complete and return, the attached form to indicate that consent is granted allowing me permission to attend the Design in the Classroom Workshops and that the Cooper Hewitt is aware that I may use all or part of these observations in this study.

Photos may be taken but will be limited to only the physical composition of the classroom and classroom furnishings. Thank you for interest and participation in this project. If you are need of further information or have concerns, my contact info is [mariafreda@comcast.net](mailto:mariafreda@comcast.net).

With kind regards,

Maria Freda  
Graduate Student  
Classroom Environment Researcher

(1) attachment with self addressed envelope

**maria freda**

36 Autumn Street • New Haven, Connecticut • 06511 • 203 915-8115  
 mariafreda@comcast.net

## CONSENT LETTER

To: Kimberly Cisneros  
 School and Tours Manager  
 Cooper- Hewitt National Design Museum  
 2 East 91 Street  
 New York, NY 10128

I agree to the terms and grant permission for Maria Freda to attend Cooper Hewitt's, **Design in the Classroom Workshops**, for research for a Bank Street College, Integrative Master's Project –

*Putting Your Classroom to Work - How Does a Classroom Environment Influence Teaching Styles and a Teacher's Motivation.*

Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Kimberly Cisneros

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Maria Freda

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**maria freda**

36 Autumn Street • New Haven, Connecticut • 06511 • 203 915-8115  
[mariafreda@comcast.net](mailto:mariafreda@comcast.net)

## CONSENT LETTER

To: Nancy Schulman  
Division Head, Early Learning Center  
Avenues The World School  
259 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
New York, NY 10001-7020

I agree to the terms and grant permission of the use of photographs of the inner classrooms of Avenues – The World School to be used as part of Maria Freda's Integrative Master's Project:

*Putting Your Classroom to Work - How Does a Classroom Environment Influence Teaching Styles and a Teacher's Motivation.*

Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Nancy Schulman

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Maria Freda

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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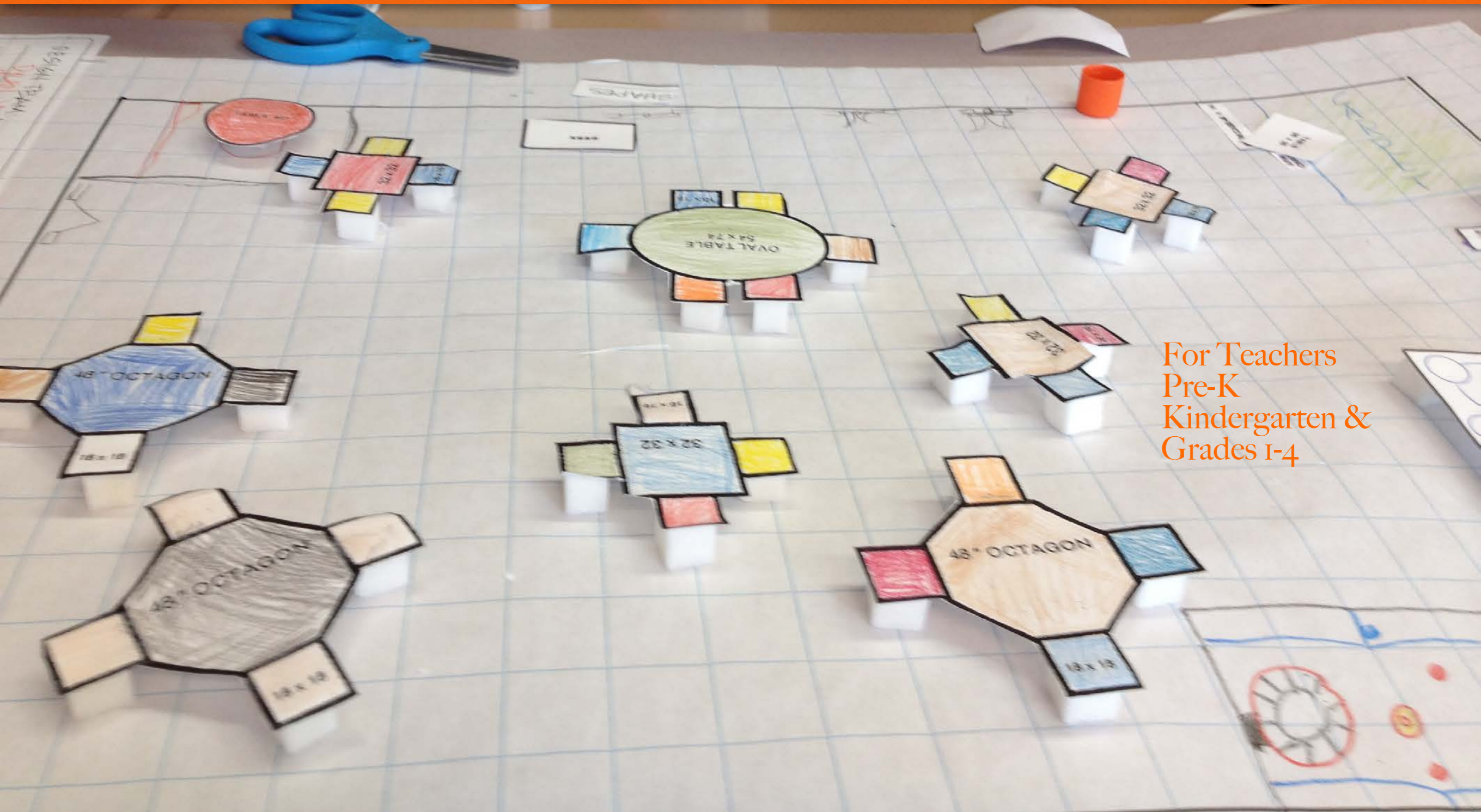


