THE STAFFROOM

Creating Welcoming & Calming Learning Spaces

By: Penny Gowen

A positive, nourished mindset is so important to keep the energy high all year round. Our goal is to support and nurture educators when the physical and emotional demands of their to-do lists are at their highest. Creating a welcoming and calming environment for a long school year (I know, I can hear the groaning from here!) is a good place to start.

In this piece, we'll look at valuable ways in which learning spaces can be shaped to support and nourish educators and children alike. The ideas presented here will help to create a more peaceful, comfortable space in the setting, including all the great educators out there who will their weight in gold!

Comfy & Cosy Spaces

Soft furnishings ensure children have access to a comfortable learning environment and can include anything from rugs and carpets to cushions, canopies, netting, fairies and more!

Soft furnishings can transform a loud and busy learning environment by absorbing noise and helping to create pockets of calm where children can, for example, snuggle into a big cushion and read a book, or sit in a tent to have a quiet chat with a friend. Soft furnishings can also modify a cold, cubic house into an inviting and comfortable space or create a welcoming area for the class to sit together to care, share stories and plan out the day's events.

Featured Product :

MTA Space – Nero Foam Filled Lounger

Calming & Reflective Spaces

Calming and reflective spaces offer a peaceful learning setting in which children can embrace quiet time. Children can spend time relaxing and reflecting away from the hustle and bustle of a busy classroom.

Cushions, fabrics, tents and dens can all contribute to quiet and reflective spaces, making cosy and comfortable spots for children to explore and make their own.

Combine these spaces with books, puzzles, soft toys, tea parties or anything else that encourages children to relax in their method. A calming and reflective space can be just the thing to refuel children's energy.

Featured Product :

Stockholm Spaces – Cosy Retreat

Spaces of Belonging

The way children and their families are welcomed into the learning environment makes an immediate difference to their sense of belonging. Belonging is all about feeling connected and accepted, and it is a fundamental need for children and families. The sense of belonging ensures the emotional wellbeing of children and their families can thrive, including their self-worth, confidence, capability and sociability, to name a few.

Spaces of belonging can be created in many ways. Welcoming learning environments will also ensure that these settings become places of safety and refuge for children and families to work through the challenges and difficulties they might be experiencing.

Educators are in an excellent position to build a sense of belonging, not only with their words and actions but also with the physical settings too. Seeking welcoming resources such as wall displays, photos, and artwork that represent children and families can help to bring their stories into the settings. Classroom journals will also empower children and their families to contribute to the program and the day's happenings.

A place where everyone belongs.

Featured Product :

Peg People of the World

Mindful Spaces

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Featured Product :

Mindful & Co Kids Yoga Flash Cards

Engaging & Inspiring Spaces

It's hard to feel motivated when you're burnt out.

Refreshing your learning environment with a new and exciting project can go a long way in helping to reignite energy and enthusiasm. Light boxes and panels along with light box accessories can add a fun, playful, and inviting element to your learning environment with energy and enthusiasm. They light up the room in the most magical of ways, in turn igniting delight and excitee to learning conversations.

Creating an engaging and inspiring learning environment ensures everyone wants to come back for more. What will happen today? The possibilities for discovery are endless!

Featured Product :

Stockholm Spaces – Round Table & Light Panel

Culturally Meaningful Spaces

Culturally meaningful curriculums in early childhood settings increase opportunities for its community members to feel connected – a place to feel safe and secure, to feel loved, appreciated and valued. A place to belong.

If you're thinking, "This sounds great, but where do I begin?", a good starting point is to have a look around your local community. Who are the people, what are the cultures and backgrounds of its community members (like children and their families, the educators and staff, as well as the wider community at large)?

Then, think about how you can bring in or meaningfully interweave throughout your environment: inside skills, flyers/ads, posters/text/ text, stories and pictures from around the world. Ensure children's books portray the diversity of the world's peoples, perspectives, cultures, and backgrounds. Consider using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Indigenous resources for children to connect with in a daily basis. Invite educators and families to share their cultural backgrounds – learn some keywords and phrases from different languages, learn a song or dance, cook foods from around the world or engage in traditional storytelling.

