



A4LE SOUTHERN REGION CONFERENCE

# Activating “Place” for Place-Based Learning and Holistic Wellbeing

SEM – 129

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Activating “Place” for Place-Based Learning and Holistic Wellbeing

# Introductions



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Activating “Place” for Place-Based Learning and Holistic Wellbeing

## Learning Objectives



### Understand Place Attachment

Develop an understanding of place attachment theory and the significance of cognitive-emotional person-place bonds in school facilities for supporting wellbeing



### Explore Place-Based Learning

Explore place-based learning and the many ways connecting students to “place” can inspire engaging learning experiences and community connections



### Developmental Considerations

Recognize developmental considerations for connecting students to “place” and engaging them with place-based learning opportunities



### Design Applications

Apply insights from place attachment theory and place-based learning to the design of spaces for learning

## Live Polling



Please scan the QR code with your personal device or type in the link below:

**[PollEv.com/CorganEDU](https://PollEv.com/CorganEDU)**



# Who is in the room?

- Educator **A**
- Administrator **B**
- Architect **C**
- Interior Designer **D**
- Researcher **E**
- Facilities/Operations **F**
- Technology **G**
- Contractor or Engineer **H**
- Vendor **I**



# Place

“What begins as undifferentiated space becomes **place** as we **get to know it better** and **endow it with value.**”

- Yi-Fu Tuan, “*Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*”





## What is a “Place”?

- More than just a physical space
- The importance of *meaning*
  - Intangible feeling of significance
  - Connection
  - Identity
  - Value



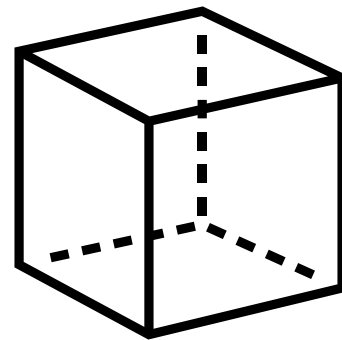


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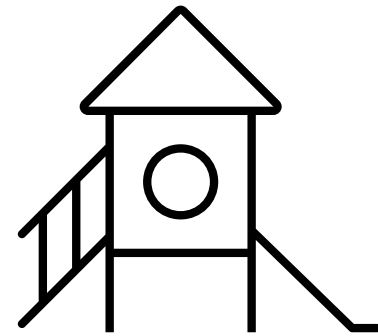
## Taxonomy of Spaces



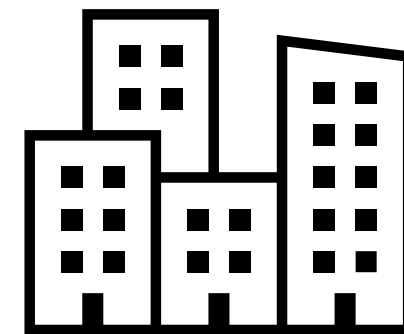
**Manipulable  
Object**



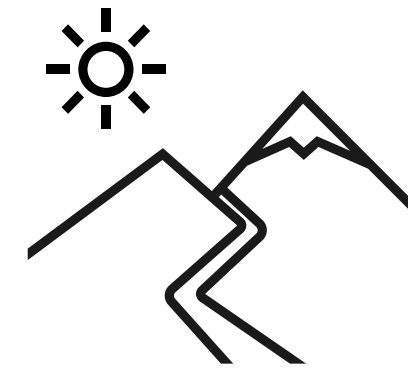
**Non-Manipulable  
Object**



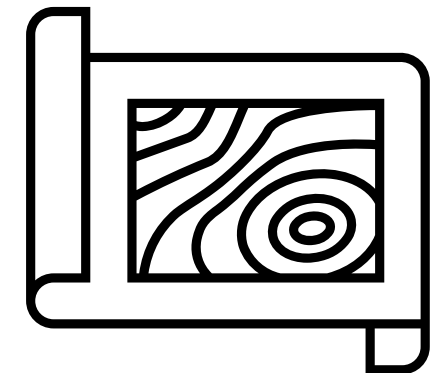
**Environmental  
Space**



**Geographic  
Space**



**Panoramic  
Space**



**Map Space**

## BODY

- Movement is encouraged through hands-on activities
- Increased sensory engagement takes advantage of the body's natural perceptual capabilities

