

Y

oung children are constantly exploring the world, their world of the "here and now", as Lucy Sprague

Mitchell so clearly expresses it in her *Here and Now Story Book*. She touches the core of who and what young children are by observing that the energies of a small child—even through the age of seven—are:

"absorbed in developing a technique of observation and control of his immediate surroundings . . . This process is a precious one and should not be interrupted or confused by the interjection of remote or impersonal material. He still thinks and feels primarily through his own immediate experiences. If this is interfered with he is left without his natural material for experimentation for he can not experiment easily in the world of the intangible. Moreover, for the child the familiar is the interesting" (Lucy Sprague Mitchell, *Here and Now Story Book*, 1948).

As children explore and experience the world, they collect information. The first information is gathered through feeling the soft blanket, hearing the conversation of adults, seeing the mobile which hangs over the crib— through the senses. As the child develops, language and the written word will become tools for experiencing and for collecting information. This collection process is of crucial importance because it will provide the basic data for a child's first concepts of the world and of himself.

At the Bank Street Infant and Family Center our goal is to provide a secure environment to support a child's experiencing, exploring and early ordering of the world. Our environment thus reflects the familiar. Our environment reflects the children and their day-to-day lives.

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By Amy Laura Dombro

Our Room Is It's People



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Our environment reflects the children's "here and now". "Here and now" for very young children is the important people in their lives.

So our room is its people:

A red bandana hangs very deliberately on a low closet door handle so that Charles (15 months) can find it and pull it down for himself. He carries the bandana with him



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wherever he goes. It often becomes part of his peek-a-boo games.

The animal poster in French which Jean's (19 months) parents brought to the Family Center hangs on the bathroom door. Jean speaks both English and French at the Family Center. His languages have become part of our program. He often brings "les autos" to play with. Danny (23 months), an English speaking child, now plays with "totos" too. One afternoon, Jean, Danny and I took a walk in Riverside Park. Jean ran ahead in pursuit of a pigeon. I called for him to stay near us—"Jean, venez-ici pres de nous." Danny called too: "Jean, a rici co po two."

Pictures of children and their families are hung at child level along one wall at the Family Center. We talk often during each day about children's families—the most significant people in the lives of young children. Many of our conversations

take place near the pictures. Some days it is hard for children to say goodbye to their parents. I remember sitting with Lisa (18 months) near the picture of her mommy who had just left to go to the office. I held Lisa, letting her cry and telling her, "Mommy went to the office. She said she will come back here to be with you this afternoon." I then began talking to the picture, telling "Mommy" that Lisa missed her and that we would see her when she came back. Lisa stopped crying and by then was looking at me, catching every word. "Mommy, come back soon," she said. We then told "Mommy" that we were going to the park. Lisa touched the picture lightly and then led me to the door to get her coat because, "we go park."

The orange rattle that Karen (nine months) likes to hold is always kept at the same place. I sat in the rocking chair with Karen who had been crying when I felt a small tap on my arm. Roberto (29 months) was

standing there, reaching over me to hand the rattle to Karen. That afternoon when Roberto's mother came to pick him up, she heard his story about taking care of Karen. "She was sad. I gave her rattle. She was happy."

John's old grey hat, which is very much like the new one he wears everyday, holds a prized place on the dress-up shelf. John, one of the caregivers, overheard George (26 months), who had been walking around the room wearing the grey hat, tell a visitor, "My name is John."

The blue backpack, which Jerry (11 months) often rides in when we take a walk, hangs by the door. Yesterday while getting ready to go outside, I said, "Jerry is coming, too." George (26 months) and Jean (19 months) got to the backpack before I had taken a step towards it.

Our room is its people.