



## Making Meaning of a Flight Core Concept:

# 2.4 Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials and Participation

How might this core concept be explored?

- In a **staff meeting**, to support the program team toward understanding what it means for them to design a responsive environment.
- As part of a **professional learning day**, where educators work together to look at current playroom environments and consider what they might do to increase the responsive design of the playroom.
- As part of a **planning meeting**, to help educators evaluate the environment for meaningful play and learning experiences.

“In an existing environment, it is important to stand back and watch closely as children play. In a space that has ample choice of materials, we can watch for what children actually do with the materials, how they move from one area to another, the types of things they gravitate toward, and the things they ignore. It is important to keep watching and adapting, providing for flexibility, and responding to how the environment is put to use—no matter how unusual the children’s ideas may be”  
(Stacey, 2019, p. 14).



## 1. Observe and document the children's use of the playroom space

Begin with each educator considering each area of the playroom. Make notes about playroom spaces:

- a. that draw many children in
- b. where children experience difficulties or challenges with materials and/or others
- c. where children spend little or no time, leaving the space unused
- d. where children experience joy and collaboration or peaceful alone time

Share your observations with your team members. Just listen to one another and try to avoid judging or problem-solving right away. If ideas arise, you can make note of them, but keep them tentative.

## 2. Gain further insight about what it means to design a responsive environment

As a team, read section 2.4 of *Flight: Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, Participation*. We encourage teams to take turns reading aloud while others follow along. This helps others hear ideas as well as read ideas.

- As you listen and/or read, highlight, or underline words and phrases that stand out for you.
- Once the section is read, share the words or phrases that were highlighted or underlined and explain why. Perhaps it was a word someone hadn't heard before. Perhaps it was a phrase that has meaning. Perhaps it was a phrase someone wanted to come back to.
- As the sharing unfolds, consider having a person record and make note of these words and phrases on a whiteboard or flipchart paper. You may begin to see some common phrases or words appear.
- As a group discuss these ideas. You might search for a definition of a word, or relate a phrase to another experience, or an article you read, or a workshop you attended. The point of the whole group conversation is to make meaning among yourselves. How might you take up and use this concept in your daily practice? How can you consider it in relation to the children and families in your centre? As a group, you may ask questions for further thinking. Not all questions must be answered right away.





### 3. Reflecting on your own playroom spaces

Together, revisit the notes each educator made about the playroom. Decide on a space to begin. It may be a space that everyone had similar observations about, or it may be a space that one person saw differently from the group. For example; a team might decide to look at a space where many children play, such as the block area.

- Read through the reflective questions provided on the final page of this resource. These questions are from 2.4 Responsive Environments.

Think about why the space draws the children’s attention? Select questions that help you to think about the space from the children’s point of view. Because the children are using the space in particular ways, it is important to think about why the space engages them, or not. Consider how they are wanting to use the space; and what messages they are getting from the space about themselves and others.

- In response to the reflective questions think about what you see the children doing, or not doing, as well as what educators are doing, or not doing. The following is a sample of educator ideas about a block area when they thought about the space.



The block area		
Elements	Educators	The Children
Space	This space offers educators and children time to spend together.	<p>I see the children playing with others and materials and persisting to build their creations.</p> <p>I think the block area offers children opportunity to be creative and imaginative.</p> <p>I see children and educators working together in this space.</p>
*Materials		
*Participation		
*Time		

\*The chart to the left illustrates how the reflective questions from Responsive Environments under the subtitle, “Space for play, for alone time, for social play with others, ...” (p. 65) have been used to think about the classroom space further. Look at the reflective questions for the other elements (materials, participation, time) to gain a deeper understanding of this space from the children’s point of view and complete the chart.



## 4. Considering further possibilities

As educators, consider goal(s) for extending the children’s play and learning in this space. For example:

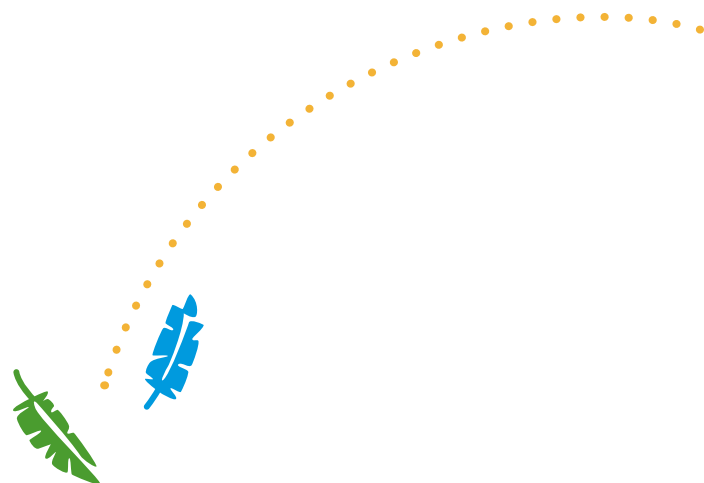
### Goal: Helping children to see themselves, their families and community in their block play.

