

The background image shows a child's play area. In the foreground, a wooden train track is laid out on a dark carpet, with a small blue and green toy car on it. Behind the track is a wooden shelf supported by two large tree stumps. The shelf is decorated with warm white string lights and a framed photograph of a child. To the right of the shelf is a vase of red and yellow flowers. In the background, there are more toys, including a basket with a 'YIELD' sign and a small table with a child sitting at it.

# THE ENVIRONMENT AS THE THIRD TEACHER

DR. DIANE KASHIN, RECE

WORKSHOP SLIDES

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2014

# How Does Learning Happen?

Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years

*A resource about learning through relationships for those who work with young children and their families*



ACCORDING  
TO ONTARIO'S  
PEDAGOGY  
FOR THE EARLY  
YEARS

THE ENVIRONMENT IS  
THE CONTEXT IN  
WHICH LEARNING  
TAKES PLACE (P. 21).

# THE ENVIRONMENT AS THE THIRD TEACHER

The principle of the environment as the third teacher comes from the educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy. It reflects the idea that the environment acts as a participant in the educational experience taking place within that environment. It involves rendering the environment a living space that actively participates in the educative process.





ACCORDING TO  
LORIS MALAGUZZI

In a program, there are three teachers of children:  
adults, other children, and their physical environment,  
the latter of which is subsequently referred to as the  
third teacher.





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## WHO WAS LORIS MALAGUZZI?

- A teacher, philosopher, poet and theorist.
- Devoted to early childhood education and defending the rights of all children to have quality education.
- From the northern part of Italy.
- Worked closely with the educators from the infant-toddler and preschools in Reggio Emilia.





# THE VALUES AND BELIEFS OF LORIS MALAGUZZI

- Malaguzzi continuously researched, wondered and discussed theories.
- He believed in the image of children as active participants and that play is learning.
- His values and beliefs are represented in the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach.







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# THE PRINCIPLES OF THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH



## The Image of the Child

Children as active protagonists of their growth and developmental processes – children have extraordinary potential for learning and each child has the right to be respected and valued.

## Participation

Participation is both a value and a strategy that defines the way in which children, educators and parents are stakeholders who belong to a community.

## 100 Languages

Children possess a hundred languages, which mean that they have a hundred ways of thinking and expressing themselves. A hundred languages is a metaphor of the extraordinary potentials of children.

## Listening

In participated education, active listening is an ongoing process and condition for dialogue and change that raises the threshold of attention and sensitivity towards others.



## Individual and Group Construction

Each child is an active constructor of knowledge, competencies and autonomies. While unique in their learning they are also learning in relationship with peers, adults, and the environment. Learning is fostered by research.

## Educational Research

Shared research is an everyday priority that is made visible by the means of documentation that builds learning.

## Organization

The organization of the work, the spaces and the time that children and adults spend is an important part of the Reggio Emilia educational project.

## Environment, Space, Relations

The interior and exterior spaces are designed and organized to foster interaction, autonomy, explorations, curiosity and communication. These are places for children and adults to research and live together. The environment takes shape in relation to the learning experiences of the children and adults in dialogue with architecture and pedagogy.



## Educational Documentation

Documentation gives value and makes visible the learning processes of the individual and the group. When documentation is revisited, reconstructed and interpreted it assumes its fullest meaning.

## Professional Development

Ongoing professional development is a right and a duty of each individual and the group. Time and attention is given to make sure that it has a high priority in the educational project of Reggio Emilia.


## Progettazione

The process of planning and designing teaching and learning activities takes shape without applying predefined curricula. Progettazione is a strategy that involves thought and action. It is respectful and supportive of the learning process of children and adults.

## Assessment

Assessment is a process that is part of the all aspects of the scholastic life including the children's learning, the professionalism of the personnel, the organization and the quality of service that is configured as a public action of dialogue and interpretation.

# ENVIRONMENT, SPACE AND RELATIONS



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*Interior and exterior spaces.*

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*Designed and organized.*

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*Fosters interaction, autonomy, explorations, curiosity and communication.*

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*Places for children and adults to research and live together.*

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*The environment takes shape in relation to the learning experiences of the children and adults in dialogue with architecture and pedagogy.*



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VISUALIZE AN  
ENVIRONMENT  
THAT ACTS AS A  
TEACHER. WHAT  
DO YOU SEE IN  
YOUR MIND'S  
EYE?





DID YOU VISUALIZE SOMETHING  
LIKE THIS?



OR THIS?







## HOW AND WHY IS THIS ENVIRONMENT A THIRD TEACHER?

- It values the children as capable and competent.
- It is flexible.
- It is designed.
- It is organized.
- It responds to children and adults (the first and second teachers).