## MIND

- Learning is student-led and inquiry-based
- Creativity and problem-solving are encouraged through divergent and critical thinking
- The formation of generalized knowledge is the goal
- Social and Emotional Learning is also emphasized

## ENVIRONMENT

- Engage the social, cultural, technological, natural, and material environment
- Holistic learning environments connect students to the real world
- Integrate real-life experiences into the classroom



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# The Power of Place: What is Our Environment Communicating to Us?



## BELONGING

Place Attachment  
Safety and Security  
Connection  
Identity  
Pride



## VALUE

Show students they are valued and cared for by providing a high-quality learning environment



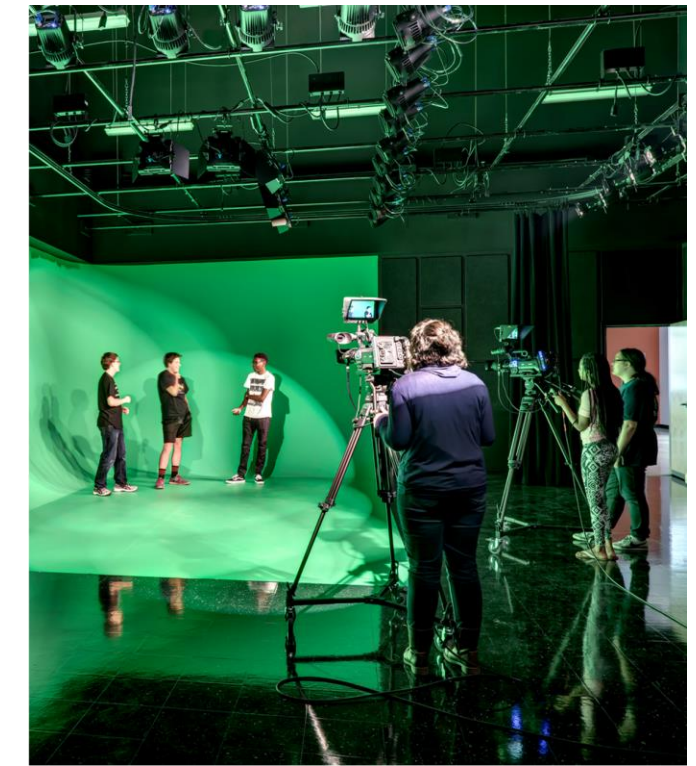
## HEALTH

Nature  
Holistic Support  
Biophilia  
Restoration  
Quality Environment



## BEHAVIOR

Cues in the environment guide behavior.  
Encourage learning, exploration, and interaction.



## OPPORTUNITY

Experiences  
Tools  
Technologies  
Connections  
Possibilities



## Activating “Place” for Place-Based Learning and Holistic Wellbeing



...the literature of children’s place describes a *rich interactive relationship* in which **place nurtures and stimulates children’s development** through interactions of play, exploration, sensory stimulation and emotional regulation...

Paul Morgan

*“Towards a Developmental Theory of Place Attachment”*



# Cypress Springs Elementary School

Case Study







## Rooted in Place

The school honors its Hill Country heritage and immerses itself in the existing landscape.







## Maintain, Protect & Respect

The surrounding nature was key to the community's values. Mimicking the topography's angles and slopes, the school is nestled into the existing landscape.





