I would like to acknowledge this land that we meet on today is traditional lands for the Kaurna people that that I respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

I acknowledge the Kaurna people are the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still important to the living Kaurna people today.

I would also like to acknowledge the educators who have shared photographs of their beautiful learning environments.

Your careful and intentional preparation of a rich context for learning always inspires me!

Thank You!
Our Learning Intentions

• To explore the messages environments convey to those who inhabit them
• To identify guiding principles in designing rich and engaging learning environments
• To think more deeply and critically about the choices we make every day in establishing contexts for learning

The Inspiration of Reggio Emilia

“The Reggio Emilia school environments are noteworthy not only because they are aesthetically and intellectually stimulating, but because they convey a respect for the interests, rights, needs and capacities of those who use that space.”

Rebecca S. New
Hundred Languages of Children, 1998

Why do our Learning Environments need to Change Anyway?

From ‘One Size Fits All’ Education to Personalised Learning

Education IS changing
Powerful Messages

- Who belongs here?
- Do I belong here?
- What is important to the people here?
- How do I behave here?
- Will I like it here?
- Will I feel safe here?
- Will it be fun here?

Powerful Messages

Spaces are put together for a purpose
Imply set of values and beliefs

*What image of the child is implied?*
*What beliefs about learning are implied?*
*What kinds of learning experiences do you imagine will happen?*

“Space has to be a sort of aquarium that mirrors the ideas, values, attitudes, and culture of the people who live within it.”

Loris Malaguzzi
Messages about Learning

What understandings and dispositions about learning do you want your children to develop as they interact with your learning environment?

Learning is...

Institutional Spaces

“Total institutions control space, time (eg: hospital time), privacy, property, relationships, activities, and tend to treat people uniformly as subservient, in the name of health and safety.”

Jim Greenman, “Caring Spaces, Learning Places”, p.64

Guiding Principles

1. Inclusion – belonging and identity
2. Connection to nature
3. Considered use of colour
4. Furnishings and displays that de-institutionalise the space
5. Texture adds depth and warmth
6. Displays make learning visible
“The room needs to live the personality of the children.”

Ellen Manobla
Teacher of Four Year Olds
New York City

“Children need a space that is personalised and meaningful. Therefore, it is important to incorporate elements of their culture, artwork, and interests to give them a sense of belonging and build a symbolic relationship between themselves and the spaces they occupy.”

Deviney, Duncan, Harris, Rody, Rosenberry
“Inspiring Spaces for Young Children”

A Place of Beauty

“sensory-scape of taste and sensibility”

(Jim Greenman, 2001)

• Considered use of colour
• Less commercially produced materials
• Texture, smell, temperature
• Clutter
• Natural light and spot lighting
• Connection to nature
**Nature Deficit Disorder**

“Within the space of a few decades, the way children understand and experience nature has changed radically. The polarity of the relationship has reversed. Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment—but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading.”

*Richard Louv*  
*“Last Child in the Woods”*

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**Beauty of Nature**

- Multiple possibilities
- Softness, depth, line, colour
- Brings life into space
- Sense of calmness and tranquility
- Non-commercial view of beauty

“Nature provides a blank canvas of open-ended opportunities to think, create and investigate.”

*Reggio Children*
What is clutter?

• Things you do not use or love
• Things that are untidy or disorganized
• Too many things in too small a space
• Anything unfinished

(Kingston, 1999: Clear your Clutter with Feng Shui)

How do we clutter?

• Keeping many things just in case they might be useful “one day”
• Holding onto things because somehow our identity is tied to them
• Territorialism, the feeling that someone else might get it if we don’t keep it
• A belief that more is better
• “Scroogeness”

How does clutter interact with our spaces and our work?

• Clutter is derived from “clotter” – to coagulate
• Stuck or blocked energy

“Sorting out your life by sorting your junk results in a tremendous renewal in your life force energy”

Kingston, p. 11
Clutter = Visual Noise

Colour Communicates Tone and Importance

“Visual Noise”

Teacher Inquiry - Colour

- How does colour influence what children do?
- How does colour show what is valued?
- What colours will enable children to create many possibilities?
- How can we reduce the visual noise of our classrooms?
- What do you see when the background is more muted?
- What do we want children and others to see or notice?
Our Learning about Colour

- Less visual noise – helps focus attention on learning experience
- Working with one color or shades of one color:
  - allows us to see potential of materials more clearly
  - Focus on other qualities of the material
  - Easier to make choices
  - Encourages more considered choices as other qualities of the materials are more visible

“If you cannot see at least 75% of the walls and the majority you see (other than children’s work) are brightly coloured, you may have visual clutter.
The impact of this visual clutter results in reducing or eliminating the open white spaces necessary to let your eyes and mind relax. The space becomes visually chaotic.
By significantly reducing the bright colours and pattern clutter, you create a visually tranquil environment for young children.”

DeViney, Duncan, Harris, Rody, Rosenberry
“Inspiring Spaces for Young Children”

“The visual noise creates disharmony in the room.
The connectedness of all these things is what we need to remember...
it’s the colours which visually make a difference, but they make a difference in every way: the way the children are in the room, but also the way we are and we interact in the space too.”

Ned Brand
Teacher of 3 year olds NYC
Tips for Choosing Colours

• Complementary or split complementary on the colour wheel
• Look online and in magazines for latest colour trends – fashion, nature, furnishings, restaurants, artwork...
• Accent colours draw your attention to an object or area
• Limit accent colours to no more than 3 colours

Invitation to Learn

How does the way we store materials influence the learning experience?

How can we present learning experiences to invite, intrigue, provoke and engage?

Think of a person you admire and respect

Imagine they are coming to your home for dinner...

How would you prepare?
What would this preparation tell the person about your values and how you see them?
The Power of Light

- Light changes how we perceive our environment
- Natural light is an energy force
- Artificial light can create mood and ambiance
- Spotlight areas or objects of interest
- Lamps can de-institutionalise spaces by making it more ‘home-like’

Elements of Light

- shadow
- glow
- luminosity
- radiance
- silhouette

A Place to Build Relationships

- Families are welcome
- They understand and can “read” the place
- Display and documentation that keeps families engaged
- How can we bring family identity and culture identity into the space?
- What is important to families?
- How can we communicate this?
**A Community of Caring**

- Supports relationships rather than divides people into spaces
- Familiarity, consistency builds trust
- Connects and gathers people together, indoors and outside
- Places to be alone, for respite from the large group

**ENVIRONMENT**

- visible
- objects
- layout
- communication
- space
- message
- quality
- shape
- thought
- relationship
- Problem solving
- power
- structures
- colour
- detail
- welcoming
- choices