Creating a Social Environment

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Design is usually thought of as a creative process that leads us to an aesthetically pleasing solution. This is true for most all design; however, sometimes we are forced to think about more than just the overall look of a space. To design a residential facility for children and young adults who are deaf and/or blind we must find another approach. We know that a child’s environment can be extremely powerful in defining how that child perceives the world (Stine, 1997). Communication is one way that the surrounding environment can influence a child’s growth. However, communication is one of the major challenges faced by people who are deaf-blind, because they have limited access to social cues (Correa-Torres, 2008). In experiencing a diminished access to observing and imitating communication behaviors and patterns, many of these deaf-blind children fall towards a risk of “learned helplessness” (Grimmet, Parker, Summers, 2008). These children have the basic needs for companionship and emotional support as other children, and these are best met through the facilitation of peer interaction (Correa-Torress, 2008). As designers, we need to use a design strategy that integrates some public spaces and semi-private spaces to help promote and facilitate a high level and frequency of communication between the residents and their peers. The space needs to process qualities the enable the residents to interact often and safely. This should provide for a stimulating social environment in which these children and young adults can play in, learn in, interact in, and live in.