Construction of Place - Where We Are Changes How We Are With God
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Introduction

As Gregory of Nyssa explained to Ablabius, God can be known as the Gift Giver, "the chief source of gift"[1]. Humanity experiences God through specific creative acts. By exploring the practical aspects of God's gift of place in the built environments of faith communities, we can have a better understanding of the immense preparation and love unveiled in God's gift of place. Humans are rooted into the earth - all faiths provide an account of the creation of place. The Eternal One's gift of place provides an interconnected home for all. In these creation narratives, the listener is told of the Gift Giver and learns about the One from whom all the created world bubbled forth. Creation is a gift always unfolding and infinitely nourishing to all aspects of the human. The breadth of evidence across multiple disciplines indicates that exposure to creation provides affective benefits such as lessening rumination and anxiety and creating greater resilience to stress[2]; improved cognition[3]; construct an ordered self[4]; and supporting the social self[5].

God's act of attaching people to a particular place is best observed in the use of the phrase Promised Land and not Canaan in the Hebrew Bible's Exodus narrative. Place continues through into the understood world to attach people to cosmic purpose and monumental moments. The early Christian writer Paul continues the theme in Acts 17:26: "…God made us in all our diversity … allowing each culture to have its own time to develop, giving each its own place to live and thrive in its distinct ways"[6]. This gift location ties communities together in the natural world.

The created world includes community - people with whom we carry story and celebrate purpose. Place presents the community with language, history, and identity interpret and provide focus and support for our gifts and talents offered to our community's abundant life.

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1 H C Ogle, W Moore, and H A Wilson. 1893. <u>From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</u>, Second Series, Vol. 5. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co. 156.

2 Dzhambov, Angel M., Terry Hartig, Boris Tilov, Victoria Atanasova, Desislava R. Makakova, and Donka D. Dimitrova. 2019. "<u>Residential Greenspace Is Associated with Mental Health via Intertwined Capacity-Building and Capacity-Restoring Pathways.</u>" *Environmental Research* 178.

Schertz, Kathryn E., and Marc G. Berman. 2019. "<u>Understanding Nature and Its Cognitive Benefits.</u>" *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 28 (5): 496–502.

4 Taylor, Anne P., and George Vlastos. 1983. *School Zone: Learning Environments for Children*. 2nd ed. Corralas, NM: School Zone, Inc..

5 Dopko, Raelyne L., Colin A. Capaldi, and John M. Zelenski. 2019. "<u>The Psychological and Social Benefits of a Nature Experience for Children: A Preliminary Investigation.</u>" *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 63: 134–38.

6 Acts 17:26. 2012. *The Voice*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Together we shape portions of the natural world into the built environment. In the Christian faith, humanity is called to model God's creativity. Humanity is called to be hospitable, interactive, interdependent, ongoing, and peaceful. Only in embracing this call can the gift of place support the true plan of god for humanity - "to have life with joy and abundance"[7]. Each pathway to this goal is unique and logic dictates one must be in an ongoing conversation with the Creator about joy and abundance within their particular context if conversation is to have any lasting relevance or impact. Educators have a mandate to assist those in their care as pathways are discovered to strengthen deep conversations with God and support their joy their place.

As educators, we have a mandate to assist those in our care to discover their pathway for deep conversations with God and support their joy in the Gift of Place. Historically, one of the major goals of the Protestant branch of Christianity has been the doctrinal education of the believer. Sermons, Sunday schools, Bible studies, and church camps exhort participants to "salvation" and emphasize a information-based Biblical literacy for discipleship.[8]

Beginning with the emergence of "childhood" in the early nineteenth century[9] [10], Christian denominations have proposed specific approaches to educating children.[11] In the past 150 years, a great deal of time has been spent educating children about Christianity while little time has been spent encouraging exploration and personal or communal reflection with the Creator. Several years ago, an eight year-old child was trying to explain what was different about the Montessori approach to Christian Formation. He finally exclaimed, "Here I have time to think. It's peaceful. I can move around. I can water plants. I can sew. I can talk things over with my friends. I can talk to God and ask questions all by myself. When I'm ready, I can move on." This child was expressing a contentment with Place and the way the curriculum could be engaged.

