

**MODULE 1**  
**BUILDING BLOCKS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION**

# **1.3 DESIGNING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

### **Building Blocks of Primary Education. Designing Learning Environments.**

This OER was developed by the Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia/CONTESSA Consortium co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union under the project number 598756-EPP-1-2018-1-AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP-/CONTESSA.

**Date of publication:** 2021

**Published by:** CONTESSA

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## Introduction

### What is the CONTESSA course?

The CONTESSA course is one of the intellectual outputs of the “Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia” project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union. Its aim is to be a contribution to establishing successful teacher education programs for primary teachers, particularly in Cambodia and Sri Lanka, which will create a long-lasting positive impact on the overall educational systems.

It is increasingly important for successful educators to stay up-to-date with contemporary skills and methods to use inside and outside of the classroom. The CONTESSA course therefore offers five carefully selected modules, each of which contain three focuses aimed at the development of contemporary teaching skills. The modules and their focuses are as follows:

- Module 1. Building Blocks of Primary Education**
1. Twenty-First Century Teaching and Learning
  2. Lesson Planning and Methodological Skills: Concepts, Tools and Application
  3. Designing Learning Environments

**Module 2. Excellence in Teaching: Profession-Specific Competences of Primary School Teachers**

1. Teaching Comprehension: Roles, Tasks and Functions
2. Assessing Learning Results
3. Pedagogical Professionalization

**Module 3: Learner-Centered Primary Education: Enhancing Co-Created Learning Processes**

1. Individual Development and Problem-Solving Skills
2. Lifeworld-References and Future Prospect
3. Self-Determination, Empowerment and Self-Efficacy

**Module 4: Embracing the Differences: Pedagogic Approaches to Diversity, Heterogeneity, Special Needs**

1. Inclusive Pedagogy: Approaches and Strategies
2. Teaching and Learning in Diversity: Preparation, Realization, Assessment
3. Diversity-Sensitive Classroom Management

**Module 5: Digital Teaching and Learning**

1. E-Pedagogy and Digitally Enhanced Learning Environments
2. Digital Media and Technology: Tools and Formats for Educational Purposes
3. Online-Based Lesson Preparation and Conduction

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to implement newly acquired contemporary teaching skills, engage all students in classroom activities and learn new ways to help students reach their full potential.

### Who is the CONTESSA course for?

The “Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia” project aims at promoting contemporary teaching skills for pre-service and in-service teachers working in primary schools. The following document is specifically adapted for pre-service teachers.

Furthermore, the CONTESSA course is available for anyone interested in staying up-to-date with contemporary teaching skills.

This is the English version of the CONTESSA course. Material is also available in Khmer, Sinhala and Tamil.

### What is the structure of the CONTESSA course?

As mentioned before, the CONTESSA course consists of five modules, each worth the equivalent of 3 ECTS. Ideally, the modules are all used together since individual modules refer to other modules, but they are also designed in a way that each one can be used on its own.

Each module contains three thematic focuses and documents are available for each focus. This makes a total of 15 documents available in the CONTESSA course. Each document contains a theoretical introduction to the focus, followed by practice exercises based on the theory. **STEP 1 – THEORY** – is meant as a revision of what has been read in the theoretical introduction. Practice exercises check the comprehension of the text to make sure that the underlying theory has been understood. **STEP 2 – EXPERIENCE** – offers examples of real teachers and how they practically implement the theory explained in the theoretical introduction. These examples are again connected to practice exercises which are meant to allow for the application of the previously learned theoretical knowledge. **STEP 3 – (SELF-) REFLECTION** – includes reflection questions based on each focus. **STEP 4 – PRACTICE** – is the final STEP where a teaching project is created based on what has been seen before in STEPs 1 and 2.

The practice exercises in STEPs 1 and 2 can be directly completed in this document. STEPs 3 and 4 are part of a separate portfolio document which has to be created by each individual. A template for this portfolio is available as a separate document.

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# 1 WHAT IS A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

In order to develop the optimal learning environment for students, it is important to understand what a learning environment is and what its characteristics are:

The learning environment refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. Since students may learn in a wide variety of settings, such as outside-of-school locations and outdoor environments, the term is often used as a more accurate or preferred alternative to classroom, which has more limited and traditional connotations—a room with rows of desks and a chalkboard, for example. The term also encompasses the culture of a school or class—its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another—as well as the ways in which teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning. (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013, online)

Thus, a learning environment is not just a physical location but a space for teaching and learning. In order to ensure a high-quality space, various factors have to be considered. Among these factors are aspects such as social interactions, room design, wall decorations, layout, available resources and policies, among others.

Learning environments are always changing. They evolve according to the educational systems and the goals they prioritize (Ifenthaler, 2012). The traditional learning environment or **teacher-centered** environment still dominates most learning settings. This type of environment focuses on the teacher as the active part, whereas the students are rather passive receivers of the knowledge that is presented by the teacher (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). This type of environment promotes the collective orientation

**Teacher-centered** refers to learning situations in which the teacher asserts control over the material that students study and the ways in which they study it—i.e., when, where, how, and at what pace they learn it. In classes that would be considered teacher-centered, the teacher tends to be the most active person in the room and do most of the talking (e.g., by lecturing, demonstrating concepts, or issuing instructions), while students spend most of their time sitting in desks, listening, taking notes, giving brief answers to questions that the teacher asks or completing assignments and tests. (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014, online)

towards the teacher and is less adaptive to collaboration or interactive learning situations.

