



## Lisa Syrette

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*What has influenced your decisions in planning spaces for children and adults? What were the influences that shaped your spaces and environment?*

Personal philosophy is important in planning spaces. I believe in aesthetics, sustainable practices and homelike spaces. Our image of children has also influenced our decisions. Concepts such as agency, freedom of movement, and seeing children as capable and competent are all factors in decision-making. Added to this is the importance of involving children in decisions, and we did consult with children extensively when planning our outdoor areas.

Staff well-being is important to me. When educators feel valued they give their best. I believe that being, belonging and becoming applies to educators and families as well as children. For a number of years we invested time and resources in improving spaces for children, but hadn't given the same attention to the adult spaces. It was a good opportunity to be reflective about this. Alain de Botton's 'visible signs of tenderness' remains a key concept, and something I refer to often. For us, it means our environments and resources are valued and cared for, and in turn that sends a message to children, families and educators that we value them and care for them.

*What have you found to be the most effective decisions you have made? Who has benefitted and why?*

A number of years ago we had the opportunity to build a new staff space, which means we now have a staff break room and a staff office. The benefits for staff well-being have been enormous. The staffroom is a work-free zone, away from the activity of the centre, so educators feel refreshed after breaks. A separate staff office means that the work of pedagogical planning and documentation is seen as valuable as well.

More recently, we opened our playground so that we have one space that children can share at all times. The change in children's play and relationships has been exciting to watch. Siblings can spend more time together and we have noticed that the morning drop-off rituals are happier as children can be dropped off together. Older children have mentoring and leadership opportunities and we have noticed that children are choosing peers based on shared interests rather than age. Relationships are developing between all educators and all children. I think that the sense of 'team' has developed, and communication between educators has improved as well.

*Have there been any challenges to your decisions?*

The shared outdoor space was challenging for educators. They needed to change the way they viewed supervision and responsibility for children. They also needed to revisit ideas of risk versus hazard and children's agency. Parents had some concerns about access to all areas as well, but we put in place some good communication strategies to ensure that parents were well informed.

*What changes might you make after having lived with the organisation of the environment for a period of time?*

The environment is always evolving. Opening the outside environment has changed our spaces and

our thinking so much we are looking at how we can open up inside. The other challenge I have set is to think about how we can establish our outdoor space so that it doesn't need 'setting up' and 'packing away' every day.

*What would you keep the same and why?*

The one thing I would keep the same in relation to environments is our attitude. While there are things I love about our spaces, our thinking is always evolving and our community is changing regularly. What works for us now may not work in one, two or ten years. So openness to critical reflection in relation to environments is the only thing I wouldn't change.