

Creating Shapes, Shaping Space

How can we create shapes with ourselves and with others? How can we shape our environment? How does our environment shape us? Just as our actions influence our environment, our environment effects our actions. We are part of an interdependent, dynamic eco- and ego-system which constantly forms, destroys, transforms and creates shapes. Our ability to influence our lives and our environment in a healthy manner begins with experiencing this dynamic interplay. We solidify our learning through exploring and learn to shape healthier, happier lives.

Creating Shapes

We make shapes, using our bodies as our medium to create. We make small shapes, big shapes, twisted shapes, pointy shapes, curvaceous spaces, angular shapes, flat shapes, bumpy shapes, round shapes; shapes that melt, shapes that transform. We design the space we inhabit, creating lines, curves, edges and angles. We create negative space, making holes and empty spaces in our shapes. We hold our shapes and move them through space in all different directions. We invent our own shapes as well as copy each others'. We make shapes with others in pairs, trios, groups. Some group shapes migrate through space while maintaining their original shape, others transform as they follow one child's lead. My favorite group shape starts out frozen in space, then melts and transforms one person at a time.

Shaping Space

We draw designs in the air. We paint patterns on the floor. Now our spatial intentions and sense of direction lead our movements. How do we shape our actions and our environment? How do our actions and our environment shape us?

Air Designs

Let's all paint huge circles with our noses in the air. This is fun to do and very interesting to watch. Each child has his or her unique way of organizing this task. Some move mainly from their torsos, twisting right and left; others initiate the movement with their necks, circling with their heads; and yet another ran in circles while looking up to the ceiling. It is interesting to observe how creatively different children organize themselves, according to the directions, their intentions, and their perceptions of themselves in space. We explore each others' solutions, noticing all the different shapes we create.

Floor Patterns

How does our environment shape us? With large shapes taped on the floor, we play lots of games where our actions are defined by the boundaries of the floor shapes. Who can be inside a shape within four counts? How about two counts? One count? Let's see how many counts it takes to get everyone inside one shape. How many counts will it take to have no more than three people in any shape?

What if you can't be inside the shapes? Where can you go?

What if you can't be outside the shapes? We play running games where the children are only "safe" inside the shapes, while the person who is "it" stays outside the shapes and tries to catch the others as they run, scamper, jump from shape to shape. Then we reverse the roles.

Now what if you can't be inside or outside of the shapes?

Who can travel along the outline of a shape?

We invent group games that utilize the boundaries and the open spaces inside and outside of the shapes to provide structure for our play.

We shape our world and our world shapes us. Recognizing our interdependence and experiencing our abilities to influence and shape our environment gives us opportunities to create a world in which we wish to live.

Sonja H. Sutherland