The **learner-centered** environment, however, has its focus on the learner. In this type of environment, teachers are aware that every student learns differently and at their own pace. Here the teacher tries to adapt the process of teaching and learning to the individual learner. (Rieber, 2001) The main idea of the learner-centered environment is to give students the opportunity to guide their learning process and contribute to the design of their learning experiences as well as connecting their interests to content they learn in school.

In the learner-centered environment the learner's role and their responsibilities change. This kind of environment requires more effort by the learner but will help them develop new skills in the long run (Doyle, 2008). The following thinking patterns can be useful when creating a learner-centered environment:

- Understanding of how humans learn: Learners are more likely to remember and internalize information if they actively engage in the learning process instead of passively receiving information.
- Preparation for working life: The learner-centered environment requires different methods such as group work and presentations. These methods teach the learner crucial skills such as communicating with others, giving and receiving feedback and public speaking.
- Preparation to become a lifelong learner: The idea is to support the learner to be able to be a self-motivated and independent learner, which will be necessary in their future working life. The reason for this is that the learner-centered environment will provide opportunities to gain skills such as time management and expressing their thoughts in a comprehensible way. This will help them to be able to keep learning even after completing their school education.

**Learner-centered** refers to forms of instruction that, for example, give students opportunities to lead learning activities, participate more actively in discussions, design their own learning projects, explore topics that interest them, and generally contribute to the design of their own course of study. Additionally, learner-centered instruction is often associated with classrooms that feature desks arranged in circles or small groups (rather than rows of desks that face the teacher), with "self-guided" or "self-paced" learning, or with learning experiences that occur outside of traditional classroom settings [...]. (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014, online)



- Preparation for the next step: In order to create a learner-centered environment, it is necessary to make the learner understand the necessity and importance of the contents they are learning. This will motivate them to study and to engage in the learning process. (Bishop, Caston, & King, 2014)

There are many advantages to the learner-centered environment. As mentioned above, this kind of environment might require more effort from the learner, but at the same time it offers them more control over how the learning process takes place. The teaching methods used in a learner-centered environment will foster the ability of self-evaluation as well as effective communication and thereby support lifelong learning (Bishop et al., 2014). Another aspect the learner-centered environment aims for is to help students feel a sense of belonging, develop the ability to trust others, to apply critical thinking and to question. In order to achieve these goals, teachers should contribute to the development and implementation of positive learning environments (Young, 2014).

The checklist below in table 1 can serve as a basis of practical points to consider when creating or evaluating a learning environment to ensure it is learner centered.

**Table 1: Learner-Centered Checklist <sup>1</sup>**

<input type="checkbox"/> A high degree of student engagement can be observed	<input type="checkbox"/> Students have the opportunity to work at their own pace and explore their own interests
<input type="checkbox"/> Students understand what they are learning and why – how it applies to the ‘real world’	<input type="checkbox"/> Students are doing the majority of the work and the talking
<input type="checkbox"/> There is a mixture of individual and group work occurring	<input type="checkbox"/> There are multiple forms of feedback and assessment

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Liebttag (2017, online).

<input type="checkbox"/> Student work (e.g., posters, art pieces, essays) is on display in the classrooms and hallways	<input type="checkbox"/> The instruction, culture and environment include and reflect the diverse students and staff
<input type="checkbox"/> There is a high level of involvement amongst teachers, guardians and community members	<input type="checkbox"/> The physical environment supports and reflects the learning and teaching

## 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A learning environment is a critical component in a student's pathway to educational achievements. Its social, physical, cultural and psychological factors can influence students' learning capabilities. Being placed in a negative learning environment (e.g., stressful, negative comments, lack of interaction with peers and undefined goals) can impair learning and prevent students from focusing, which inhibits their ability to make progress. However, when students are placed in a positive learning environment, they are more likely to make progress. (Young, 2014)

Unfortunately, there are a variety of external factors that can threaten a positive learning environment. In his *Ecological Systems Theory*, Bronfenbrenner (1977) introduces the concept of multiple environments in correlation to child development. The idea of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system consists of layers; namely the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem and the Macrosystem. The Microsystem is the innermost layer and most immediate environment in which children live. The Microsystem includes the home, school or daycare, the child's peer group and the community. The child interacts with family members, classmates, teachers and caregivers. In the Mesosystem the interaction and relationships between the different microsystems are displayed. For example, in the Mesosystem the communication between parents and teachers is displayed. Parents



represent the home as one Microsystem and teachers represent the school as another Microsystem. The Exosystem is the layer where other people's lives can influence the child. This layer does not directly influence the development of the child, but it affects it indirectly through the life and experiences of surrounding people. For example, parents who participated in a specific out-of-school activity in their childhood are likely to suggest the same activity to their child. The last layer, the Macrosystem, consists of the values, beliefs and norms that have an impact on the society in which a child grows up (Vest Ettekal & Mahony, 2017). The results of the interactions between and within these layers influence a child's development. Within the school microsystem, teachers can only directly influence the learning environment at school. By providing enough positive learning experiences, teachers can help counteract negative experiences the student may have had in other parts of their microsystem (Buckler & Castle, 2014).