# HOW DOES YOUR THIRD TEACHER, TEACH?

“In order to act as an educator for the child, the environment has to be flexible: it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers in order to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge.” Lella Gandini (1998)







- The environment “mirrors the ideas, values, attitudes, and cultures of those who use the space” (How Does Learning Happen? p. 20).
- Are your values about children and learning represented in the environment?



# SPACE SPEAKS

# THINK, FEEL, ACT (2013)

## The Environment Is a Teacher

*Written by Karyn Callaghan*

*Charles Sturt University*

### The Environment Is a Teacher

Space speaks. Architects and designers know this; young children know it too. Every day, they are reading the environments through which they navigate. The environment is a teacher. When we can read its many layers as children do, we can use it as an ally. “Beauty is the voice that calls the child to engage with the materials and elevates him to a higher level of grace and courtesy as he interacts in his environment” (Haskins,

2012, p.34). How do educators design classrooms so that they have a cohesive sensibility and rationale for decisions about the environment?



In educational discourse, the word “environment” usually refers to the physical environment, inside and outside. It will serve us well if we can expand this perception to include the context in general,

including the relationships among the people and between them and the materials, the rules, the schedule. These contexts should be co-constructed by the adults and children because the impact on everyone is tangible.

### View of the Child

A starting point for critical reflection is a clear statement of how we view children. If we posted our view of the child in large letters in our classrooms, we could invite collaboration as we work to bring our practice into alignment with those stated views.

It has been said that the environment should act as a kind of aquarium which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and cultures of the people who live in it. This is what we are working toward ~ Loris Malaguzzi





## ACCORDING TO HOW DOES LEARNING HAPPEN?

The environment “mirrors the ideas, values, attitudes, and cultures of those who use the space” (How Does Learning Happen? p. 20).

How are your values reflected in the learning environment?




## HOW DOES THIS BOOKSHELF REFLECT THE VALUES OF TEACHERS IN THE ROOM?

*What is this third teacher teaching?*

- Books are not valued?
- Reading is not important?
- Children do not deserve to have access to quality children's literature?
- Children do not need to learn about respecting themselves and caring for materials?







The Environment as the Third Teacher is not about decorating but looking for the underlying values that the environment reflects.

How does it represent your view of the child?

# VALUES

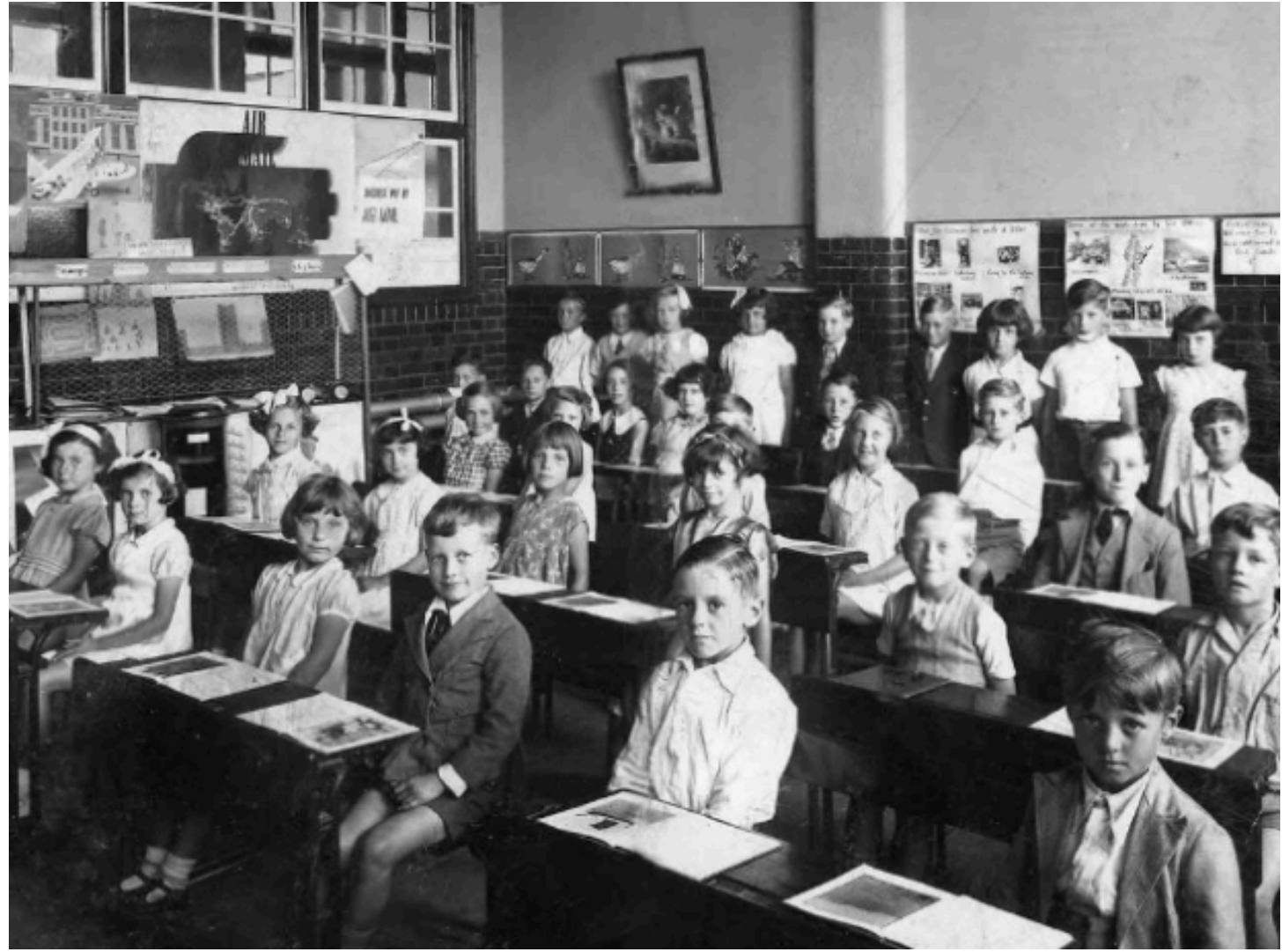
*Values = a person's judgement about what is important.*

