

### SLO III Developmental Context Reflective Narrative

*Students will demonstrate knowledge of the multiple environmental contexts in which children grow and develop, and will be able to analyze systems that support children's well-being.*

Children grow and learn in a variety of different environmental circumstances. Some children need a specific environment to learn and some can learn in a variety of different contexts. In my college career I have learned about how environments support children's learning and the importance of these environments on children's learning. While studying child development at Montana State University, I took a class called Advanced Practicum in which I truly received in depth perspective about environments and why having different environments at hand are so crucial for children. At Chico State University, I also took a class called Methods of Inquiry, this class taught me about environmental philosophies, as well as environmental contexts and differences.

As educators we know that quality early education means there are comprehensive needs that are set in place so that children can become Kindergarten ready. The environment in which children are learning and growing is essential to this learning process. The environment can take place in a classroom or outside of a classroom. There can also be many different environments in one classroom. When I taught at the Montana Child Development Center they displayed these different environments very well. In one area of the classroom they had a quiet, calming place for children to read books and sit inside of a teepee to calm their bodies. In other parts of the classroom there were art, sensory motor, eating, resting, building, music, and play areas. Outside there were lots of different areas for gross motor skills. These different environments were important because it offered children a variety of learning experiences as well met their social and physical needs.

At Chico State in my Methods of Inquiry Class I have learned that some environments have different systems in which reflect a specific philosophical approach. These philosophical approaches such as Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio shape the environment and create a specific learning experience for the children. These programs offer children freedom, creativity, cognitive development, and learned social skills. If a preschool picks a philosophy the environment will reflect that philosophy. If a center chose a Montessori approach the classroom would have a big emphasis on independence and freedom. Toys and materials would be set up so that children from ages two-six could have access and uninterrupted play time. There would be a range of different activities and instead of teachers directing most play situations the children would. The purpose of Montessori is to respect the needs of the child's social, physical and psychological needs. Some educators put their energy into different aspects of the environment. Environment affects a child greatly, and can help enhance and encourage a child's learning or it can hinder a child's learning experience, this fascinates me greatly.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) describes a high-quality program as providing "a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families." A quality program depends greatly on the quality of the environment or different environments that are provided. This can be challenging for some schools or classrooms to meet these standards. I have learned in my higher education what elements are the most important and these elements are very fascinating.

The most important rule of creating an environment is safety. If a child does not feel safe inside his or her environment fundamental learning will not take place at the rate that it needs to be. Besides safety, I also believe that the environment must have essential features. Some

important features that a preschool should have is... Children should be free to choose their own play experiences and be free to play, the environment should offer play alternatives and a variety of options, and lessons should be meaningful and support curriculum. A balance of structured and open-ended activities should be provided, there should be individual and group activities with mixed ages, children should be allowed access inside and outside.

The physical environment of the early education classroom should consist of different centers that hold table top activities. These centers can be an open art table, sensory bins, or even a science table. It should be warm and inviting, with as much natural light as possible. It should have different areas such as the dramatic play area, and a quiet space for reading or writing. The environment should be safe to children and have the proper bathrooms, sinks, first aid kits, fire safety equipment and more. There should be plenty of toys for stimulation and play. A large open space is important so that children can have circle time or free play. Lastly there should be bicycles, sand boxes, swings, climbing structures, and various toys for the outside play area. This ideal environment effects a child's social, cognitive, and physical development by encouraging, supporting, and providing appropriate resources that provide children with essential learning tools.

As a lifelong learner, I want to observe and explore various indoor and outdoor environments as well as classrooms that model different behaviorists such as Montessori to see how the children react differently in each environment. I also want to be able to compare and contrast to see which environments work the best, or what specific features about the environment work the greatest.

It always surprises me how different environments alter children's behavior and shape the way they learn. In the past I struggled with knowing what aspects are important in a learning

environment. Now that I have education and experience in this field, I hope to manipulate the environment of the preschool that I am currently working at so that I can make sure it is at its highest standards in relation to environment. I plan on working with my co-teacher Amanda to move, fix, rearrange, add, and subtract many pieces to our program so that it is pleasing, inspiring, safe, and welcoming.

