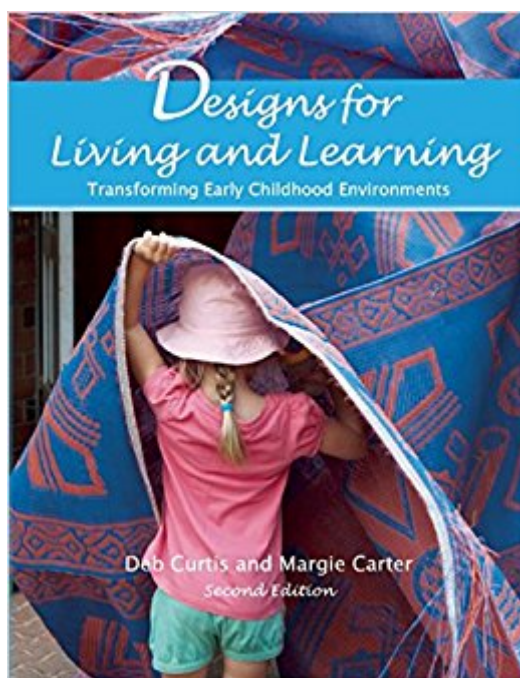


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# Designs For Living And Learning, Second Edition: Transforming Early Childhood Environments



## Synopsis

You likely have dreams for your early childhood environment that are greater than rating scales, regulations, and room arrangements. *Designs for Living and Learning* has been a favorite resource among educators and caregivers for more than a decade, and this new edition is packed with even more ideas that can be used as you create captivating environments that nurture children, families, and staff while supporting children's learning. With hundreds of all-new colorful photographs of real early learning settings and a multitude of simple and practical concepts for creative indoor and outdoor spaces and learning materials, this book truly is a source of inspiration as you learn how to shape welcoming spaces where children can learn and grow. Expanded chapters include new information reflecting current trends and concerns in early childhood, such as the use of repurposed and nontraditional materials, children in the outdoors, alternative ways to think about providing for learning outcomes, facing and overcoming barriers and negotiating change, and the impact of environmental rating scales in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Two new chapters are included, one highlighting the transformations of environments with before and after photos and outlines of the process, and the other with examples of soliciting children's ideas about the environment. Deb Curtis and Margie Carter are internationally acclaimed experts in early childhood. They host three-day institutes and professional development seminars for early childhood professionals; consult with early childhood programs across North America, Australia, and New Zealand; and have written many books together.

## Book Information

Paperback: 360 pages

Publisher: Redleaf Press; 2 edition (December 2, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1605543721

ISBN-13: 978-1605543727

Product Dimensions: 1 x 8.2 x 10.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 68 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #29,522 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #41 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Home Improvement & Design > Decorating & Design > Interior Decorating #46 in Books > Arts & Photography > Decorative Arts & Design > Decorative Arts #121 in Books > Education & Teaching > Schools & Teaching > Early Childhood Education

## Customer Reviews

"Margie and Deb have done a phenomenal job of revising *Designs for Living and Learning* to ensure that the culturally relevant environments being created by paradigm shifting early childhood programs are highlighted. However, the power of their work is not in merely capturing the images that captivate our senses, but rather it is in providing us a window into the intentionality behind these images. It is far too easy to create an environment that is beautiful and aesthetically pleasing, it is harder to create an environment that reflects the unique culture of your early childhood community, one that builds connections for children, strengthens parents understandings of their child's development and pushes the field of Early childhood education forward. Carter and Curtis have not only achieved this balance, they have also made the information accessible through imagery that touches our soul. When we at the Paradigm Project are working to help programs deepen their practice and create environments that draw upon the richness of a school's unique community, we find *Designs for Living and Learning* to be a "go to" resource for us, one that can live on for the teachers and Directors after we leave the school." •Peter Blair, The Paradigm Project Founding Partner, ECE change agent, Lifelong learner and Associate Executive Director Harry and Rose Samson JCC of Milwaukee

"What is a quality experience and environment for young children? The voices of teachers in diverse settings - teachers who involve children in the design process and who design with attention to their own values and the rights of all children - are a powerful resource. Add to their voices the guiding philosophical perspectives and pedagogical approach of Deb Curtis and Margie Carter who engage with teachers around the world and you have this resource - bubbling over with photos and design ideas. New work included in this edition focuses on the professional development experience that can be the heart of transforming your environment. Quality is always a process and never finished. Let Margie and Deb provoke and inspire you on your journey." •Bonnie Neugbaur, Child Care Exchange and World Forum Foundation

