

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DESIGN

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR ELEMENTARY AGED CHILDREN TO LEARN AND THRIVE

THE MONTESSORI METHOD IMPLEMENTING A.R.T. (ATTENTION RESTORATION THEORY).

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FOSTERING A LOVE OF LEARNING

When Kaplan and Kaplan named their studies into childhood development paired with exposure to nature, the Attention Restorative Theory was born. (Kaplan, 1995; 2001)

This simple concept allows for children to use both their voluntary attention (focused, purposeful, cognitive-driven attention) and involuntary attention ("where attention is captured by inherently intriguing or important stimuli"). (Berman, 2008)

The separation of these two are very important for the cognitive and subconscious growth of children, and the Kaplans found that by exposing children to nature, or even scenes of nature in a calm environment, their minds were able to concentrate using their voluntary attention much better.

In many countries around the world, the western methods of rigidity is being broken down for a more holistic method of childhood education, focused on the strength of nurturing the whole child, in lieu of programming the children to use up their cognitive attention in an attempt to not become distracted.



In the following design proposal, I will combine my years of experience as both a licensed educator and well seasoned student to help develop a layout that is beneficial to both the learning environment and students.

By using natural materials in neutral and muted colours, the students are allowed to focus their attention and drift when necessary. I propose an open floor plan, building on the Montessori method of classroom layout for an Upper Elementary (years 4-6) class. There are ample seating areas, both inside and out, and areas for communal gathering and learning as well as quiet areas for solitude. I've included a gender-neutral restroom, kitchen area, and dining table for group meals.

In the reading area, there are age appropriate books in multiple genres, covering many topics and viewpoints. There are many religions, ethnicities, and socio-economic groups represented both in decorative elements and available literature. There are several window seats available, and floor seating options, as well as structured seating around the room.

The sliding doors, double doors, and standard doors and the ample window area makes the room open effortlessly to the outside, and in addition to the garden areas surrounding the building, there is also a covered seating area allowing the students to convene with nature and still be shielded from the sun.

Various types of interior and exterior seating will be available for the students.



The rammed earth floors of the Panyden School's Assembly Hall (Chiang Mai, Thailand) and the Gando Primary School (Gando, Burkina Faso) are cooler than installed wood floors, allowing the students to connect to the earth, even inside their classroom.



This method of conscious connection to the earth is called "grounding" and has been proven to alleviate many symptoms of stress in both children and adults.

By allowing children to experience this freedom within the learning environment has been shown to increase cognition.

NURTURING THE IDEA OF PLAY AS AN IMPORTANT LEARNING TOOL

In many educational environments around the world, both in the developed and developing world, the concept of play as a learning tool is increasingly becoming one of the many methods that facilitators of education assist children in their individual quests for learning.

Often times those times for play come in the out of doors. When both the educators and students are actively engaged in this type of learning, the lessons are enhanced and retained easier.



Gando Primary School, Outdoor seating area



Children in New Zealand on a group hike



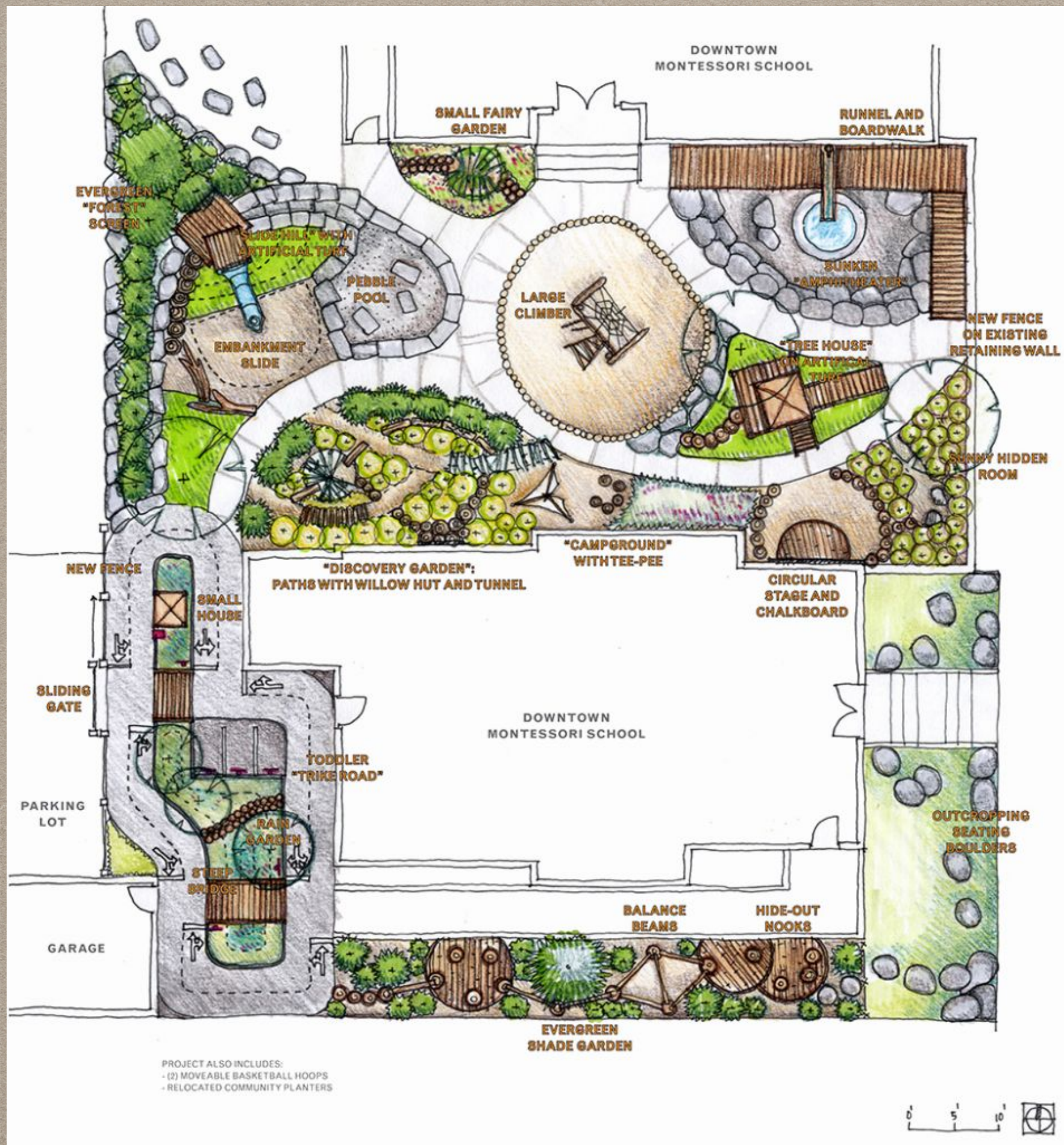
A class at play out of doors in Wisconsin



