

Environments for Playful Inquiry: Where do I start?

1-Questions to Ask Yourself:

- What are my intentions for the start of the year? What essential things do I want my students and families to experience as we settle in? How do I want them to feel?
- How do I teach? How do I want to grow as a teacher? How will the environment I create support the teacher I want to be?
- Collect images and words that describe the spaces that inspire me!
- What are my hopes and dreams for my space?
- What do I think my students hope for? How will I find out more about them?
 - Where do students love to be most?
 - Where do they like to be together or alone?
 - What are the spaces used the least or with only adult direction?

- What are the challenges of this space?
- What do I like about it?
- What are my must haves?
- What are my must go's?
- What spaces do I want to add that I don't currently have?
- What spaces am I willing to part with?

2- Potential of Classroom Design as another Teacher in the Room

Our thoughtfulness around the classroom design has the potential to support us, almost like having another teacher in the room! Ideally, students can walk in and no one needs to tell them what is possible here, they can see it simply in how materials and spaces are organized, labeled and arranged in inviting ways!

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- How does my classroom communicate to my students what they can and cannot do in a space?
- When I put the writing materials next to dramatic play what might happen?
- How might my students use the writing materials to enhance their play?

3-Principles of Classroom Design for Playful Inquiry

- Image of the Child/ Children's Voices/Reflect diversity of community
- Flexible Space that can change over time
- Warm and Welcoming: Varying heights/ Textures/Multi Sensory
- Organization: Materials/Routines
- Relational: Agency/Empathy/Collaborative/Group/Individual Work

Where do I see these elements in my classroom already?

Where do I see potential to bring them in?

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4- Make a list of what I have to have and what I am willing to let go of?

- Is there a filing cabinet in my room that I haven't opened in the last few years?
- Do I really need a desk and a kidney table?
- How can tables or spaces in my room serve multiple purposes?
- Where else can I store curriculum materials that I am not using on a daily basis?
- Are there other storage areas where I can keep things that I can rotate in and out of the classroom?
- What materials can I share and rotate with my team?

5- Draw a map of the classroom

- layout what areas I want to include (gathering area/ blocks/ table groups/ small worlds/ maker space/ art studio/ book boxes/ classroom library/ loose parts/ writing/ cozy nooks for 1 or 2/ light table...)
- make difficult decisions about what I do and do not have space for
- feel ok to start small, I don't need to change everything all at once, it's ok to pick one area and go from there

6- Visit [this link](#) for inspiration from a N.Clack K Classroom Makeover.

7- Start moving things around, try things out. I can always change things if something doesn't work once the children arrive

- invite students to give input once they've had a chance to explore the environment
- be open to changing the set up multiple times over the course of the year

"Each time I walk into a classroom, I can choose the place within myself from which my teaching will come, just as I can choose the place within my students toward which my teaching will be aimed. I need not teach from a fearful place: I can teach from my curiosity or hope or empathy or honesty, places that are as real within me as are my fears. I can have fear, but I need not be fear..."

-Parker Palmer