The  
**Classroom**  
Blueprint

**Submitted by Maria L. Freda  
Bank Street College of Education  
April 19, 2013  
Mentor: Betsy Grob**

# the classroom blueprint

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR PUTTING THE CLASSROOM TO WORK



For Teachers  
Pre-K  
Kindergarten &  
Grades 1-4





“Before you have places of belonging,  
you must feel you belong”.

Roberto Bedoya

## AN INTRODUCTION

With so much happening in the classroom having a “third teacher” at your side can make all the difference.

The Classeum Blueprint is designed as part of a workshop series that introduces the teaching environment as a collaborating partner.

The Classeum Blueprint is designed to help a teacher explore the classroom’s physical elements, to examine their form and function and then to evaluate their impact on the teacher’s teaching style, motivation and sense of well being.

As a learning tool the Blueprint is designed to

prompt teachers to reflect on what drives them; build upon their learning and living experiences and in turn encouraging teachers to see the value of interpretation of space through an enriched aesthetic lens.

As a comprehensive program The Classeum Blueprint Series will present the steps and recommendations that will attempt to motivate teachers to create a classroom that is happy, healthy and imaginative as well as one ... that “feels just right” for not only for students but for teachers as well.

# BLUEPRINT CONTENTS



## PLACEMAKING

Re-imagining your classroom is the first step in becoming a placemaker. Consider how you make a place your own. Learn how by accentuating your interests can make your teaching space more

## THE BIOPHILIA EFFECT

Do you have a love of the natural life? Does your classroom have a green connection? Take a walk on the calm side and explore the benefits of bringing the outside in.

## TO CONSTRUCT OR DECONSTRUCT

Building aesthetic appreciation by examining a classroom's authentic materials as if you are seeing them for the very first time.

## DESIGN MATTERS

Does your classroom work with you? Is there Storage? Is there clutter? Does it function efficiently or is an organizing intervention its only hope?

## THE POWER OF SPACE

What you do in a space and how that space makes you feel are two different things. This descriptive check list acts as a stimulus prompts to assess actions and reactions to what is happening in the classroom.

*Science lab equipment at St. Hilda's & St. Hugh's School, NYC photo by M. Freda*

## **CLASSROOM**

any place where one learns or gains experience \*

## **MUSEUM**

an institution devoted to the procurement, care, study, and display of objects of lasting interest or value \*\*

## **CLASSEUM**

a place where one gains experience among found objects exhibited and studied through engagement and through discovery, for the purpose of nurturing a lasting interest in life long learning and doing

\*Origin: 1865-70, Americanism; class+ room. dictionary.reference.com

\*\* <http://www.merriam-webster.com>

## EMPOWERED BY DESIGN

**Information is power.** Understanding how to use that information can be insightful when examining how the classroom environment can affect your teaching style.

### WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO?

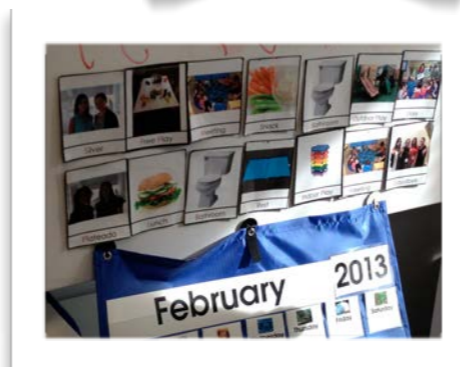
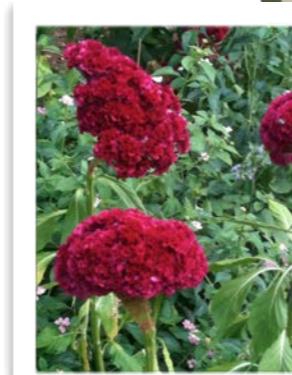
- What inspires you?
- What motivates you?
- What is it that keeps you going?
- What tools do you use to keep your senses sharp, your insight keen?
- How does the classroom space effect your mood ... patience ... comfort zone?

### WHEN WALKING INTO YOUR CLASSROOM ... CONSIDER:

- How the room is used?
- Is it organized? Is it messy?
- How can you make it meet your aesthetic?
- What is your favorite part of the room?
- When are you at your best in the classroom?

### WHEN THINKING CLASSROOM ROOM DESIGN

- Examine
- Evaluate
- Eliminate
- Enhance what needs to change - in order for the space to be what it can be.



## THE POWER OF SPACE - EVERY ACTION HAS A REACTION.

Feel • Healthy • Notice • Interested • Design • Laugh • Run  
Cooperate • Insightful • **Anxious** • Observe • **Perform** •  
Notice • Happy • **Connect** • Organize • Remember • See  
Define • **Cry** • Wonder • Beautify • **Appreciative** • Explore •  
Discover • Engage • Focus • Arrange • Construct • **Joy** •  
Share • **Discuss** • Listen • **Shut Down** • Stand up • Sit down •  
Nervous • Tense • Silly • Calm • Investigate • **Dream** •  
Active • **Indifferent** • Question • Professional • Better • Involved •  
Adventurous • **Productive** • Tired • Awkward • Brilliant •  
**Strong** • Confident • Think • **Artsy** • Write • Plan ...

**ACTIVITY:** Needing a space to “act-out” is not uncommon for students in the early childhood classroom. Sometimes a teacher needs that space as well. Understanding how or why that happens can be a challenge as well as a solution. Using the words listed above and/or words that relate to your daily classroom tasks as prompts, respond to the following statement in an attempt to find a healthy balance.

### FOR EXAMPLE:

When I feel **ENERGIZED**, I **REMEMBER** to plan next week’s parent meeting.

When I **READ** aloud I feel a **CONNECTION** to my class.

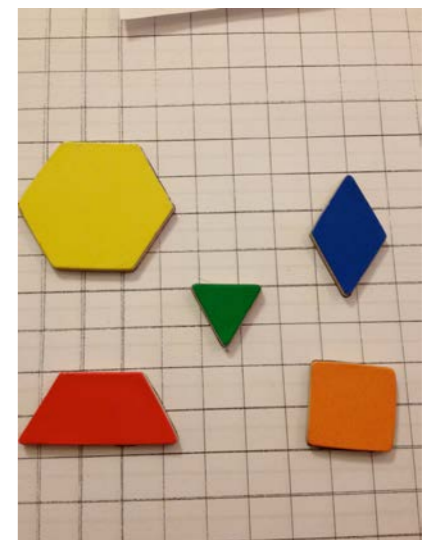


photo - M. Freda

**THE POWER OF SPACE**

**ACTIONS**

**REACTIONS**

**SPACE SOLUTIONS**

**When I ...**

**I feel ...**

**and the classroom helps me ...**

**I feel ...**

**When I ...**

## POWERED BY DESIGN : TASK SHEET

### 1. HOW DOES THE PHYSICAL SPACE OF THE CLASSROOM EFFECT YOUR TEACHING STYLE?

a. What inspires you?

b. What motivates you?

c. HOW MIGHT YOU USE ELEMENTS FOUND IN THE CLASSROOM AS TEACHING PROMPTS?