# Creating a New Place

This project was the first step in creating what will be a new, comprehensive campus. **It's a new place that students will be connected to throughout their educational journey.**





# Dark Sky Community Design Response

Dripping Springs was the first city in Texas to be designated as an International Dark Sky Community. Dedication to preserving the night sky through the implementation and enforcement of a quality outdoor lighting ordinance.





# Exploring Experiences with Place

## *Discussion*



Can you think of a **place that you feel attached or connected to?**

*A place of meaning, significance, or importance to you and your life. Go with your first instinct!*





# What place came to mind?



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## Place: Supporting Holistic Wellbeing and Meaningful Learning Concept Introductions



**Place Attachment**



**Place-Based Learning**



## Activating “Place” for Place-Based Learning and Holistic Wellbeing



## Place Attachment Theory

*a cognitive-emotional bond between person and place*

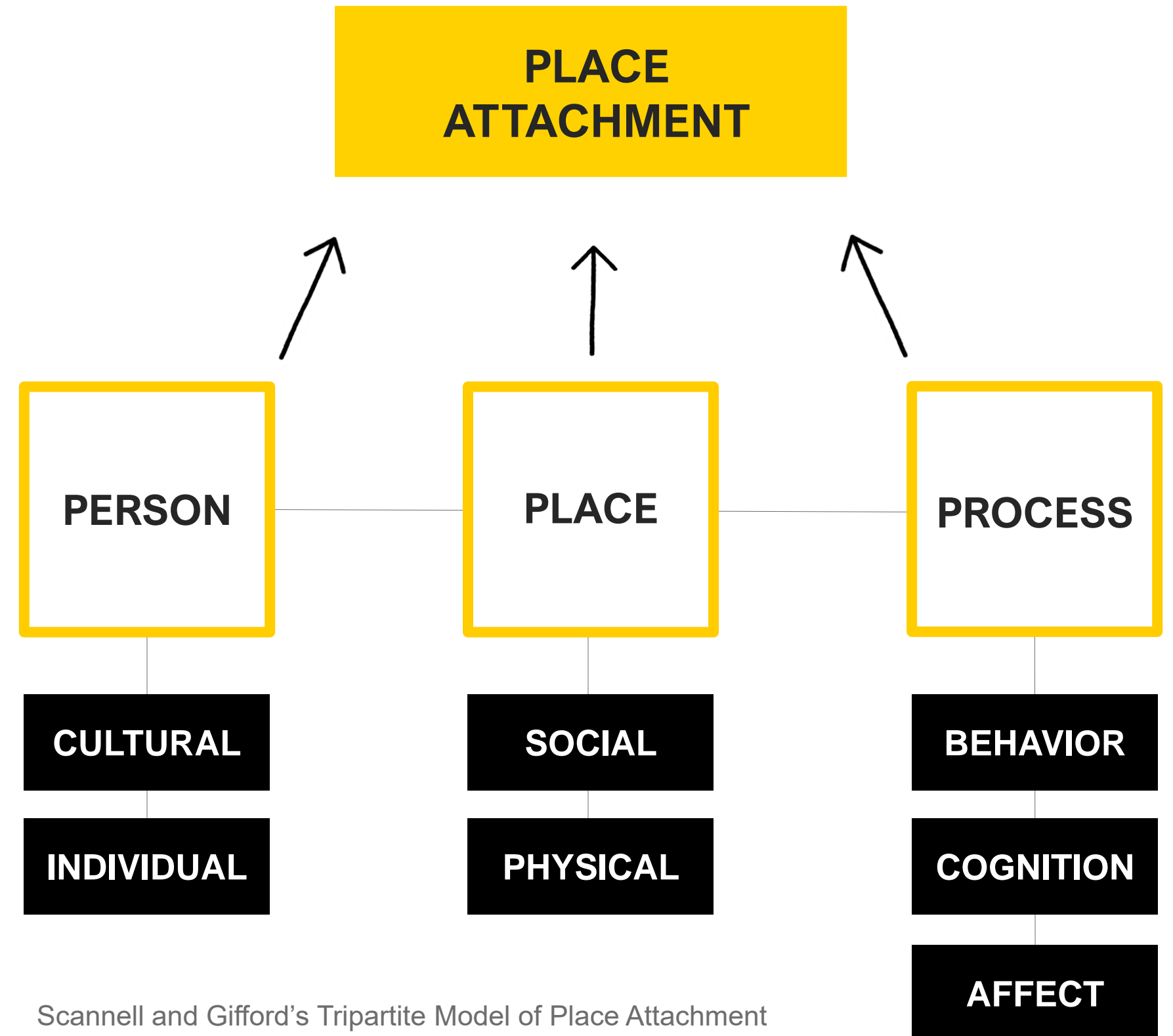
- Development
- Identity
- Wellbeing
- Learning

[Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Rieh, 2020; Jack, 2010, Morgan, 2010]



# Why Do Place Attachments Form?

- Forming **emotional connections** is a part of human nature and reflects our **innate drive to find meaning and belong**
- Place Dependence
- Fascination



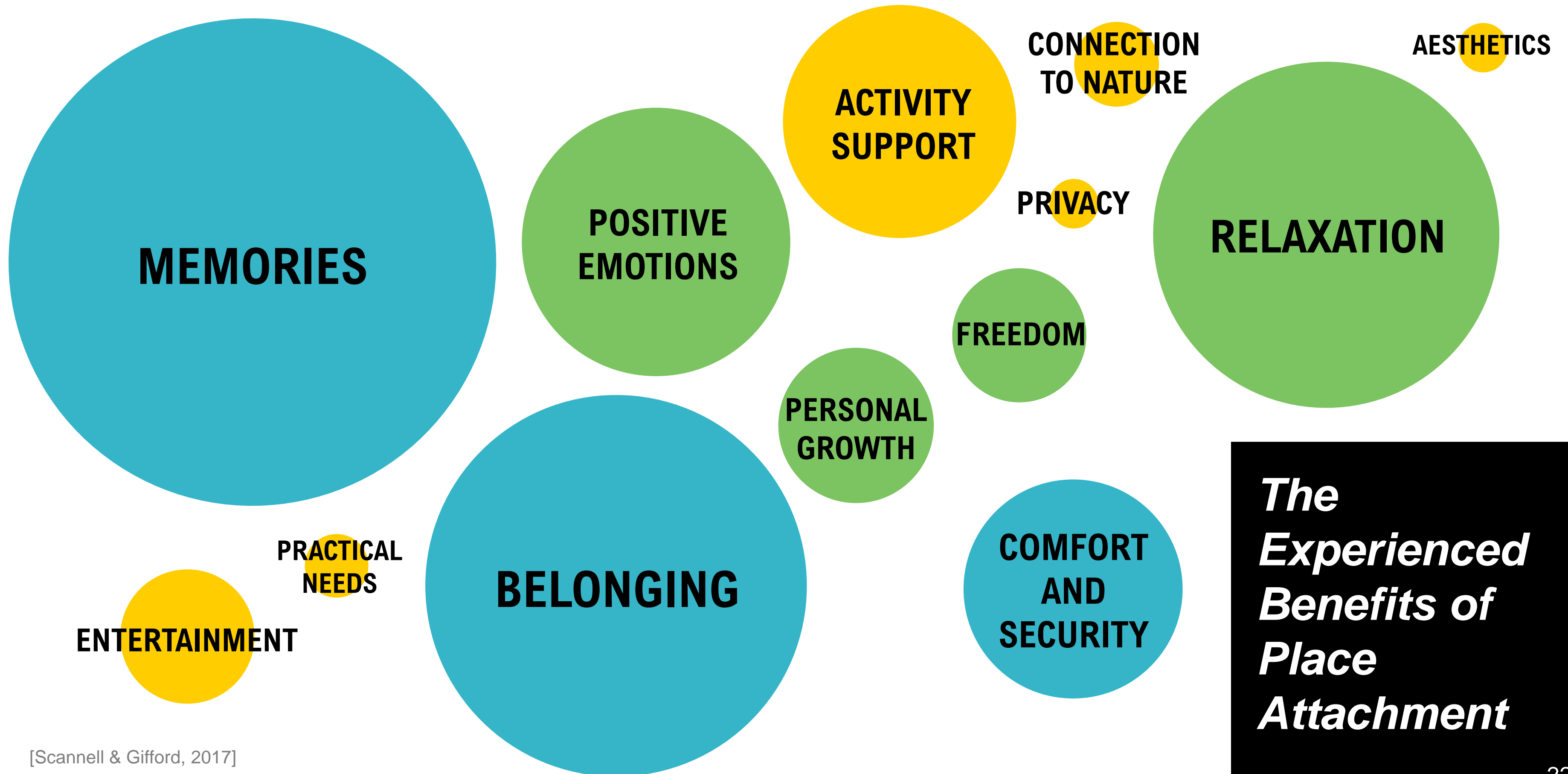
Scannell and Gifford's Tripartite Model of Place Attachment