As there is little research by unbiased sources in regards to best practices in Christian Sunday education of children, it is necessary, to look further afield for research which describes the best practices that take into account place (and temper that by understanding that relationships are formational and not easily quantitative). Cognitive development theorists recognize when an environment of openness to inquiry-based learning occurs, the

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7 John 10:10b. 2012. *The Voice*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

8 Brown, A. A., *A History of Religious Education in Recent Times*. Abingdon Press, 1923, 13.

9 Boylan, A. (1979). "Sunday Schools and Changing Evangelical Views of Children in the 1820s". *Church History*, 48(3), 320-333.

10 Leal, K. Elise. 2018. *"'All Our Children May be Taught of God': Sunday Schools and the Roles of Childhood and Youth in Creating Evangelical Benevolence"*. *Church History* 87 (4): 1056–1090.

11 Knapp, William J. "Professionalizing Religious Education in the Church: The 'New Curriculum Controversy.'" *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 2 (1982): 47–59.

participants understand concepts (as opposed to facts) more fully and are able to abstractly apply the concept to a wide variety of challenges[12]. Growing from the inquiry-based learning paradigm, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory emerged. He proposed that when a person unveils a sense of purpose and meaning this drives further exploration and learning when they enter into "flow" - a period supported by having high levels of control and time for deep concentration[13] [14]. This model requires a built environment that can flex with the child's needs.[15]

Concurrent with the advent of Flow Theory, Drs Taylor and Vlastos published their research pondering how the built and constructed environment effects children's learning[16]. They adamantly stress a need for the reordering of the educator's and administrative understanding so the built environment is understood as the "silent curriculum" supporting the needs of the child at different ages. To do this best, they recognize that children must be collaborators in the core creation and use of the learning environments.

I propose that faith leaders ponder the direct needs of the child in religious formation spaces. Just as one prepares the soil before planting a seed, with the proper balance of nutrients keeping the young plants from starving or being burned. Our environments must take into account a goal beyond imparting facts, doctrine, or moral goodness. How can we create, built, and construct environments where children engage in "flow" and thus more fully engage in conversations with God and the world?

In my branch of Protestant Christianity, children's learning spaces began by modeling themselves after traditional classrooms abutting a central meeting room. This model was call the Acron Model. By 1910 it was being challenged - younger children's teachers began to demand their own purpose built environments. And thus the Department Model began. Children were segregated by age. And even though Herbert Frances Evan was very concerned by the built environment: with calls for an exterior Gothic architecture giving way to sunlit, hygienic, well plastered rooms with beautiful age appropriate art for the youngest children, he was insistent that "outside interruptions must be shut out in every way possible. … If these Junior classes can be shut away from outside noises and sights, efficiency will be

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12 HUSNI, Husni. "The Effect of Inquiry-based Learning on Religious Subjects Learning Activities: An Experimental Study in High Schools". *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, [S.l.], v. 8, n. 1, p. 43-54, June 2020. ISSN 2621-8275.

13 Cisikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). Flow: The psychology of optimal experience. Harper & Row.

14 Cisikszentmihalyi, M.(2014). *Applications of flow in Human development and education*. Springer.

15 Schmidt, J. A. "Flow in Education." International Encyclopedia of Education. Edited by Rob Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye Ercikan, 4th Edition, 605–11. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier Science, 2022.

Taylor, Anne, and Vlastos, George, School Zone, Learning Environments For Children. Albuquerque: (2nd edition) Horizon Communications, 1984.

greatly increased."[17] Over time it was generally agreed that this type of built environment provided little motivation for children to engage in the learning process. So, quite often modern churches have taken another path and created exciting, play-filled environments with few walls, bright colors, and soft furnishings[18]. But does either of these approaches support the flow which helps the child have meaningful conversations with God and their world?

Again let us look further afield and examine innovators in educational pedagogies. Among the best known are Dr. Montessori, Loris Malaguzzi, and Rudolph Stiner. They bucked the idea that children learn best in rigorous, regimented, sterile, efficient, educational environments. They proposed other directions to optimize the child's wonder and understanding of their world. Independently, they recognized the importance of creating spaces where children have high levels of control and time for deep concentration. Malaguzzi sums up their view of the prepared environment well by calling it the "third teacher."[19] Dr. Montessori determined that "the first aim of the prepared environment is, as far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult.[20]" When the child arrives, "a teacher simply assists (the child) at the beginning to get his bearings among so many different things and teaches him the precise use of them, that is to say, she introduces him to the ordered and active life of the environment. … But then she leaves him free in the choice and execution of his work."[21]

To assist in building deep concentration, the environment is designed to encourage slow movement through soft lighting, zones of work divided by low shelving, and attractive materials for the children to want to work with independently and repeatedly. She held that a young child constructs their identity by living within their environment and observing how others interact with it. If this is true then their environment must support not just the child's sense of physical and emotional self, but also the spiritual self as well.

