Social Inclusion + Intentional Play
Impacts of the interior environment on children's learning and behaviors.

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to determine which elements within the built environment best support children's educational, physical, and emotional needs. The benefits of child-centered play therapy (CCPT) and social inclusion in educational settings have been found to enhance child development, social interactions and learning. Data for this survey was collected through an online survey with questions that revealed insight on effective learning considerations. Survey results supported the most beneficial design features and desirable play elements within classrooms.

References:

Method
An online survey was open for 32 days and asked participants a sequence of questions using a Likert rating system, multiple choice options, and additional written responses when desired. The questions focused on elements of the built environment to best support children’s educational, physical, and emotional needs.

Procedure
Childcare workers and practitioners in the Midwest region provided an insight on how to foster intentional play and social inclusion within the interior environment.

Subjects
- Early Education Teachers (13)
- Child Therapists (6)
- Childcare Directors (4)
- Childcare Coordinators (3)
- Childcare Site Supervisor (1)
- Health & Safety Specialist (1)
- Childhood Consultant (1)

Results
- 100% of participants reported frequently incorporating play when working with children.
- Access to outdoor spaces (76.67%), natural lighting (43.33%), and flexible/mobile furniture (43.33%) are extremely important design considerations [FIG 1].
- Children most often play with building blocks (40%), play sets (30%), and art projects (6.67%) [FIG 2].
- A majority of respondents strongly agreed that the display of children’s artwork (80%) and the layout of the space (76.67%) are the most influential elements within childrens' educational environments.

Discussion
When working with children, play was considered an important aspect of children's development. Play should be more heavily incorporated within learning environments and children should have a variety of activities to choose from to best support their learning and individual interests. This evidence suggests that natural lighting, flexible/mobile furniture, and neutral colors are extremely important. This evidence also coincides with previous research that access to nature, spatial arrangements, and furniture flexibility have a significant effects of productivity and overall satisfaction.

Future Ideas
- Investigate additional considerations such as modified learning programs and well-being initiatives that are beneficial to children’s learning environments.
- Determine the impact of a more dynamic sample group population in regard to race, culture, geographical location, and occupation.