” When the **socio-physical features of the place match the individual's needs and goals**, place attachment is more likely.

*Scannell and Gifford - “The Experienced Psychological Benefits of Place Attachment”*



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*The Experienced Benefits of Place Attachment*



## Activating “Place” for Place-Based Learning and Holistic Wellbeing



## Community Visioning

Building a *shared understanding* between the community and project team about *what this place is and what they want it to be for their students*





## Community Input

Important in early visioning sessions was a welcoming, communal environment. **Neighbors, parents, community leaders, and district leadership helped steer the design vision.**





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# Key Considerations and Priorities of Place



**Aesthetic and Materiality**



**Harmony with the Site**



**Connection to the Outdoors**



**Preserving History while Embracing Fast Growth**





# Place and Development

- **Attachment Theory**
  - Long-term emotional bonds to particular individuals
  - Attachment bonds form internal working models that shape future relationships
  - Secure attachment relationships have been connected to optimal synaptic connectivity and cortical consolidation (memory)
- **Transactional Theory: development arises from the mutual interaction between child and environment**
- **Motivation: Exploration-Assertion System**
- Differences in how children and adults relate to place



...a developmental shift in early adolescence from the primacy of sensory to cognitive engagement with the world is accompanied by a dimming of sensory perception...Consequently, memory of childhood place is fixed in the context of an intense and ecstatic sensory awareness

*Paul Morgan - "Towards a Developmental Theory of Place Attachment"*



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# Immersion

The transition from home to school during early childhood introduces students to a new environment brimming with challenging experiences and opportunities to explore, connect, and grow.

# Identity

As a learner develops their capabilities and interests, a passion for independence and exploration grows. The ability to uniquely impact their surroundings and make meaningful connections strengthens and molds their identity.

# Purpose

Emerging adults are shaped by their experiences, passions and a developing sense of purpose. The jump into the "real-world" is a significant one that provides both opportunity and stress.