Sofia Cavalletti, a theologian, and Gianna Gobbi, a Montessorian, collaborated for 25 years to create an optimal learning environment for faith formation. They experimented, taking a scientific research approach followed by careful documentation. They used trial and error to see what arrangements, lighting, paints, and furnishings supported the child's personal conversations with God. Educational spaces they argued must be carefully curated and thoughtfully designed to be spaces where children and adults collaboratively live their

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17 Evans, Herbert Francis. "The Sunday-School Building and Its Equipment". *The Biblical World*. 44, no. 3 (1914): 151–224.

18 Theimer, Roger & Heinz, M. "Reinventing Sunday School for the 21st Century". *Religious Product News*. April, 2006.

19 Strong-Wilson, T., & Ellis, J. (2007). "Children and place: Reggio Emilia's environment as third teacher". *Theory into Practice*. 46(1), 40-47.

20 Montessori, Maria. The Secret of Childhood. Orient Blackswan. 1966. 9788125014553. 267

21 Montessori, Maria. The Discovery of the Child. India: Aakar Books, 2004. 166.

religious experiences. Gobbi's observations about the environment always led her back to the internal benchmark expressed by Dr. Montessori: does the environment led to a better "interior dialogue between the child and the true Teacher.[22]"

Each religious education location is contextualized to a group of people, resources, and needs. If educators attempt to "innovate" one plan that works for every location, they have lost sight of the environment as a collaborator. Yet, there are principles through which context brings about unique expressions. If our prepared environments model the Gift of Creation, we will support children in becoming life-long friends with God and the world. Our environments will embody three characteristics: Hospitality, Interactivity, Interdependency.

Hospitable environments take into account the developmental needs of children and goals for their spiritual life before the child even enters the space. This will encourage them to ground into community and enter into the flow state more easily. Two parallel components of hospitality are a perception of safety and sense of peace. Hospitality creates the boundaries for children to explore and question.

For children to have the ability to enter into flow and deepen their engagement in a life-long conversation with God and creation, the built and constructed environment must be interactive. Each child's abilities and gifts are unique; this requires the built environment to be engaged at different levels. The child can find ways to focus energy and reflect on the spiritual insights gleaned with minimized adult assistance. By preparing the environment with flexibility and layers of engagement, the child will question, discover, and respond in ways that were impossible for the adult to anticipate. This supports the child formation of an identity that is separate from the adult and unveils their unique gifts in their Place.

For optimal flow there is an additional layer. This layer involves the child's response to being in a place of hospitality and full acceptance. This is the interdependence that comes from living in community. By living in a community where each person's unique gifts and talents have a Place to flourish, we grow in respect for those different from ourselves, offer support to others, and ask for support ourselves. The built environment must offer space for children to collaboratively care for, enhancement, and nurturing their Place (beginning with the room and expanding into the church and community). With the sense of collective ownership and purpose, each child becomes more resilient and confident in sharing creatively, practically, artistically, emotionally, and intellectually with wider and wider groups. And in this the abundant, joyful purpose for each person in their ever expanding Place can be unveiled.

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22 Montessori, M. Et.al. Ed: Standing, E. M., The Child and the Church. Hillside Education. 18

Survey of Current Research

Safety

The built environment has implications for the physical safety of the child but also contributes to their emotional and psychological safety thus allowing the child to enter into flow. In a time where children are often taught to see the world as a threatening place, the carefully constructed environment can support a child's resilience[23] to this narrative and its deconstruction[24]. There are two approaches to site management. The enclosure model which says that harm can be completely controlled by vigilance and barring people from encountering any dangers. While the encounter model argues that mitigation of all hazards is impossible and an informed community is a part of mitigation of danger. By using a both/and approach religious spaces can be hospitable and inclusive.