**Maria Montessori's** approach also puts an emphasis on creating positive learning environments, especially for young learners. The Montessori method is based on the idea that children are naturally eager for knowledge and capable of learning. This capability is enhanced by providing a well-equipped learning environment, well-designed teaching materials and adult observation (Tubaki & Matsuishi, 2008). Another crucial aspect of Montessori's approach are the learning materials. She suggests more practical activities as learning materials. Doing these kinds of activities requires manual as well as intellectual work (Marshall, 2017). Montessori's approach aims to initiate the learner's active search for knowledge rather than passive learning:

Teachers provide environments where students have the freedom and the tools to pursue answers to their own questions. Internal satisfaction drives the child's curiosity and interest and results in joyous learning that is sustainable over a lifetime. (American Montessori Society, 2020, online)

**Maria Montessori** introduced the 'Children's House' in which teachers created an environment to stimulate and provide freedom for children to learn on their own. The 'Children's House' is a garden of child culture. The fundamental principle of the learning environment of Montessori's approach provides the appropriate furniture and

When discussing the benefit of Montessori's method, it is important to keep her focus in mind. A majority of teaching methods nowadays are centered on academic success, whereas Montessori's focus as a psychiatrist lies in the psychological, emotional and intellectual development of a child (Marshall, 2017).

A positive learning environment lays the foundation for a student's success as it encourages active engagement in the learning process. When a student feels appreciated and empowered as a contributor to their own learning environment, they are more likely to engage in learning which promotes progress (Young, 2014). The foundation of Montessori's method lies in the interaction between the teacher, the student and the environment (Marshall, 2017).

learning material  
for young  
children.  
(Montessori,  
1912)

### 3 HOW CAN TEACHERS BUILD POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS?

When attempting to create safe and productive learning environments, teachers are faced with a number of challenges such as problematic behavior from students, lack of teaching materials and resources, or crowded classrooms, in addition to outside of school factors. In order to overcome these challenges and set the scene for a positive and stimulating learning environment, teachers should be equipped with a variety of strategies and resources. They should also be able to identify and address any circumstances that could hinder the creation of a positive learning environment (Banks, 2014). Teachers who create positive learning environments design settings that encourage students to participate, learn, ask questions and make sense of given problems. Learning environments where children feel comfortable, safe and are allowed to make mistakes, enable them to fully exploit their potential (Rieber, 2001).

While different learning environments can vary according to culture and context, the following factors are vital in contributing to an effective learning environment which allows students to achieve their full potential.

### 3.1 Design a Welcoming Learning Environment

The arrangement of the environment (e.g., chairs and desks) can directly impact instruction and interactions. A well-designed environment that feels welcoming is more likely to make students feel comfortable and thereby encourage learning. There is, however, no ‘one size fits all’ approach, and classroom arrangements can be modified depending on the type of instruction being applied. For example, for a group task, which encourages learners to interact with one another, it can be beneficial to set up the desks and chairs in a semicircle. For individual work or taking exams, the teacher can go back to a row set up. However, it is important to consider that students who sit in the back of the room often receive less attention and do not benefit equally from the lesson. This is why this kind of formation should be only used when necessary. The appearance of bright colors and images on the walls are just as important as the arrangement of chairs and desks, resources, and materials that are readily available. Teachers can establish routines in which students are a part of designing, organizing and cleaning up the classroom. Teachers who need to rearrange the space often, can depend on student volunteers to help move furniture around. Including students in the classroom design will help them develop a sense of community. It will also give them a sense of empowerment as they help the teachers maximize instructional time (Banks, 2014).

### 3.2 Set Clear Expectations

Establishing clear and realistic expectations in the learning environment will help students understand how they can succeed in school. Teachers can set

expectations within various areas of the learning environment including setting schedules and developing rules.

Setting a schedule, particularly for younger students, will help everyone – including the teachers – to anticipate what is going to happen during the school day. Teachers should seek input from students on how they would like the schedule to look like by asking for suggestions on activities and time slots that are flexible such as recess or reading time. Teachers should also consider

**The Premack Principle** when creating schedules.

When creating the schedule, the students' attention span should be put into consideration. Depending on the school level and age, the students are assumed to be able to stay focused for 20-30 minutes.

Developing a few definite classroom rules is also a critical step in encouraging positive interactions and setting expectations. At the beginning of the school year, teachers should decide what the classroom rules are. Student should be able to contribute to the rules and give their feedback once the rules are decided. Students should help identify why certain rules are in place, e.g., why it is important to raise your hand before speaking, and they should also discuss the potential consequences of breaking the rules (Banks, 2014).

### 3.3 Establish a Safe and Supportive Culture

Students tend to respond in a more positive way to praise and constructive feedback than to punishment. It can be beneficial to further specify and explain the reason for praise as well as criticism. This means facilitating appropriate teacher-student-interactions is key to making students feel safe and supported in their learning environment. Teachers should make sure they use appropriate vocabulary when communicating with their students. Furthermore, teachers can promote positive behavior by supporting students who tend to display inappropriate behavior to explore more positive behavioral patterns. By providing students with the opportunity to engage in

**The Premack Principle** states that students are more likely to engage in a low probability activity if they know it will be followed by a high probability activity that they enjoy. (Banks, 2014, p. 521)

encouraged behavior, teachers will create learning environments that prompt positive outcomes (Banks, 2014).

