Environments Affect Behavior

Look at these photos of school-age environments. Answer the questions that follow.

What messages (positive and negative) does this environment send to the children and youth in it?

Possible positive messages:

- You can have fun here.
- You can express yourself here.

Possible negative messages:

- You cannot be by yourself here even when you want to.
- You cannot trust what happens here.

What behaviors (positive and negative) would you expect to see in this environment?

Possible positive behaviors:

- Smiling, laughing
- Active play, children and youth working together

Possible negative behaviors:
• Yelling, screaming, crying
• Pushing, shoving

What might children and youth feel in this environment? How does this space help or hurt school-age children’s ability to meet their own physical and psychological needs for privacy, organization, personal space, and ability to move around? How might this ability (or inability) to meet these personal needs affect children and youth’s emotions?

School-age children in this environment might feel excited, happy, frustrated, or overwhelmed. Although there are a lot of opportunities for fun and active play in this environment, it might be difficult to move around and there is no space for children and youth to be by themselves. The messiness and disorganization of the environment might make children and youth feel like they do not know what to expect and cannot predict what will happen next. This could create stress for children, and as a result they may act more aggressive with each other and with their teachers.

What messages (positive and negative) does this environment send to the children and youth in it?
Possible positive messages:

- You can trust what happens here.
- You can be by yourself here when you want to.

Possible negative messages:

- You cannot express yourself here.
- You cannot do things on your own here.

What behaviors (positive and negative) would you expect to see in this environment?

Possible positive behaviors:

- Quiet play
- Attentive listening

Possible negative behaviors:

- Crying, whining
- Running, wild behavior due to boredom

What might children and youth feel in this environment? How does this space help or hurt school-age children’s ability to meet their own physical and psychological needs for privacy, organization, personal space, and ability to move around? How does this ability (or inability) to meet these personal needs affect children and youth’s emotions?

Children and youth in this environment may feel calm and content, but also frustrated and constrained. The environment is well-organized, implying that there are predictable routines and that children will know what to expect in the program. However, the environment has a cold, impersonal feel. It is more adult- than child-centered. There appear to be few opportunities for children and youth to access materials and toys on their own without adult assistance and the materials do not meet the needs and developmental level of the wide age-span in most school-age programs (e.g., ages 5 to 12). The absence of pictures of family and friends, children’s artwork on the walls, and other home-like touches may make school-age children feel like they cannot express themselves fully in this environment.
How are these school-age environments similar to or different from the first two environments?

These environments are fun and provides many opportunities for play, like the first environment, but it is also well-organized like the second environment. These environments are more home-like than either of the first two environments.

What messages do these environment send to the children and youth in it?

These environments sends a lot of positive messages to children, including:

- You can trust what happens here.
- You can be by yourself here when you want to.
- You can have fun here.
- You can express yourself here.

What behaviors would you expect to see in these environments?

This environment should encourage numerous positive behaviors, such as:

- Attentive listening
- Smiling, laughing
- Active, engaged but not wild, play
- Children and youth working together
- Development of autonomy (children and youth doing things on their own)

What might children and youth feel in these environments? How do these spaces help or hurt school-age children’s ability to meet their own physical and psychological needs for privacy, organization, personal space, and ability to move around? How does this ability (or inability) to meet these personal needs affect children and youth’s emotions?
These well-organized environments and the predictable routines that accompany it will help children and youth feel calm and content. The home-like and child-centered aspects of this environment will make the environment seem familiar and will help school-age children feel comfortable expressing themselves and doing things on their own.