Outdoor classrooms like these in Scotland (above) and this outdoor learning area in the US (left) are becoming increasingly popular educational settings because of the uptick in studies citing the positive effects of Nature for students' experiential learning.

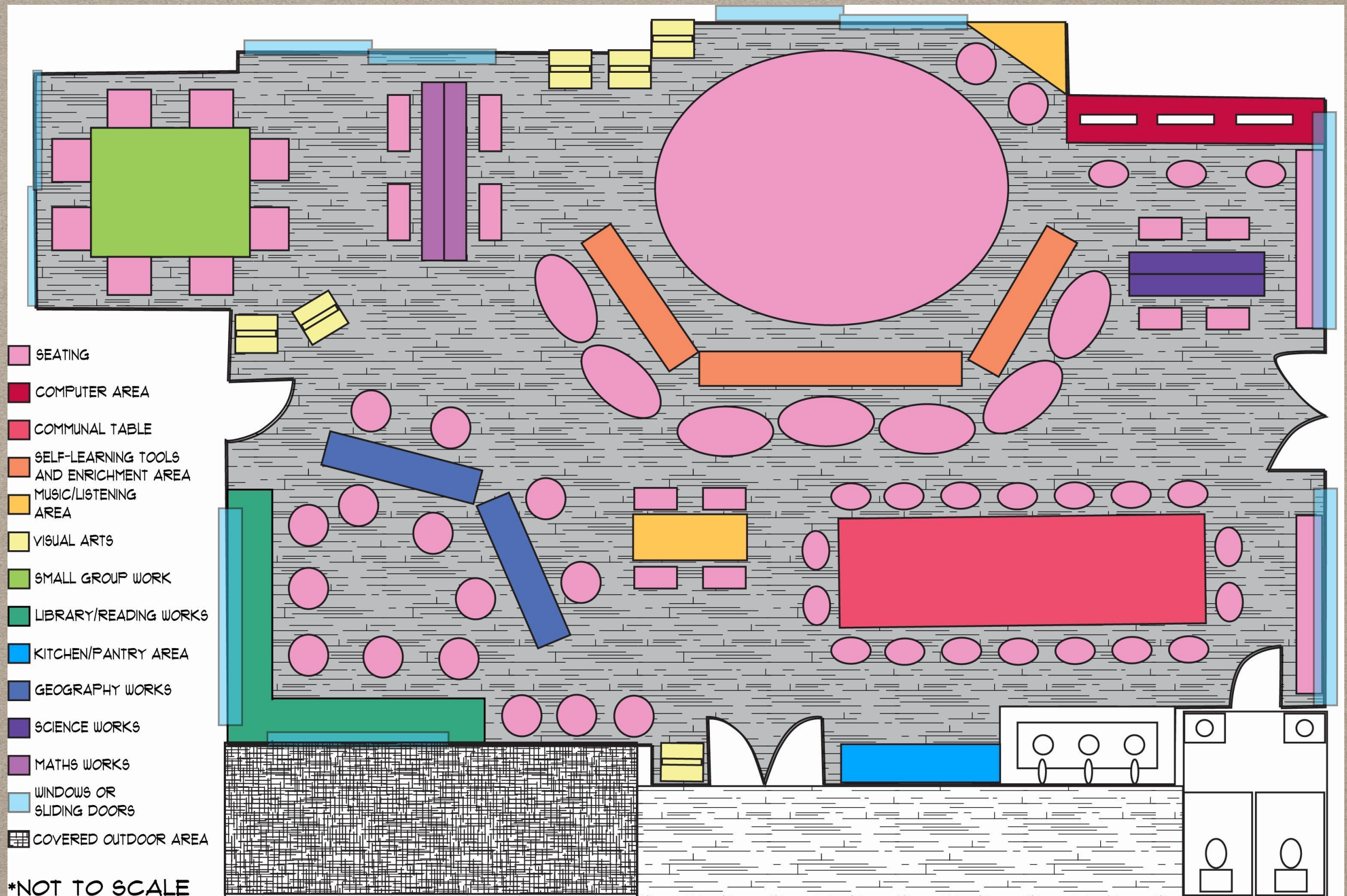


The above photographs are from the "Forest Kindergartens" that are becoming more prevalent across much of northern Europe. Here, the students build confidence and skills that allow them to learn more standardised information with greater ease.



While researching optimal learning environments including exterior areas as well as interior spaces, I stumbled upon this lovely design for a Montessori garden area. The following slide is my design for the interior space.

(Drawing and Landscape Design provided by Site-Design Group in Milwaukee.)



UPPER MONTESSORI CLASSROOM JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

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