Table 2 presents an example of a positive, learner-centered classroom in comparison to a traditional, teacher-centered classroom. The characteristics between the two classrooms are very distinct. The positive learning environment places the emphasis on the students.

### 3.4 Manage the Classroom

Classroom management can be a challenging aspect of teaching, especially for the majority of teachers who are relatively new to the job as they have not been prepared well enough to be able to deal with disruptive student behavior. Therefore, these teachers struggle to maintain control in their classroom. However, being able to maintain control in the classroom is a very important skill teachers need to acquire in order to teach effectively. This teaching skill is also closely related to the students' academic performance. The challenge that untrained teachers may face in this context is most likely due to having been taught ineffective management strategies (Flower, McKenna, & Haring, 2016). "Usually, poor classroom management is at the heart of the worst classrooms. Teachers with poor behavior-management skills end up spending too much time on behavior and not enough on teaching. The classroom becomes unfocused and disruptive for students who might otherwise learn." (The New Teacher Project, 2013, p. 10). A useful tool to improve classroom management is self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is a way of observing and checking one's own professional performance. In order to not lose track of one's overall achievement, a self-monitoring checklist could be used (Oliver, Wehby, & Nelson, 2015). It may also be useful to monitor the students' behavior and its development. The teacher can do so by e.g., keeping an open body position, moving around in the classroom, varying in the way they speak (pace, tone) and gesturing (Stronge, 2018).

*Table 2: Characteristics of a Positive Learning Environment <sup>2</sup>*

	<b>Traditional, Teacher-Centered Classroom Environment</b>	<b>Positive, Learner-Centered Classroom Environment</b>
<b>Relationships</b>	Distant (the teacher addresses students from the front of the classroom with his/her back towards them)	Friendly and warm; The teacher sits next to and smiles at the children, who are seated in a semi-circle
<b>Who is in the classroom?</b>	The teacher and students with quite similar abilities	The teacher, students with a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, and others such as the parent-helper/aid
<b>Seating arrangement</b>	Identical seating arrangements in every classroom (all children seated at desks in rows; girls on one side of the room, boys on the other)	Different seating arrangements, such as girls and boys sitting together on the floor in two circles or sitting together at tables in groups
<b>Learning Materials</b>	Textbook, exercise book, chalkboard for teacher	Variety of materials for all subjects such as math materials made from newspapers, or posters and puppets for language class
<b>Resources</b>	The teacher is interacting with children without using any additional teaching materials	The teacher plans a day in advance for the class; S/he involves the children in bringing learning aids to the class, and these aids do not cost anything
<b>Evaluation</b>	Standard written examinations	Authentic assessment; Observations; Samples of children's work over time such as portfolios

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from UNESCO (2015, p. 24).



## 4 KEY POINTS

- ✓ A learning environment is not just a physical location but any space where teaching and learning occurs.
- ✓ Learner-centered environments (focus on the students) are favorable over teacher-centered environments (focus on the teacher) as they foster critical thinking, effective communication and support lifelong learning.
- ✓ Learner-centered environments are greatly influenced by design. They are often associated with classrooms that feature desks arranged in circles or small groups (rather than rows of desks that face the teacher), with ‘self-guided’ or ‘self-paced’ learning and with learning experiences that occur outside of traditional classroom settings.
- ✓ Students in learner-centered environments have the opportunity to work at their own pace and explore their own interests, do the majority of the speaking, understand what they are learning and why and are highly engaged in their work.
- ✓ A learning environment is a critical component in a student’s pathway to educational achievements, but there are a variety of external factors that can threaten a positive learning environment.
- ✓ In his *Ecological Systems Theory*, Bronfenbrenner introduces the concept of multiple environments in correlation to child development. It consists of layers; namely the Microsystem (home, school, family, classmates), the Mesosystem (relationships between microsystems), the Exosystem (external factors such as the educational and political systems) and the Macrosystem (values, beliefs and norms). Teachers can only directly influence the learning environment at school, but by providing enough positive learning experiences, they can help counteract negative experiences the student may have had in other parts of their microsystem.

- ✓ Maria Montessori's approach is based on the idea that children are naturally eager for knowledge and capable of learning and by creating positive learning environments with well-designed teaching materials, the desire to learn is enhanced.
- ✓ In building positive learning environments, teachers should focus on design (e.g., furniture arrangement, natural light, decorations, colors), setting clear expectations (e.g., schedules, goals, rules) and establishing a safe and supportive culture (e.g., praise, feedback, appropriate language).

