

Experiencing The Moment

My friend, Anita wrote me about her adventures of accompanying her five-year-old granddaughter and daughter-in-law to private school enrollment interviews and classroom visits.

Eliana came out of one school interview jumping and twirling around and exclaimed, “That was so much fun!”

A week later at another interview session Eliana was the last to leave the classroom. Her grandmother described Eliana as quiet and contained. After they were in the car, Eliana’s mother asked Eliana about the difference in her reaction to the two different school sessions.

Eliana told her mother and grandmother, “At this school I can put my happiness and joy inside the class.”

“Which school do you like better?” Eliana’s mom asked.

“I like this school because here I can just be myself. This was better.”

Reading Anita’s story made me think. How many times do we misinterpret our children’s excitement as happiness, when in fact it might be exactly the opposite?

“Excitement may not be as satisfying as being where you can feel yourself in the right place of learning,” Anita wrote.

Eliana knew. If we are in the right place at the right time, we experience a deep and quiet contentment, an intense satisfaction.

When we are in a place that doesn’t engage our inner being, we may feel that we are only being entertained. The excitement generated from being thrilled or amused may keep us from being ourselves, from thinking our own thoughts, from making our own decisions.

We may all be able to do something to excite and entertain a child and make them squeal with delight.

It takes a special person to create a place where, as Eliana says, “I can put my happiness and joy inside”.

Creating the right place at the right time requires knowledge of the needs of the people who will be using the space. It requires careful observation of the activities that hold significance. It requires

preparing a place for people to engage in these meaningful activities.

Our fundamental needs can be considered as material and spiritual. Material needs include food, clothing, shelter and protection. Spiritual needs include appreciation of beauty and the arts, and communing with a higher power. Humans have inherent tendencies to be involved in activities, to have a sense of belonging, to feel a sense of growth, to explore, to orient themselves to new circumstances, to create order, to communicate needs and emotions, to use their imaginations, to repeat activities and to strive for perfection. There are many requirements for a place where we can put our joy.

To develop the right space we need to observe the activities of people being served. Perhaps because I love to cook and eat, I think of restaurants when considering environments. Savvy restaurant owners carefully watch the needs and activities of the people they serve. Well-run restaurants take careful note of what dishes their customers enjoy, what music they prefer to listen to, what decorations they appreciate. Fast food restaurants design environments for customers who want to meet the basic need of hunger quickly and inexpensively. Five stars restaurants cater to the need for nourishment, but may focus more attention on the esthetic needs and tendencies of their customers.

Successful restaurateurs plan spaces based on their observations of customer needs and desires. Designers consider table placement, colors, flowers, music, lighting, menus, table service and more to meet customer material and spiritual needs, along with people’s tendencies towards activity, communication, belonging, use of imagination, etc.

The teacher in a vibrant classroom considers the requirements of students in much the same manner as a restaurant manager with his customers—by understanding the fundamental needs of children, by observing children’s activities, and by preparing an environment that supports those needs and actions.

That’s how we can create the right space at the right time, a place for our children to put their joy and happiness inside. A place to experience the moments of their lives.