"This new edition illuminates how the environment becomes an active agent that helps to shape the living going on inside it: the reader sees that the environment and the life it contains are compellingly inseparable. This is a thoughtful, inspiring, and empowering contribution to the early childhood field." •Carol Anne Wien, York University

"Beautifully constructed to connect to developmental and learning domains with well-conceptualized final chapters answering the questions that all will be asking as they read the book, "how can I do this in my classroom?" and "where will I get the resources?"" •Dr. Deborah J. Cassidy, Professor of Human Development and Family Studies

"*Designs for Living and Learning* not only maintains that children thrive in spaces designed for both; it provides an updated second edition to planning outdoor and indoor environments that nurture children and families. Hundreds of

photos and stories for early childhood programs around the world accompany discussions of the latest early childhood education trends, how to develop a sense of wonder and scientific thinking, and how to arrange and store materials to invite the best responses from kids. With its wealth of facts and fun ideas for environment and play areas, this is a "must" for any involved in early childhood education." •James A. Cox, Editor in Chief, Midwest Book Review

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**Deb Curtis:** Deb Curtis has spent the past 35 years working with children and teachers in early childhood programs, observing and studying children and the teaching and learning process. Along with teaching children, Deb has worked with early childhood educators in college settings, seminars, and institutes all over North America, New Zealand, and Australia. She has been working as a toddler teacher for the past five years and is the coauthor of eight books related to working with young children. Deb holds a master's degree in human development from Pacific Oaks College.**Margie Carter:** Margie Carter has worked in the early childhood field as a teacher, director, college instructor, coach, and consultant for nearly 50 years. She has coauthored eight books and traveled across the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand to present to early childhood professionals. Margie's work challenges early childhood educators and caregivers to expand their thinking about what children, families, and staff deserve in programs. She works to ensure that all quality enhancement efforts are focused on reflection, not just compliance. Margie holds a master's degree in human development from Pacific Oaks College.

This book is my bible for creating any environment for children (home or otherwise). I am a full time preschool teacher who also does counseling and play therapy on the side and I use this book in both professions regularly. The approach of this book is full of ideas that are not only stimulating and engaging in an educational and intellectual sense, but extremely enriching from a mental health standpoint. Children are growing up in a very plastic and digital world and while it is important to introduce and allow them to be a part of that world, what we're doing as a culture is verging more on shallow novelty overload (based on the selfish and lazy needs of adults). This book brings the idea of designing environments back to focusing on curiosity and naturalism which gives children more of

a sense of intellectual control and freedom through creation and peace. I know for some of you I'm starting to sound like a peace loving hippie art teacher, but I assure you when I eat granola, it's usually the unhealthy kind I buy at Walmart (I'm also a dude if that makes a difference). But I care about children, and their mental well being, which is why I strongly recommend this book for any teacher, mental health practitioner, or parent. Personally I think teachers have gone over board by controlling the environments in their classrooms too much. Centers are a good example of this. I think the centers need to be there, but the boundaries need to be permeable. The kids should be able to take the blocks to the dress up area, the book center, the art center...any area they please really because you never know what they may be able to create. For example I used a few of the ideas from this book in my class and I'd put rocks, cut sticks, fabric with different textures, stone tiles, and some potpourri in appropriate centers around the room. In the middle of play time I realized one girl had begun passing out different objects to just about every child in the room. Every child this little girl went to was involved in their own play activity, yet they all said "thank you" when she handed them a rock or random piece of a stick. I watched this go on for about 10 minutes dreading the task that this clean up time was going to entail when all of a sudden the little girl said "Ok everyone, come to the carpet" and they all picked up their random trinkets and sat down on the carpet where she handed them all a piece of fabric. They all placed their 5-6 objects on the fabric and looked through them one at a time, sharing them with one another with so much excitement. It took me awhile but I eventually realized that what they were playing was "birthday party." The little trinkets were the little goodie bags that kids get at their friends parties. This was a group of 20 4 year olds all playing one game, all sharing and cooperating, not to mention originally multi-tasking, and they were doing it with rocks and sticks. It was a fascinating example of the type of creative initiative that children have that we adults lack because of our need for control (only certain toys here, only four per center, timed center times, etc..). I'm positive those children learned more in the 20 minute birthday party they put on than in any similar circle I organized all year. I've had several play scheme's play out like this over the years in both my classroom and in play therapy that don't occur when all of the toys and environment are plastic and punched out from a store bought display. There's something about creating with creation that is different than creating with Playskool (no offense to them, I love their toys). When kids see environments made out of things that they see elsewhere in the world it expands the learning environment beyond the classroom and makes otherwise passive children active constructors of their world. When they see adults creating their environment out of familiar items it makes them feel like they can do the same. It makes them feel connected and we undervalue that aspect of child development. This is what this book is about, and