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## STEP 1 PRACTICE EXERCISES



### **A Drag and drop the following characteristics into the appropriate category in the chart below:**

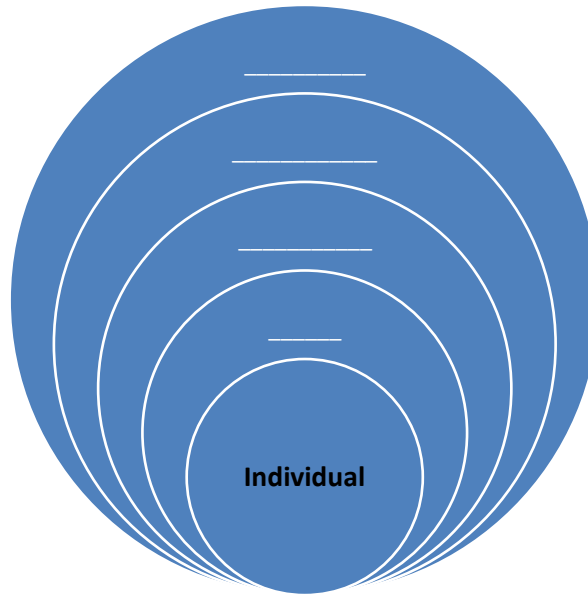
The teacher asserts total control over the material that students study<sup>1</sup> – Students explore their own interests<sup>2</sup> – The teacher dictates the ways in which students study (when, where, how, and at what pace)<sup>3</sup> – The chairs are organized in a small semi-circle<sup>4</sup> – The teacher is the most active person in the classroom<sup>5</sup> – Students work in groups<sup>6</sup> – The teacher does the majority of the talking<sup>7</sup> – Students work at their own pace<sup>8</sup> – There is student work displayed on the walls<sup>9</sup> – Students sit alone at their desks in rows<sup>10</sup> – The students listen, take notes and complete assignments individually<sup>11</sup> – The students do the majority of the talking<sup>12</sup> – The teacher is at the front of the classroom writing on the board<sup>13</sup> – Students engage in learning experiences outside of the classroom<sup>14</sup>

Teacher-Centered Environment	Learner-Centered Environment



**B Complete Bronfenbrenner's ecological system by first labeling the image below with Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem and Macrosystem. Then drag and drop the below people and places into the correct layer in the ecosystem:**

Home – School – Societal Beliefs – Education System – Daycare – Societal Values – Mass Media – Community – Economic System – Peer Group – Family – Teachers – Political System – Societal Norms



**C Answer the multiple-choice questions about the text. There is only ONE correct answer:**

1. A learning environment refers to:
  - a) a classroom that is controlled by the teacher.
  - b) a classroom inside a school.
  - c) all of the rooms and spaces inside a school.
  - d) the diverse physical locations, contexts and cultures in which students learn.
  
2. According to the text, which of the following is NOT a thinking pattern that can be useful for creating a learner-centered environment?
  - a) Understanding of how humans learn
  - b) Understanding of how to apply order and rules
  - c) Preparation for working life
  - d) Preparation to become a lifelong learner

3. According to the Montessori approach, what drives a child's curiosity?
  - a) Receiving good grades
  - b) Making their parents happy
  - c) Internal satisfaction
  - d) Overall academic success
  
4. The foundation of Montessori's method lies in the interaction between
  - a) the teacher, the student and the environment.
  - b) the student, the materials and the environment.
  - c) the teacher, the materials and the student.
  - d) the teacher, the parents and the environment.
  
5. Which of the below is true about welcoming learning environments?
  - a) All learning environments should follow the same model: Chairs and desks should be arranged in small groups and walls should be colorfully decorated.
  - b) Desks and chairs should be organized in rows facing the teacher at the front.
  - c) Desks and chairs should be rearranged daily to keep students interested.
  - d) Desks and chairs should be arranged based on the type of instruction being applied.
  
6. Which of the following states that students are more likely to engage in a low probability activity that they dislike if they know it will be followed by a high probability activity that they enjoy.
  - a) The Premack Principle
  - b) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
  - c) Maria Montessori's approach
  - d) The learner-centered approach
  
7. When creating rules and schedules for the classroom, teachers should:
  - a) ask students for their input and feedback.
  - b) have them completed and displayed on the first day of class.
  - c) align each rule with a respective punishment.
  - d) ensure high probability activities come before low probability activities.



## STEP 1 PRACTICE EXERCISES – SOLUTIONS



### **A Drag and drop the following characteristics into the appropriate category in the chart below:**

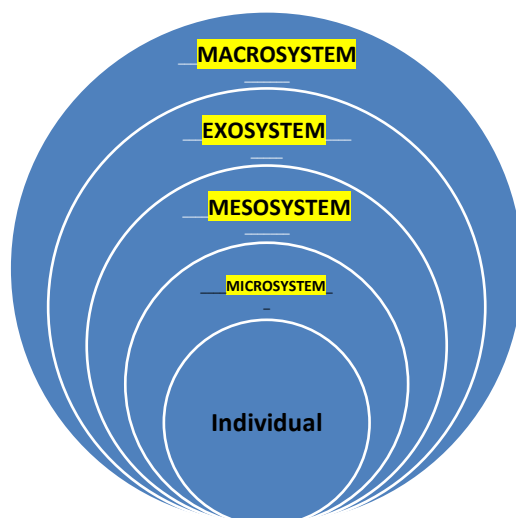
The teacher asserts total control over the material that students study<sup>1</sup> – Students explore their own interests<sup>2</sup> – The teacher dictates the ways in which students study (when, where, how, and at what pace)<sup>3</sup> – The chairs are organized in a small semi-circle<sup>4</sup> – The teacher is the most active person in the classroom<sup>5</sup> – Students work in groups<sup>6</sup> – The teacher does the majority of the talking<sup>7</sup> – Students work at their own pace<sup>8</sup> – There is student work displayed on the walls<sup>9</sup> – Students sit alone at their desks in rows<sup>10</sup> – The students listen, take notes and complete assignments individually<sup>11</sup> – The students do the majority of the talking<sup>12</sup> – The teacher is at the front of the classroom writing on the board<sup>13</sup> – Students engage in learning experiences outside of the classroom<sup>14</sup>