<b>Space</b>	Be prepared to extend the space so more children can work together.
<b>Materials</b>	Add images of buildings and places from the children’s home experience – like mom’s office and/or their homes.  Add more building materials like boxes and large recycled materials.
<b>Participation</b>	Photograph images of children’s building projects and post for families to see what the children are creating. Initiate conversations with families using these photos as well. Learn from the families about the buildings and structures that captivate them.
<b>Time</b>	Save some of the afternoon building projects at the end of the day so the children can share them with their families at pick up time. This way the children may be able to continue building the next day as well.

## 5. Put the actions into practice and observe what happens

As a team, you might need to adjust, or revisit your plans again. Unexpected results may happen that further the children’s interest in building, and/or community structures and people.

**Note:** A team could decide to look at a different playroom space each week. It may be a space that children are experiencing challenges in, or a space they are enjoying. Remember a responsive environment is always evolving to reflect children’s growing and changing ideas, questions, and interests.



### References:

Makovichuk, L. Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta’s early learning and care framework*. [flightframework.ca](http://flightframework.ca)  
Stacey, S. (2019). *Inquiry-based early learning environments: Creating, supporting, and collaborating*. St. Paul, MN: Readleaf Press.

## 2.4 Responsive Environments - Reflective Questions

### Consider how time is used and organized

- Do the routines of the day dominate? Are your daily routines flexible enough to respond to children, as learners and citizens, to participate in decisions that concern them?
- Are all the routines and transitions necessary for this group of children? Do your routines happen because they have always been done a particular way?
- How do you invite children to be decision-makers in the organization of their daily experiences, routines, and rituals?
- What would happen if “clock time” did not determine your daily experiences? What would happen if your daily routines were determined by children’s internal rhythms?

### Consider how space is organized and designed

- How do the spaces you create for/with children reflect who they are as learners and citizens?
- How do the spaces you create for/with children nurture their playfulness, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring dispositions to learn, in familiar and novel ways?
- How can each child see his or her family and self in the playroom space?
- How do you create spaces for/with children, as individuals and group members, including both healthy and flexible indoor and outdoor spaces? Do they inspire imagination and possibilities?
- How do your playroom spaces support children, families, and educators to share time together or be alone as they wish?

### Consider how materials are selected and presented

- Are your materials for play and learning interesting for and reflective of this group of learners? Are the materials respectful of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions?
- Do the materials and how you offer them invite children to access them independently and use them in a variety of ways? Are materials presented in a thoughtful, clean, beautiful manner and respectful of the natural world?
- Do the materials and how you offer them invite children to explore ideas, thoughts, and feelings by inventing, creating, and/or changing the materials over time and with others?

- Do the materials invite children to engage in a wide range of learning experiences, independently and with others? Can the children:
  - be creative, explore, and represent in meaningful ways?
  - explore, inquire, and create theories and solve problems?
  - build real-world and/or imaginative structures?
  - author, act, direct, and produce personal narratives and stories?
  - collaborate, take turns, share, negotiate, and challenge their ideas with others?
  - learn and practice skills for their learning and development?
- Are the materials you offer to children representative and respectful of their family, social, and cultural practices and traditions and ways of knowing?

### Consider your participation and that of others

- Who are you in the early learning and child care community?
- How do you recognize each child and his or her family within the time, space, and materials?
- How do you help to create opportunities for families and children to participate in decisions that concern them? How do you listen and attend to families and children when they participate?
- How does the environment you have created nurture children as learners, risk takers, and citizens?
- How does the environment communicate value for each family’s social and cultural practices and traditions? In what ways are family, social, and cultural practices and traditions reflected in routines of the day? ...in the child’s play and learning materials?
- How do you recognize and value children’s and families’ personal rituals within daily routines?
- How do your decisions, participation, and communicative practices invite children, their families, and friends to become active participants within this community?