Physical safety is key to a child's ability to be able to have the mental capacity to be inquisitive.[25]   Physical safety includes items dictated by the site and building's design, construction materials, utilities, and general maintenance. The following items are following general best practices for schools and civic buildings. An acknowledgement must be made that often retrofitting older and/or historic buildings can be challenging and at times daunting, and creating a general maintenance plane requires the input of many groups[26].

Approach and entrance - Well lit and marked and secured building that allows for the disabled to have uninhibited access are signs of hospitality. In the US, religious organizations do not have to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations, however hospitality dictates that we prepare spaces where all people have equitable access.[27]

Means of Egress - In case of emergencies, having multiple marked paths for exiting a building is crucial. These must be indicated for young children as the symbols involved must be learned.

Fire - Having the proper smoke detectors and fire suppression systems for your building is a must. And these must have regular checks.

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23 Carew, M. B., & Rudy, J. W. (1991). "Multiple functions of context during conditioning: A developmental analysis". *Developmental Psychobiology.* 24, 191-209.

24 Nemeroff, C. B. (2004). "Neurobiological consequences of childhood trauma". *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry.* 65(1), 18-28.

25 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children's Learning and Development: Working Paper No. 9". (2010).

26 Disciples Church Extension Fund. *Planning Guide Church Facility Maintenance*. Indianapolis, IN: Christian Church, 2020.

27 Government , U. (2010). Laws, regulations & standards. *ADA.gov*.

Electrical - An examination of wiring, switch and plug placement, and covering exposed plugs is central to your building's safety[28].

Gas and steam - Certain heating systems like radiators can become very hot and a burn hazard; by covering them with an approved cover, the risk can be lessened.

Plumbing - Plumbing leaks should be addressed quickly to mitigate biohazards, molds, and reduce slips, trips, and falls. Plumbing in historic buildings often contains lead while many drain pipes are iron and corrode over time. When drain pipes fail, sewage exits directly under the building creating a hazards.

Air quality - COVID has taught us quite a lot about how air flows through rooms - or doesn't. We now have a better understanding why installing items - from air purifiers to alarms indicating the buildup of gasses like radon[29] and carbon monoxide[30] which can quickly harm children is important. Mold and mildew are products of humidity and a failure building's integrity. They have complex solutions. An additional hinderance with air quality is off gassing by paints, plastics, and soft furnishings[31]. Biophilic elements added to the room can provide a 10% improvement in air quality and comfort.[32]

Slips, trips, falls - By providing transitional markings, railings, appropriate drainage, maintain appropriate lighting, and improving air flow potential hazards can be lessened[33].

Hazardous materials like lead, asbestos, and long-lived chemicals[34] must be tested for and then professionally mitigated. Painted furnishings should also be tested for lead.

Plants - Maintaining the property to reduce plants with human toxicity or painful thorns is an ongoing part of maintenance. Awareness of pesticide toxins in children's areas is crucial to maintaining both plant and human health[35].

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28 Committee, the WBDG Secure/Safe. "Occupant Safety and Health ." *Whole Building Design Group.* January 13, 2017.

29 Carmona, Richard H. "Surgeon General Releases National Health Advisory on Radon." News Release. January 5, 2005.

30 Adler, Liora C, Ronald Karlin, and Tara Novick, eds. "Carbon Monoxide Poisoning in Children." Nationwide Children's Hospital. April 1, 2022.

31 Adgate, John, Timothy Church, Andrew Ryan, Gurumurthy Ramachandran, and Ann Fredrickson. "Outdoor, Indoor, and Personal Exposure to VOCs in Children." *Environ Health Perspective.* 112, no. 14 (October 2004): 1386–92.

32 Bowman, Clare Louise. "The Biophilic Classroom - The benefits of Nature in a Learning Environment". ResearchGate, June 2019.

33 Committee, the WBDG Secure/Safe. "Occupant Safety and Health". *Whole Building Design Grou*p. January 13, 2017.

34 Committee, the WBDG Secure/Safe. "Occupant Safety and Health". *Whole Building Design Group.* January 13, 2017.

35 Roberts, James R, Catherine Karr, and Council on Environmental Health. "Pesticide Exposure in Children". *Pediatrics.*130, no. 6 (December 2012): e1765–88.