Teacher-Centered Environment	Learner-Centered Environment
1	2
3	4
5	6
7	8
10	9
11	12
13	14



**B Complete Bronfenbrenner's ecological system by first labeling the image below with Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem and Macrosystem. Then drag and drop the below people and places into the correct layer in the ecosystem:**

Home (Microsystem) – School (Microsystem) – Societal Beliefs (Macrosystem) – Education System (Exosystem) – Daycare (Microsystem) – Societal Values (Macrosystem) – Mass Media (Exosystem) – Community (Microsystem) – Economic System (Exosystem) – Peer Group (Mesosystem) – Family (Mesosystem) – Teachers (Mesosystem) – Political System (Exosystem) – Societal Norms (Macrosystem)



**C Answer the multiple-choice questions about the text. There is only ONE correct answer:**

1. A learning environment refers to:
  - a) a classroom that is controlled by the teacher.
  - b) a classroom inside a school.
  - c) all of the rooms and spaces inside a school.
  - d) the diverse physical locations, contexts and cultures in which students learn.
2. According to the text, which of the following is NOT a thinking pattern that can be useful for creating a learner-centered environment?
  - a) Understanding of how humans learn
  - b) Understanding of how to apply order and rules
  - c) Preparation for working life
  - d) Preparation to become a lifelong learner

3. According to the Montessori approach, what drives a child's curiosity?
  - a) Receiving good grades
  - b) Making their parents happy
  - c) Internal satisfaction
  - d) Overall academic success
4. The foundation of Montessori's method lies in the interaction between
  - a) the teacher, the student and the environment.
  - b) the student, the materials and the environment.
  - c) the teacher, the materials and the student.
  - d) the teacher, the parents and the environment.
5. Which of the below is true about welcoming learning environments?
  - a) All learning environments should follow the same model: Chairs and desks should be arranged in small groups and walls should be colorfully decorated.
  - b) Desks and chairs should be organized in rows facing the teacher at the front.
  - c) Desks and chairs should be rearranged daily to keep students interested.
  - d) Desks and chairs should be arranged based on the type of instruction being applied.
6. Which of the following states that students are more likely to engage in a low probability activity that they dislike if they know it will be followed by a high probability activity that they enjoy.
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7. When creating rules and schedules for the classroom, teachers should:
  - a) ask students for their input and feedback.
  - b) have them completed and displayed on the first day of class.
  - c) align each rule with a respective punishment.
  - d) ensure high probability activities come before low probability activities.

## STEP 2 PRACTICE EXERCISES



**A Read the descriptions of classroom A and classroom B. Drag and drop the following characteristics into the appropriate category in the chart below. Characteristics can be assigned to MULTIPLE categories:**

Not applicable<sup>1</sup> – Objects brought in by students<sup>2</sup> – Text book<sup>3</sup> – Desks and benches in rows<sup>4</sup> – Frontal teaching<sup>5</sup> – A parent volunteer<sup>6</sup> – Chalk board<sup>7</sup> – Circle on the floor<sup>8</sup> – Group work<sup>9</sup> – Student engagement<sup>10</sup> – Small groups<sup>11</sup> – Exercise books<sup>12</sup> – Objects from home<sup>13</sup> – Positive oral and visual feedback<sup>14</sup> – High level of involvement amongst students and teacher<sup>15</sup> – Rote learning<sup>16</sup> – Small groups<sup>17</sup> – Newspapers<sup>18</sup> – Separated by gender<sup>19</sup> – Work at their own pace<sup>20</sup> – Students doing majority of work<sup>21</sup> – Chalk<sup>22</sup> – Closed questioning<sup>23</sup>

### Classroom A

Forty primary school students are sitting on wooden benches behind desks with their exercise books open and their pens in their hands. The teacher is copying a story on the chalkboard from the grade 3 textbook, making sure that she writes it exactly as it is written in the textbook. The boys, who are sitting on the right side of the room, copy what the teacher has written into their exercise books. The girls, who are sitting on the left side of the room, wait for the teacher to move so that they can see what she has written and copy it into their exercise books. As she writes, the teacher asks, “Are you copying the story that I am writing?” Everyone answers, “Yes, teacher.”

### Classroom B

Two groups of children are sitting on the floor in two circles. Both groups contain girls and boys. The grade 3 teacher is teaching shapes to the children. In one group, the children are talking about circles. The teacher has shown them some common round objects that she had asked the children to bring from home. The children handle the objects and then work together to make a list of other objects that are circular in shape. In the other group, some of the children are holding rolled up newspapers that look like long sticks. The teacher calls a number, and the child with that number places her stick on the floor in the centre to begin forming a square. One child with hearing difficulties adds her stick to form a triangle and smiles at the teacher. The teacher smiles back at her and says “very good,” making sure that the child can see her lips as she speaks. A parent, who has volunteered to be a classroom helper for a week, pats her on the arm, and then turns to assist a student who is confused about where to place his stick in order to form a new shape.<sup>3</sup>

	Classroom A	Classroom B
<b>Learner-centered elements</b>		
<b>Teacher-centered elements</b>		



<sup>3</sup> Adapted from UNESCO/Booklet One (2015, p. 22).