### 2. WHEN YOU WALK INTO YOUR CLASSROOM DO YOU ...

a. Think about how the room is used?

B. WHERE IS YOUR FAVORITE SPACE IN YOUR CLASSROOM?

c. When are you at your best in the classroom?

## BUILDING AESTHETIC APPRECIATION

Collecting data sparks an endless appetite for one more article. True to form, found among my documents was a stapled chapter titled “Disciplines of Art”. From where it originated I do not know, therefore there is no citation attached. However this orphaned reference did offer a reason for me to adopt it into this guide.

Disciplines of Art, (DoA) lists questions that might emerge through interactions with a piece of art. While as appropriate as they are for a teacher to use to prompt a discussion about a painting, a sculpture, etc.

I wondered if the classroom is viewed as a museum aka “a classeum” in its own right, alternative questions could be offered when looking at the classroom through a broadened aesthetic lens.

DoA • How can we assign value to what various perceivers say about works of art?

**Teacher: How can I assign value/purpose to the various objects I find in the classroom?**

DoA • Should works of art that are deemed sacred, privileged or private by groups within one culture be publicly displayed by another culture for all to see?

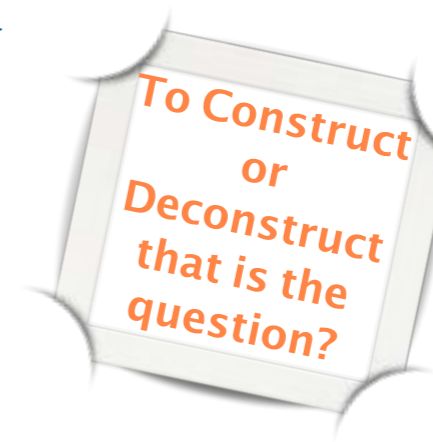
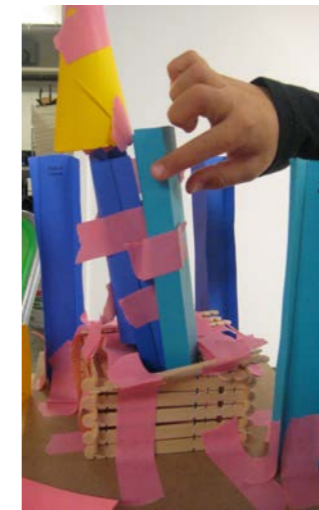
**Teacher: Are there subjects or shapes in the classroom that can be used in another form for a different purpose? How can I expand the predictable into an alternative approach to teaching?**

DoA • Is the erasure of a drawing, the deconstruc-

tion of an existing work or the creating of a new one?

**Teacher: How can we learn more from deconstructing an object than we can from building a new one from scratch? How can I use my teaching to transform one object into the many parts of another?**

While the preceding questions offered by “Disciplines of Art” have a direct application to interpreting fine art, with a bit of coaxing along with the help of The Classeum Blueprint for Teachers, the reinterpretations of these questions might lead to a thoughtful discovery.