Human Comfort

A child's physical comfort is extremely important to flow and feeling like you are being cared for. The subtle mental stresses required to mitigate for discomfort take away the ability for children to easily enter into flow. For neurodiverse children, these stresses can be exacerbated by sensorial hyperawareness.

Lighting - Daylight positively impacts mood[36], performance, and well-being[37] [38] [39]; the availability of full spectrum light helps reduce eye strain; low glare lighting increases oral reading fluency[40] (often required in religious education settings); LED lighting supports engagement by autistic children. (!!!!). The research on lighting's effect on whole person wellbeing is vast and broad. Updating one's lighting is worth the time and investment.

Environmental noises and acoustics - over the past 35 years a number of carefully designed studies have sought to measure the effects of environmental noises and room acoustics on the child's ability to focus, recall, process, and express discoveries[41] [42]. The lesser focused child excels when there are fewer noises[43]. Doctor Massonnié's recent article *Children's Effortful Control Skills, but Not Their Prosocial Skills, Relate to Their Reactions to Classroom Noise* asserts: "findings are important because they question the assumption that children who are perceived as difficult to engage in schoolwork 'do not care about distractions'—they do particularly care. These children report being more annoyed and easily distracted by

36 Morrow BL, Kanakri SM (2018)."The impact of fluorescent and led lighting on students attitudes and behavior in the classroom". *Advanced Pediatric Resources.* 5:15.

37 Play, Alana, and Amy Williamson. "A Case Study Comparing the Influence of LED and Fluorescent Lighting On ..." *Springer Nature.* January 23, 2018.

38 Wilkins, Arnold, Jennifer Vetch, and Brad Lehman. "LED Lighting Flicker and Potential Health Concerns: IEEE Standard ..." *Northeastern University.* 2010.

39 Allen Panahi "The health risks associated with energy efficient fluorescent, LEDs, and artificial lighting", *Proc. SPIE 9202, Photonics Applications for Aviation, Aerospace, Commercial, and Harsh Environments.* V, 92020K (5 September 2014).

40 Mott, M S, A Walden, and D H Robinson. "Illuminating the Effects of Dynamic Lighting on Student Learning." *SAGE Open* 2, no. 2 (April 2012).

41 Goswami, Biswaijit, Yamin Hassan, and Arup JD Sarma. "The Effects of Noise on Students at School: A Review." *International Journal of Latest Engineering and Management Research (IJLEMR).* 3, no. 1 (January 2018): 43–45.

42 Massonnié, Jessica, Philippe Frasseto, Denis Mareschal, and Natasha Z. Kirkham. "Learning in Noisy Classrooms: Children's Reports of Annoyance and Distraction from Noise Are Associated with Individual Differences in Mind-Wandering and Switching Skills." *Environment and Behavior.* 54, no. 1 (2020): 58–88.

43 Jessica Massonnié et al. "Children's Effortful Control Skills, but Not Their Prosocial Skills, Relate to Their Reactions to Classroom Noise". *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.* (2022).

noise. The danger is that these children who are already being labeled as less focused will face a downward spiral if noise levels in classrooms are not controlled."[44]

Furnishings – Having flexible seating[45] [46], correctly sized chairs, desks, and shelves positively affects the perception of teachers as caring. It also positively affect concentration. When the child's anthropometric needs are taken into account, an improvement of posture is immediate, higher focus (as measured by less distractive behavior and lengthened attention span) are demonstrated.[47]

Biophilic Elements – There is a resounding amount of evidence that living things, particularly plants, aid in positive perceptions of one's quality of life, better perceptions of the built environment, and enhance focus and attention to detail[48] [49] [50] [51].

Temperature – This often goes hand in hand with Air Quality but can be challenging to dial in. Children's optimal temperatures are not the adult's.[52] [53] [54]

44 Massonnié, Jessica, Philippe Frasseto, Terry Ng-Knight, Katie Gilligan-Lee, Natasha Kirkham, and Denis Mareschal. "Children's Effortful Control Skills, but Not Their Prosocial Skills, Relate to Their Reactions to Classroom Noise." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.* 19, no. 14 (2022): 8815.