Seating arrangements		
Learning materials available		
Teacher's resources		
Teacher feedback		



**B Look at the pictures below and drag and drop the characteristics that match each learning environment:**

room to rearrange desks and chairs<sup>1</sup> – sufficient space for the students to move around without disturbing others<sup>2</sup> – sufficient space for children with disabilities to enter and move around the classroom easily<sup>3</sup> – lack of natural light<sup>4</sup> – students' work displayed on the walls<sup>5</sup> – natural light<sup>6</sup> – colorful decorations<sup>7</sup> – identical seating arrangements<sup>8</sup> – varied seating arrangements<sup>9</sup> – instruction focused on front of the classroom<sup>10</sup>

Learning Environments	Characteristics
	
	

Picture Source: Open Source from pixabay.com



**C Read the following tips for creating a positive classroom environment and fill out the chart based on your classroom/future classroom:**

### Organizational Tips

Teachers may find it hard to maintain an organized and stimulating classroom. For this reason, teachers can work with students, parents and community leaders to provide and protect learning materials. Some materials may have to be put away each day in a secure box or cupboard. Teachers can give students the responsibility of putting items away or taking things home and bringing them back the next day. Parents and community members can be encouraged to donate items to the schools that may be useful as learning materials or organizational materials. When parents and community members are actively encouraged to participate in helping teachers organize and schools function, a stronger community is built.

### Library

School libraries are an extremely important resource for students and even entire communities. Unfortunately, many rural communities lack library facilities, thus children do not have access to many books. A class library can be created just by using, for example, a cardboard box that is decorated and then filled with locally made books. When children create their own books, no matter how simply made, they take pride in seeing their story “in print.” They also learn about how books are made, classified, and cared for. Teachers can even have children make “zig zag” books. These books are made from pieces of paper that are folded two or three times, with text on each “page,” like a brochure. The children can illustrate these “books,” and they can become treasured reading materials when few books are available. Books made by children can be very effective teaching aids. The explanations or illustrations that children include in their books may help another child to understand an important concept. Children look at problems in a different way than adults; they use language that is easier to understand; and they may communicate important information successfully, even more so than the teacher. Watch for useful books made by your children! Moreover, books can be used to teach other skills, especially for children who may have difficulty seeing. For example, a book can be made by gluing objects onto pages. A child learns what these objects are by feeling them; for instance, a triangle is pasted onto a page so that children with sight impairments can learn what a triangular shape feels like. Even children who can see well may enjoy creating such “feeling books,” and they can practice using them by closing their eyes. “Feeling posters” that rely on touch rather than sight can also be made and put in display areas.

### Display Areas

Proper displays of teaching aids and children’s work in the classroom will help children take an interest in their learning and feel a sense of belonging to the class. Parents will also be more interested and will better understand the work going on in the classroom. The work of all children should be appropriately displayed to show their unique abilities. Children like to see their names by their work because it makes them feel proud. Change the displays regularly so the children remain interested and to allow each child to have some good work displayed during each term. Work displayed and



then taken down can be used to build children's portfolios for assessment and reflection. An interesting display board can be a good teaching aid, and it will provide a lively focus in the classroom. Display boards can be made from local materials, such as woven palm, with help from the local community. Display boards are important because they give you the opportunity: In East Timor, teachers have used broken umbrellas as a framework for mobiles, with letters of the alphabet, pictures, etc., for reinforcing language activities. String for hanging visual aids is made from woven palm or banana leaves. Traditional glue comes from a fruit. Parents and other caregivers have helped to provide these local materials, and they have found out more about teaching and learning in the process. They are now better able to talk to their children about their learning at school.

### **Space to Write**

In Bangladesh, several chalkboards may be found around the classroom at the children's level, so that they can sit in a group and use the chalkboard for planning, discussing ideas, problem-solving, etc. In some classrooms, the lack of desks and chairs is beneficial. A large learning space, covered with a clean, locally made carpet, can be easily changed from a science investigation space to a drama space, and groups can easily be formed and reformed without disturbing other classes. In a highly populated state in India, the lower wall space is painted black and children use it as their own writing space, drawing and writing with a chalk.

### **Learning Corners**

Children are often curious about the natural world around them. Learning corners can stimulate children's curiosity and improve learning. Children can collect and organize all of the things that interest them, and these resources can be available for use by ALL children. Children may grow seeds in these corners, collect fruits, and display objects they have found, such as seashells. These learning corners should be located in a space where all children can work in these areas without disturbing others. Objects found, labeled, displayed, and used by the children help them to make the link between school, daily life, and the local community. Local craftspeople and musicians can visit the school and talk with children. Perhaps they can leave objects, such as tools and instruments, for children to explore and draw, at least for a short time. Some classrooms are not large enough to have separate corners. In East Timor, parents weave baskets that are stacked on the floor, full of shells, stones, seeds, and anything else that can be used in science and mathematics lessons. The important thing with all of these learning materials is that they are used by the children.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from UNESCO/Booklet Five (2015, p. 229ff.).

