

## Environment: The Third Teacher

### The Role of the Environment

The educational philosophy of Bear Park centres is influenced by Te Whaariki: the early childhood curriculum of New Zealand and the educational approach of Reggio Emilia. One of the strongest messages we have identified from Reggio Emilia, is the important role the environment plays in the life and education of the child; the way that it is seen as a “third teacher”, assisting in the education of the child. As Bear Park educators we strive to ensure our environments are interesting, educational and full of discovery, and therefore believe the centre environment must...

- Be *sensitive* to the child’s age, interests and stage of development, being responsive to the changes of the child.
- Provide numerous *opportunities* for the child to develop their own ideas and theories by being full of *discovery*, with a *richness* of materials presented in an enticing and effective way.
- Offer the child a sense of *belonging* through the visible documentation of learning experiences that the child has been involved in – showing them that these experiences were *meaningful*.



- Be *aesthetically pleasing* and *comfortable* for the child to work within.
- Be *organized* to meet the individuality of each child, which is achieved through careful observation of the child whilst in the environment.
- Be *engaging*, with materials presented in an interesting and provocative way that will *challenge* and extend the child’s understandings, whilst also encouraging imagination and expression.
- Be *inviting* to the child and their families, *encouraging* family involvement and participation and providing various opportunities for *communication* between children, teachers and families.
- Encourage *respect* and *pride* from the community involved in the centre, ensuring the environment remains *clean* and *cared for*.
- Through the *creative* use of space allow opportunity for the child to be part of a group or spend time as an individual on their own.

### Design Characteristics

- *Light, shadow and reflection* – Both natural and artificial light sources are used throughout Bear Park environments to facilitate investigation of the interplay of light and shadows. Reflective surfaces are also used to provoke the investigation of reflection.

- *Transparency* – The provision of areas of transparency within the environment allows for visibility and linking of internal spaces and encourages the sense of community and interconnectedness.

- *Materials* – Bear Park centre environments tend not to be full of toys and equipment with predetermined outcomes. We aim to instead provide a wide range of resources, including natural and recycled materials, which have enormous creative possibilities and encourage the desire to pose questions, experiment, investigate and discover.

- *Flexibility of space* – Both indoor and outdoor environments are designed to be flexible, with the opportunity to adapt the spaces and rooms to best support the children and programme that it currently encompasses. Spaces can be arranged and adapted to support both large groups and small group activities, including spaces for individuals who choose to work on their own.



*“It has been said that the environment should act as a kind of aquarium which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and life-style of the people who live in it.”*

- *Loris Malaguzzi.*

## **Image of a learning environment where.....**

# Children explore and discover

# Children have time to investigate

# Children negotiate with one another

# Children make choices and reasoned decisions

# Children solve problems

# Children's ideas are valued

# Children have time to think

# Children construct theories and hypothesis that lead to deeper understanding and take construction of knowledge