Featured Product :

Fair Trade Aboriginal Ceremony Matching Game

Purposeful Spaces

Learning spaces that are set up purposefully can bring safety and comfort and a sense of calm to the environment. The physicality of the space (the size, furniture placement etc.) contributes to how the space is used and how it feels to be in it. Spaces can be a mixture of motivated and engaged learners. Create breakaway areas, book corners and home corners or simply direct foot traffic in safe and effective ways.

How can you transform spaces for creative? It might be through using non-fixed furniture pieces that can be easily moved around the room to create and define predictable play spaces. Consider using light boxes and panels, or light boxes and accessories to create inviting and calmer areas within a bustling space, while the number of chairs, cushions and pillows (removable) ensure how many children the space available for at any one time.

Purposeful spaces can also be created by using the outdoor learning environment. Organised and prioritised spaces with a considered selection of material will invite children to develop their skills and interests while interacting in positive ways and achieving learning goals.

Featured Product :

Stockholm Spaces – Circular Low Table

Creative Spaces

With all those big feelings and emotions children are experiencing, spaces in which children can express themselves are important. Creative spaces can be a place for children to explore arts (including painting and drawing, dance, drama, music and movement) all allow children to work through their feelings and emotions by creatively expressing themselves, which is important for their well-being and sense of self.

Providing a space that includes a wide variety of creative materials ensures children have endless opportunities to process what's happening in their world and come to terms with their experiences. A space where children's voice and perspectives are seen and heard.

Creative spaces aren't just for children thought! A selection of art materials in the staff room can provide a space for educators to express their feelings, or even just a place relaxing or for adults can help boost positive feelings or simply take your mind off things.

Featured Product :

Premium Wooden A Sided Easel

Storytelling Spaces

Grab a comfy cushion – it's storytime!

Books that gently and sensitively capture the lived experience of lockdown, such as While We Were Apart, can be a great way to start a conversation about what life was like during lockdown or even changing 'new normal' during the current pandemic. The Fun & Funtastic Book Pack is guaranteed to make children laugh with continuous joy and entertainment, while the Mindfulness Kids Pack will help children to develop mindfulness and resilience in young children's emotional development with just the right touch of imagination.

Whether it's everyday shared reading with the Big Books Mixed Carton or storybooks that delve into specific topics, books are a powerful way for children to explore and process their feelings and emotions, supporting and empowering them to identify and articulate the things they are experiencing.

Multigenerational Spaces

Adult-sized furniture places ensure educators have places to sit safely and comfortably throughout the day, as well as provide welcoming statements for families to participate, connect, and feel valued. Adult-sized furniture provides opportunities for adult conversations, spaces for carers to feed their little ones before setting off, adult-sized armchairs, sofas, chairs and cushions will ensure a humble setting where all the members of the learning community feel comfortable and welcome.

Featured Product :

Aalto – Full Size High Back Armchair

A well thought out learning environment has the power to support the wellbeing of children & their families – and educators too! It can encourage exploration, enquiry and discovery – and ensure that children feel safe, secure, and valued. It can be a place of belonging and connection. It can respond to individuals needs and interests, provide anticipation and excitement, security and comfort, demonstrate cultural diversity and perhaps most importantly – a deep sense of belonging for all.

Thanks for joining us over here at the Modern Teaching Blog today!

About the Author
Penny Gowen is an Early Childhood Teacher who has worked in Early Childhood Education and Care settings around Sydney for 17 years. She has a passion for working in meaningful partnerships with families and communities, providing a responsive and engaging environment for children to learn and grow, and ensuring that children have access to the natural world and all the wake and wonderful experiments growing both inside and outside the classroom. Penny is also known for equipping children with the tools to explore their interests and celebrate the discoveries each day brings.

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