Classroom Resource	What resources are needed?	How can these resources be obtained?	How can the children use these resources?
Library			
Multiple writing spaces			
Display board for students' work			
Learning corners			
Organization team			

## References

- UNESCO. (2015). Booklet 1: Becoming an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly environment (ILFE). In: *Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments*. Retrieved from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137522>. ISBN 92-9223-032-8 (Electronic version).
- UNESCO. (2015). Booklet 5: Managing Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Classrooms. In: *Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments*. Retrieved from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137522>. ISBN 92-9223-032-8 (Electronic version).

## STEP 2 PRACTICE EXERCISES – SOLUTIONS



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Two groups of children are sitting on the floor in two circles. Both groups contain girls and boys. The grade 3 teacher is teaching shapes to the children. In one group, the children are talking about circles. The teacher has shown them some common round objects that she had asked the children to bring from home. The children handle the objects and then work together to make a list of other objects that are circular in shape. In the other group, some of the children are holding rolled up newspapers that look like long sticks. The teacher calls a number, and the child with that number places her stick on the floor in the centre to begin forming a square. One child with hearing difficulties adds her stick to form a triangle and smiles at the teacher. The teacher smiles back at her and says “very good,” making sure that the child can see her lips as she speaks. A parent, who has volunteered to be a classroom helper for a week, pats her on the arm, and then turns to assist a student who is confused about where to place his stick in order to form a new shape.<sup>3</sup>

	Classroom A	Classroom B
<b>Learner-centered elements</b>	1	9, 10, 14, 15, 20
<b>Teacher-centered elements</b>	5, 16	1
<b>Seating arrangements</b>	4, 18	8, 11

<b>Learning materials available</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13, 17</b>
<b>Teacher's resources</b>	<b>3, 7, 21</b>	<b>2, 6</b>
<b>Teacher feedback</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>



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room to rearrange desks and chairs<sup>1</sup> – sufficient space for the students to move around without disturbing others<sup>2</sup> – sufficient space for children with disabilities to enter and move around the classroom easily<sup>3</sup> – lack of natural light<sup>4</sup> – students' work displayed on the walls<sup>5</sup> – natural light<sup>6</sup> – colorful decorations<sup>7</sup> – identical seating arrangements<sup>8</sup> – varied seating arrangements<sup>9</sup> – instruction focused on front of the classroom<sup>10</sup>

<b>Learning Environments</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
	<b>1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9</b>
	<b>4, 8, 10</b>

Picture Source: Open Source from pixabay.com



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Classroom Resource	What resources are needed?	How can these resources be obtained?	How can the children use these resources?
Library	Books, places to sit, posters, storage for the books	Children can make their own books and we can ask the community to donate books. We can ask community members to volunteer time to help the children make pillows and a rug out of donated materials. Posters of their favorite stories can be designed by the children and hung up on the walls. Old boxes from the storage room can be decorated and used to store the books.	Children will learn about how books are made, classified, and cared for. They will also interact with the community members who help with the pillows and rug, teaching them not only about the craft but also helping them appreciate the supplies more.
Multiple writing spaces	Chalk board paint, chalk	School budget	Paint the lower wall to match the children's height and give them spaces to draw and do their work apart from at their desk.
Display board for students' work	String	Donated from local factory	Hang student art work in the corner on different lengths of string displayed as a art exhibit or installation piece. Invite parents to visit the "art gallery".
Learning corners	Items from nature: leaves, nuts, soil, branches, rocks	Outside children's school and homes	Create a math learning corner using the items as counting tools.
Organization team	A clean-up crew	Volunteer basis – rotating every week	These students will walk around the room at the end of the day and make sure that everything is put away and ready to begin a new day tomorrow.

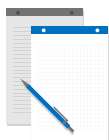
## STEP 3 PORTFOLIO TASK – SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS



**Write essay answers to each of the following self-reflection questions. Each essay answer should be approximately 300-500 words long and answered in a coherent text with full sentences. THESE ESSAY ANSWERS GO INTO YOUR PERSONAL PORTFOLIO!**

1. How would you describe your ideal learning environment?
2. How important do you consider the learning environment for the learning process of students?

## STEP 4 PORTFOLIO TASK – TEACHING PROJECT



**Create your own personal teaching project. Describe the physical layout of your learning environment as chosen in Module 1.1. This portfolio task should be approximately 800-1000 words long. THE TEACHING PROJECT GOES INTO YOUR PERSONAL PORTFOLIO!**

Work in detail on where learning takes place in your concept, what prerequisites are given, how these can be optimized, what cannot be changed, whether the learners can contribute to the design of the learning environment and what different aspects of a 'learning environment' (social etc.) need to be taken into account. What does the learning environment need so that you can activate the learners in the best possible way so that they can achieve the learning objectives? Use the 'Roots' section from the *Planning Tree* (Module 1.2) to help you in your considerations.

Successful educators understand how to incorporate the key elements of high-quality teaching into their classroom. This module serves as a foundation for effective teaching practice to ensure that the core components of primary school teaching are considered when planning, conducting and evaluating learning and teaching processes. Through various cornerstone topics including 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning, lesson planning, and learning environments, you will be asked to reflect on the interdependent process of teaching and learning to successfully achieve the targeted outcomes.

Enjoy!