What is valued in this image?





LOOK AT THIS  
ENVIRONMENT –  
WHAT DOES IT  
TELL YOU  
ABOUT THE  
VALUES OF THE  
TEACHERS?



An environment that is crowded or cluttered may obscure the values you have in mind. What values do you want reflected in the environment?





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## CONSIDER THE ELEMENTS OF LIGHT, SOUND, VISUAL CLUTTER, TEXTURE AND COLOUR

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**LIGHT:** Use a variety of lighting sources that illuminate the natural light from windows (floor lamps, table lamps, light table, projectors, chandeliers, lights with dimmers, flashlights, prisms, glass balls).

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**SOUND:** Create a variety of interesting listening experiences that support children's engagement with the space.

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**VISUAL CLUTTER:** Be intentional about what you put on the walls and shelves.

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**TEXTURE:** Provide children with different textures.

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**COLOUR:** Use neutral colours and add accent colours. Colours can be powerful in both positive and negative ways.





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HOW ARE CHILDREN  
REPRESENTED IN  
YOUR ENVIRONMENT?

*Are they active  
participants?*





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## CONSIDER YOUR ROLE

- Be intentional in the design of the environment both inside and outside.
- Find ways to reflect the children, educators and families in the design of the environment.
- Supply materials and experiences that reflect the interests and development of the children that will deepen their explorations.
- Provide children with relevant, real, hands-on materials.
- Provide long uninterrupted periods of time for children to explore their environment.
- Be playful! Be observant! Document!
- Nothing without joy (Loris Malaguzzi).



# CONSIDER THE OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT


Children thrive in indoor and outdoor spaces that invite them to investigate, imagine, think, create, solve problems, and make meaning from their experiences – especially when the spaces contain interesting and complex open-ended materials that can be used in many ways. In addition, when the schedule allows for long periods of uninterrupted play, with few transitions, children are calmer and more engaged. When the environment supports children's growing autonomy and independence, challenging behaviours are reduced and educators can focus more fully on observing, interacting, and extending children's learning and development in meaningful ways (How Does Learning Happen? 2014).









The background image shows a chaotic and vibrant art studio. The floor is covered in a thick layer of brown cardboard, which is splattered with various colors of paint, including red, blue, yellow, and purple. In the center, there is a small, makeshift table or stand made of cardboard, also covered in paint. On top of it, there are several paintbrushes in a metal mesh container, a small jar of paint, and a red container. To the left, there is a red plastic jug and a stack of white papers or canvases. To the right, there is a white cylindrical container and a small jar of paint. The walls are also covered in cardboard and paint splatters, creating a colorful and textured environment.

THANK YOU TO THE  
SENECA COLLEGE  
NEWNHAM  
LABSCHOOL FOR THE  
INSPIRING IMAGES OF  
THE ENVIRONMENT AS  
THIRD TEACHER



# STAY IN TOUCH!



I love staying connected to early learning professionals!



Find me on Facebook – Diane Kashin



Find me on Twitter - @DianeKashin1



Find my Facebook pages – Technology Rich Inquiry Based,  
Resources to Support Child Development and the York  
Region Nature Collaborative



Email me at: [diane.kashin@gmail.com](mailto:diane.kashin@gmail.com)