45 Attai, Shanna L., Jorge C. Reyes, John L. Davis, Judy York, Kerri Ranney, and Truell W. Hyde. "Investigating the Impact of Flexible Furniture in the Elementary Classroom." *Learning Environments Research.* 24, no. 2 (2020): 153–67.

46 Kariippanon, Katharina E., Dylan P. Cliff, Sarah L. Lancaster, Anthony D. Okely, and Anne-Maree Parrish. "Perceived Interplay between Flexible Learning Spaces and Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing." *Learning Environments Research.* 21, no. 3 (2017): 301–20.

47 Castellucci, H. I., P. M. Arezes, J. F. Molenbroek, R. de Bruin, and C. Viviani. "The Influence of School Furniture on Students' Performance and Physical Responses: Results of a Systematic Review." *Ergonomics.* 60, no. 1 (April 18, 2016): 93–110.

48 Bogerd, Nicole van den, S. Coosje Dijkstra, Karin Tanja-Dijkstra, Michiel R. de Boer, Jacob C. Seidell, Sander L. Koole, and Jolanda Maas. "Greening the Classroom: Three Field Experiments on the Effects of Indoor Nature on Students' Attention, Well-Being, and Perceived Environmental Quality". *Building and Environment.* 171 (2020): 106675.

49 Han, Ke-Tsung. "Influence of Limitedly Visible Leafy Indoor Plants on the Psychology, Behavior, and Health of Students at a Junior High School in Taiwan." *Environment and Behavior.* 41, no. 5 (2008): 658–92.

50 Bowman, Clare Louise. "The Biophilic Classroom - The Benefits of Nature in a Learning Environment…". *Sustainable Building Performance Analysis and Design.*

51 Browining, William, Catherine Ryan, and Joseph Clancy. *Publication 14: Patterns of Biophilic Design.* New York, New York: Terrapin Bright Green LLC, 2014.

52 Bluyssen, Philomena M, Dadi Zhang, Stanley Kurvers, Marjolein Overtoom, and Marco Ortiz-Sanchez. "Self-Reported Health and Comfort of School Children in 54 Classrooms of 21 Dutch School Buildings". *Building and Environment.* 138 (June 15, 2018): 106–23. 10.

53 Wargocki, Pawel & Porras-Salazar, Jose & Contreras, Sergio. (2019). "The relationship between classroom temperature and children's performance in school". *Building and Environment.* 157.

54 Mendell, M. J., and G. A. Heath. "Do Indoor Pollutants and Thermal Conditions in Schools Influence Student Performance? A Critical Review of the Literature". *Indoor Air.* 15, no. 1 (2005): 27–52.

<u>Smells</u> - scent is tied to emotion and memory. Scent is an extremely powerful sense until around age 12 when sight becomes more dominant and olfactory skills are mature[55]. So it is important to set scent memories that evoke calm, joy, and love. This is very much tied to Place and community. Certain scents affect learning positively[56] and focus can be encouraged.

Quite often when religious organizations set up children's spaces the first layer of safety is considered, then children have their core physical needs met. However, the second layer of comfort is not as heavily considered. One of the challenging aspects of hospitality is that it is a hidden layer. When this layer of is done well, it is all but invisible. By observing children in the built environment, we can better ponder their joys and challenges and create the infrastructure for them to construct the Place where they can ponder and practice the abundant life in Christ.

When we begin to layer other factors onto a safe, comfortable built environment, we move beyond simple hospitality into nurturing the child's covenantal purpose. The child and the Teacher can begin to unveil what gifts and talents are waiting to be nurtured. The interactive nature of the environment takes into account the values the faith community wants to communicate and encourages the child to begin to embody them through the lens of their own unique life. Before this piece of the environment an be opened to the child, the community needs to ponder: What is it that our faith tradition particularly celebrates? What will help our children grow an understanding for and desire to pass on these qualities. By placing these answers within a series of guiding questions, we can answer in specific way honoring the contextualization that each built environment must embody.

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55 Schaal, Benoist. "<u>Olfaction in Infants and Children: Developmental and Functional Perspectives</u>." *Chemical Senses.* 13, no. 2 (June 1988): 145–90.

56 Choa, Narae, Toshio Yamanaka, and et. al. "Impact of Indoor Aroma on Students' Mood and Learning Performance." *Building and Environment.* 214 (April 15, 2022).