*A classroom at Avenues - The World School and other photos - M. Freda*

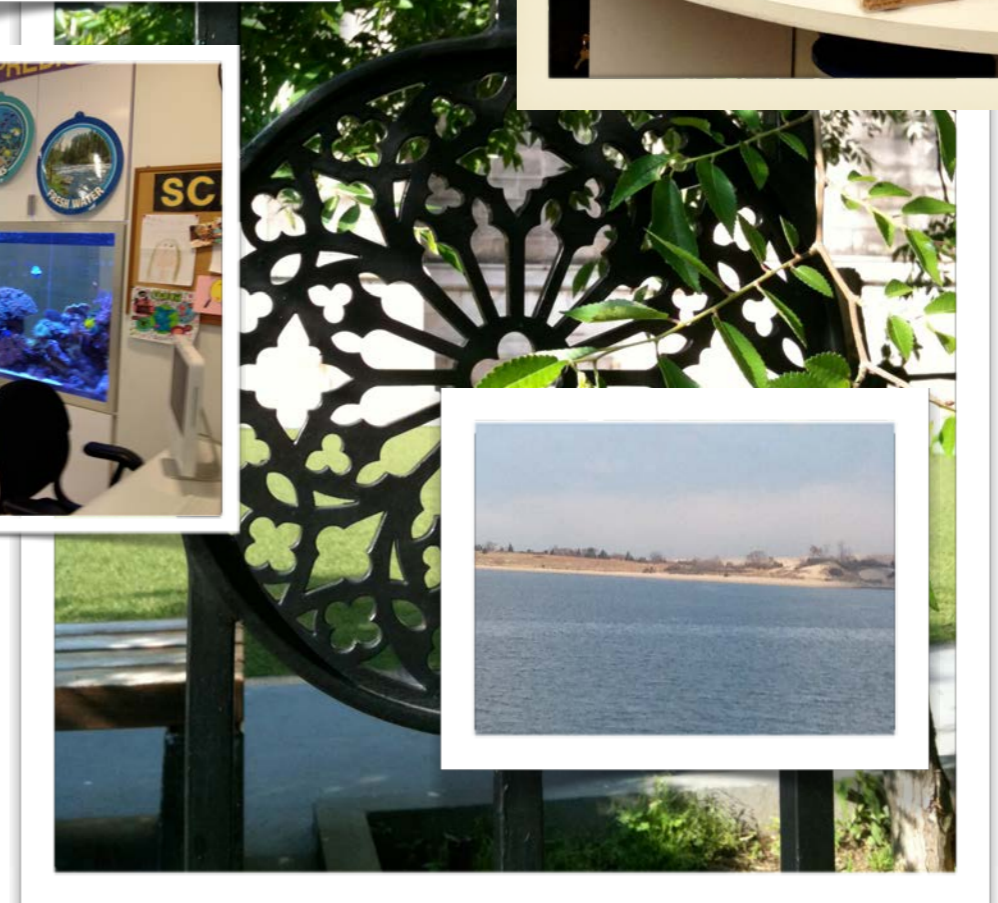
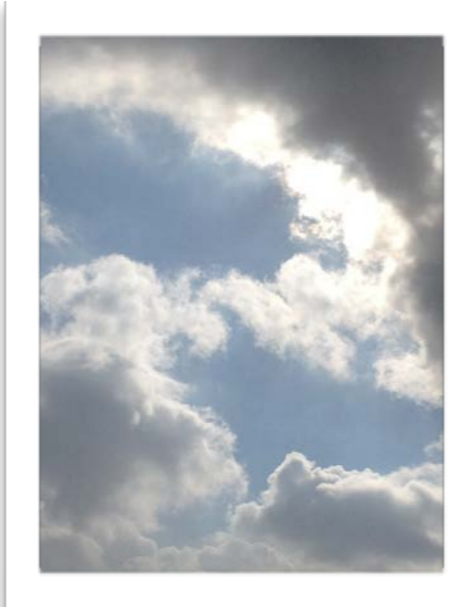


# THE BIOPHILIA EFFECT

“The spaces in which we live shape us and in turn are shaped by us”. Nel Noddings

Resources and interview responses reveal that a clean, bright, spacious and well organized classroom with a small class roster is the optimal scenario for most teachers. Adequate storage space, adjustable lighting, defined activity areas and a professional looking environment are priorities when space and budgets allow. These requests when coupled with *biophilic* elements such as living plants, natural daylight, and flowing water make for an increased sense of well being, reduced stress, increased productivity and a broaden awareness of society’s natural connection to nature. Defined by Harvard biologist, E.O.

Wilson, “*biophilia*” has come to be a driving force in building design. Can this “love of life” be the natural additive teachers need to nurture a deeper love for what it is they do? Can a review of nature’s place within a teaching space be just what the classroom needs to get to work?



“This need is linked to our emotional, cognitive, aesthetic and spiritual development”

Stephen Kellert,

## THE BIOPHILIA EFFECT : THINK GREEN

List the all natural elements found in your classroom.

What would you like to add? **How would you use those elements in your lessons?** How would having these natural items in your classroom effect your teaching style?



# A CLASSEUM BLUEPRINT REVIEW - a redesign of space and self.