it's a one of a kind resource. This book is full of pointed advice, great suggestions, and wonderful pictures of different ideas and environments. Some reviews I've read have complained that the ideas are not feasible or don't have explanations as to why you'd put them in a classroom. To those questions I'd say you fear giving up control of your classroom to the children. Let them figure out why the ideas are important, and if the ideas aren't feasible adapt them so they are. This isn't a book full of punch out bulletin board activities. It's a book of open ended ideas designed to encourage a more open minded approach to teaching and environment. The environment should be a second teacher in the room, and if you design the environment for the children with their perspective in mind you're empowering them to use the environment to be their own teachers and in turn be more internally motivated and passionate learners.

I wish there had been more information connecting the pictures of the designs to the reasons behind them. Information about how the different decorating ideas connected to different learning styles or programs--Reggio Emilia, Montessori, special programs for Gifted, Autistic or behaviorally challenged/emotionally handicapped children would have been helpful. A review of any available research on whether or not certain design schemes led to increased learning, decreased behavioral problems, more parental involvement would also have been nice. As it stands, this book is mainly a collection of lovely pictures, ideas, and anecdotal reports from fellow teachers that can inspire you to create a beautiful and comfortable environment for your students. A caveat--many of the designs are lovely--hanging umbrellas from the ceiling, building indoor gazebos, hanging strings of lights, mirrored shelves and tables, etc.--but would never fly, at least in my state, with the fire marshall and early childhood safety inspectors. The book suggests that inspectors can be swayed by a good talking to about the importance of your indoor gazebo to your students' development, but this is not usually the case. I am not permitted, for example, to have paper or wood sticking out more than an inch from the wall, or use any extension cords, or hang anything from the ceiling, and I have a feeling other teachers might run into the same problems. Take the inspiration and run with it, but do so cautiously.

This is a great book. Well-written text and beautiful pictures that make the case for a thoughtful classroom environment. I especially enjoyed the suggestions for getting families involved in the classroom. This would be a great resource for teachers who want to get away from overly "themey" environments and instead create beautiful classroom settings that invite participation and support learning. There are suggestions at the end of each chapter that are helpful and encouraging. This is

a book you can read straight through, or pick up and put down at your convenience. This is a "must read" for any early childhood teacher (or any teacher for that matter).

As a director of a fairly new child development center, I am always looking for new ideas to make our center as comfortable for the children as possible. This book has some wonderful ideas that don't require a lot of money, which is nice because we are always short. It suggests using things you find at yard sales and thrift shops. The advice given does, however require lots of upkeep and adult supervision. It recommends lots of things, such as using lots of natural items in the sensory area like tree bark and rocks and giving the children more freedom to make a mess and explore to their hearts content. This makes it harder on the teachers because there is more clean up and it takes a lot of encouragement on my part to implement these changes, but it is worth it in the end. When the children are happier and have plenty to keep them busy, the teacher's jobs become easier.,

Although I loved the pictures in the book- I am very shocked that they are using pictures from the Children1st school in Durham NC. This school is a home Nursery School near Duke and you are NOT aloud to go visit the school during the week . Only on a Saturday with ut any children!! I went to the see this school in person and thought that the school was not very clean . There are much better schools in Durham to go see like Our Children PlayHouse or The Old Farm School in Chapel Hill.

I really loved the colorful pictures in this book and I would suggest all teachers of preschool and head start centers and child care providers purchase this book as it has great ideas for making activities and environments welcoming and fun for children.

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