The Self-Construction of the Child Within Place

1. *Is there a prayer table?*
    1. Visually central prayer table encourages the child to come and interact with it by setting up the table, singing their own songs, pondering an image, sitting meditatively, and even curling up and resting. The is the visual reminder that this place is a place of conversation with God.

    2. Maintaining a simple, low table with a nearby shelf for items is core. It should be something that a family could create in their own home.

2. *Is the built environment beautiful?*
    1. Are there many natural materials? To celebrate the Gift of Creation, natural materials and textures are widely used - particularly those created within your faith community. These call for child to touch, interact, and know the creator. In *Inspiring Spaces for Young Children,* Jessica DeViney and her coauthors assert: "Incorporating natural elements inside the four walls of your classroom can effortlessly transport children into a world of beauty. Not only does nature provide an infinite supply of sensory experiences that can be integrated into all learning domains, it conveys a sense of calmness and tranquility for both children and adults."[57] [58]

3. *Is it Nurturing?*
    1. Do the wall and rug colors support the materials? The color choices in the environment point to the items in the room - not compete with them. This allows the child to navigate the room, understand its layout, and manage their needs without being overwhelmed. Color science is conclusive (so much so that advertisers bank millions of dollars on it); color choices effect energy, mood, and focus[59].

    2. Is there a simplicity of focus and an organization of items? To provide the child with a sense of control which leads to flow, each item from cleaning to prayer supports have a organized location. overwhelm the child. This initiates a path for the child's desire to continue to explore ideas often past when adults believe they are capable.[60]

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57 DeViney, Jessica. Inspiring spaces for young children. Silver Spring, Mar., MD: Gryphon House, 2010.

58 Yeh, Chin-Wen, Shih-Han Hung, and Chun-Yen Chang. "The Influence of Natural Environments on Creativity." *Frontiers in Psychiatry.* 13 (July 27, 2022).

59 Stern-Ellran, Keren, Sigal Zilcha-Mano, Rachel Sebba, and Nava Levit Binnun. "*Disruptive Effects of Colorful vs. Non-Colorful Play Area on Structured Play–a Pilot Study with Preschoolers.*" Frontiers in Psychology. 7 (2016).

60 Fisher, Anna V., Karrie E. Godwin, and Howard Seltman. "Visual Environment, Attention Allocation, and Learning in Young Children" *Psychological Science.* 25, no. 7 (2014): 1362–70.

The Construction of Place by the Community

1. *Is there flexibility for movement?*
   1. Is there a collaboration zone? Group work space allow for ideas to mix and interconnection to occur. Strengths are able to be shared and difficulties are able to be cared for by community.[61]
   2. Are there personal work zones and quiet nooks? Nook areas and quiet work spaces allow children to work on self-regulation and provide boundaries for others to learn how to give space.[62]
   3. Is there freedom of movement throughout the environment which encourages community, collaboration of ideas, and communal other-oriented empathy.[63] [64]

2. *Is it representative of the Place?*
   1. Do the room's art and teaching tools represent the core values of the worshiping community distilled for the child?[65]
   2. Are the art, books, music, and furnishings representative of the whole community?
   3. Who, from the wider community, is not represented in the room?

3. *Are there plants and/or animals?*
   1. Children benefit from the hospitable act of having biophilic elements in their built environment. Plants and animals create a path for the child to see nature as something to be cared for and part of a conversation with God.
   2. Plants and animals allow for deeper connection with Place and the responsibilities we share in its care and development. Although there is little quantitative research with animals in classrooms, there is a great deal of research on emotional health and service animals.[66] [67] [68]

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61 Wright, Sara N. "Flexible Seating in the Classroom." Thesis, DeWitt Library Commons, 2020.

62 Cole, Kassadie, Kaitlin Schroeder, Mohamed Bataineh, and Adel Al-Bataineh. "Flexible Seating Impact on Classroom Environment." *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology.* 20, no. 2 (April 2021): 62–74.

63 Abramson, Ashley. "Cultivating Empathy." *Monitor on Psychology* 52, no. 8, November 1, 2021.

64 Rands, Melissa L, and Ann M Gansemer-Topf. "The Room Itself Is Active: How Classroom Design Impacts Student Engagement." *Journal of Learning Spaces.* 6, no. 11 (2017): 26–33.

