

Top ten tips to de-institutionalising your living, and learning, environment.

ASTUTE EARLY YEARS SPECIALISTS



ENVIRONMENTS FOR LEARNING... AND FOR LIVING IN...

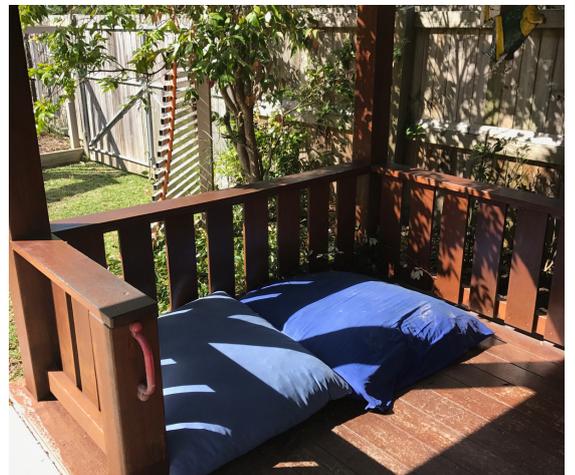
For a long time, when visiting centres and reading their philosophies, nearly all of them stated something to the effect of "We have a welcoming, home like environment" ...but, on reflection, very little within the environment was "home like". It certainly didn't look like my home, and when asking educators to reflect on this statement, many of them agreed. There was nothing in the environment that reflected their homes either. But, what they were talking about was the *feel*. The *feeling* of their environment. The *feeling* that the environment evoked in them, and their children. And digging a bit deeper, they were seeking an environment that fostered the feeling of *being* together of people, be they big or little. For living. And for learning in.

BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT MATTERS, RIGHT? RELATIONSHIPS FIRST.

So, how do we transform our spaces to foster bringing people together & create 'feeling' in our programs?

Here, we share some easy, everyday tips that you can try:

- 1. Chairs. Big, comfy chairs.** It is kind of stating the obvious, but do you have a comfy, adult sized chair where you can curl up with a child or two to comfort them or read a story? And another story? And still be comfortable?
- 2. Gather interesting objects** that spark joy (Marie Kondo that space!) Not only joy, but interest, curiosity, beauty and surprise.
- 3. Buy furniture and resources that **have character**.** Consider upcycling and recycling furniture. Upcycling furniture can bring character, warmth, interest and that sense of familiarity (from home) that we talk about.
- 4. Choose furnishings of **different textures and surfaces**.** Cane, wicker, plants and flowers, stones, wood, natural fibres, can work to 'soften' spaces, both to touch and visually.



ENVIRONMENTS MATTER...

5. Declutter. Declutter. Declutter. Clear tops of shelves (and place some of those objects of interest in small groupings). Clutter creates a visual noise and is a sensory input - so be very judicious about what you hang from ceilings, on walls and place on shelves. Clutter also creates an energy that can stop one from being comfortable in a space. And relaxing. And being together.

6. Consider lighting - you don't need to fluro's on all the time! Buy some lamps and clean those windows (windows are for looking through, remember? See 9).

7. Be specific about what you hang on walls and why. If it isn't used regularly to reflect on learning with children, then why is it there? (it's their learning environment remember). Create specific places to display documentation, so children, and families, will know where to find it, and change it up often.

8. You don't really **need** all those identical tables do you? Use coffee tables and low floor tables (where you sit at with cushions) to create smaller spaces for more intimate learning experiences.

9. Gaze through your windows...can you see through them, or are you dodging posters, policies and paintings? Windows are for seeing through and for supervision, so clear them up. You'll be surprised how easily this can change your environment.

10. And lastly, position pieces of furniture and items of interest so they naturally draw your eye - ensure they are not raising the "here I am...over here...📍📍" flag.

These are just some quick tips to assist in creating spaces where people, big and little, want to spend time. **Together.**

For living in. And for learning in.



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