65 House, Anna Swartwood. "The Long History of How Jesus Came to Resemble a White European." *The Conversation*, July 17, 2020.

66 Han, Ke-Tsung. "Influence of Passive versus Active Interaction with Indoor Plants on the Restoration, Behaviour and Knowledge of Students at a Junior High School in Taiwan." *Indoor and Built Environment.* 27, no. 6 (2017): 818–30.

67 Gee, Nancy R., James A. Griffin, and Peggy McCardle. "Human–Animal Interaction Research in School Settings: Current Knowledge and Future Directions". *AERA Open* 3, no. 3 (2017): 233285841772434.

68 Boyer, Wanda. "Using Interactions Between Children and Companion Animals to Build Skills in Self-Regulation and Emotion Regulation." Essay. In *Teaching Compassion: Humane Education in Early Childhood*, edited by Mary Renck Jalongo, 33–47. Dordrecht Neterlands, Netherelands: Springer, 2014.

4. *Is there access to the outside?*
    1. Access to nature grounds the children in Place. The invitation to a wider definition beyond the purely built environment of Place.
    2. As the child grows their interaction with wider community's natural world and built world grows. The natural world helps the child expand their vision for their participation in the abundant joyful life of Christ.
    3. It calls to the way we construct Place. It supports the moral formation of the child by providing group awareness of responsibilities and natural and consequences. The ability for anticipatory patience is further developed in nature.[69]

5. *Can the child maintain it?*
    1. Creating ways so the day-to-day care can be primarily maintained by the community teaches the child that caring for Place is essential and that work is to be shared.
    2. The built and created environment is optimized for the child to maintain - surfaces are uncluttered, cleaning supplies are easily accessible, lessons are given to support proper care, time is offered without judgment for managing spills, cleaning a dusty shelf, and "making the work ready for the next person," and accountability shifts from the adult to the child over time.

The Adult Role in Place

Self-regulated exploration encourages sustained creative responses to lessons, conflict resolution, and prayerful activity. This is supported when the built and created environment's design has been carefully thought through and is rooted in Place. The adult in the children's environment must model how to be and interact with in it. Then the child knows what abundant relationships look like: that conflicts can be overcome (within and without), that boundaries exist and are worth respecting, that an innate skill sparked within them can to turn into practiced talents, and that conversations with God are ongoing with our mouths, minds, hands, and hearts.

When we ponder how the environment enhances learning by allowing the child to enter easily into flow, we realize there is a necessity to create an environment anchored in the needs and growing independence of the child. The adult's role does not end with the creation of the environment. It, like the environment, must morph with the needs of the children; it must adjust to changes in opportunities and external events.

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69 Celia Stendler (1965) The Montessori Method, The Educational Forum, 29:4, 431-435

Conclusion

By imagining the micro-place of the child's formation in its raw physical characteristics, the child's developmental needs and bends, and the communities shared values, then an environment that engages a child's body, soul, mind and strength can be constructed[70]. St. Bonaventure wrote "In the soul's journey to God we must present to ourselves the whole material world as the first mirror through which we may pass over to the Supreme [Artisan]". Creation is a participant in the human's transformation. The gift of place is core to our self-construction.

For the child, the creation of carefully pondered, hospitable, interactive micro-places, is a bit of Eden for them to communally learn to hear the voice of God, practice their gifts and talents, and live in a community of mutual respect. The child entering into flow is wholly absorbed by their interest and the process of discovery. Flow is not a static experience. It is active. It can involve multiple people moving to a goal.

To support flow, the built environment's design must be safe and comfortable, support meaningful whole person skill acquisition from a young age, provide flexibility and adaptability so skills can be practiced, center conversations with the Creator, provide ways for self-directed exploration of developmentally appropriate religious formation lessons.
- It must allow the child to surprise us. It must provide ways for the child to learn how to interact with the world through personal conversations with God and thoughtful conversation within community so the values, morals, and ethics of upheld by their faith community can be shared in practical ways.
- It must engage the intellectual curiosity of the child at different developmental levels.
- And it must be interdependent yet not performative so the child's skills have a direction.

Then the plan of God for an abundant joyful life to spread to all humanity is more fully realized and can take deep root in the child and spread lives of creative hospitality and interdependent interaction with all creation.

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70 Barrett, Davies, Zhang, Barrett 2015