*Primary*

*Secondary*

*Higher Education and Workforce*



**What will I discover?**

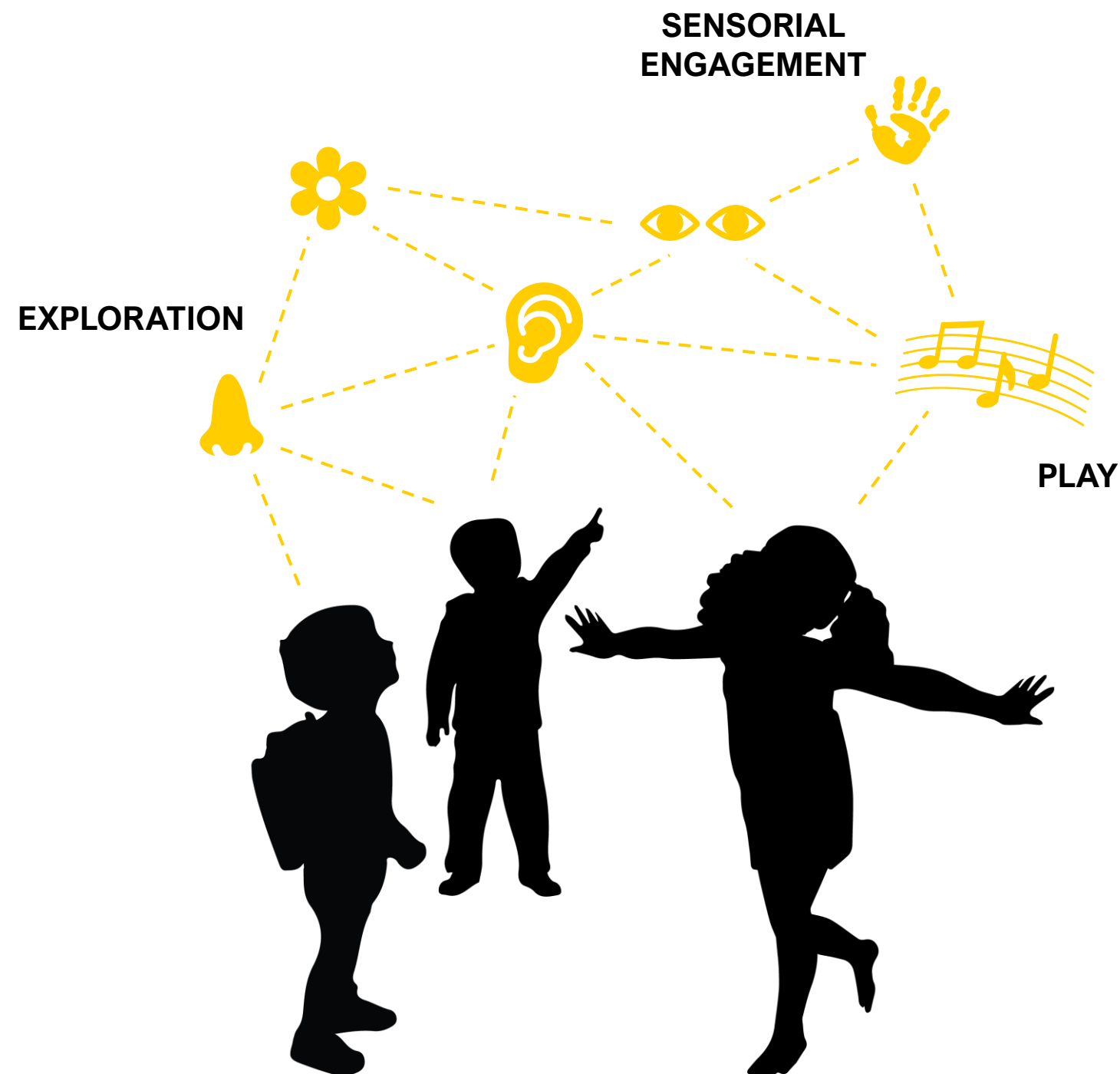


**How can I make my mark?**



**Do I have what it takes?**





## YOUNG LEARNERS

## Developmental Changes: Young Learners and Place

Younger children show a “heightened attentiveness” to place during childhood due to their **developmental drive for sensory integration** and to gather information about their environment.



**Children focus on what the environment can provide and what they can do in the environment:**

- Engage with the environment through their senses
- Emotional regulation and stress reduction
- Exploration and place-play
- Self-directed learning activities
- Prefer natural over man-made environments



# Creating Places for Young Learners

1

## CREATE WARMTH

Develop a vibrant, welcoming space with playful energy to comfort and engage students as they learn and grow

2

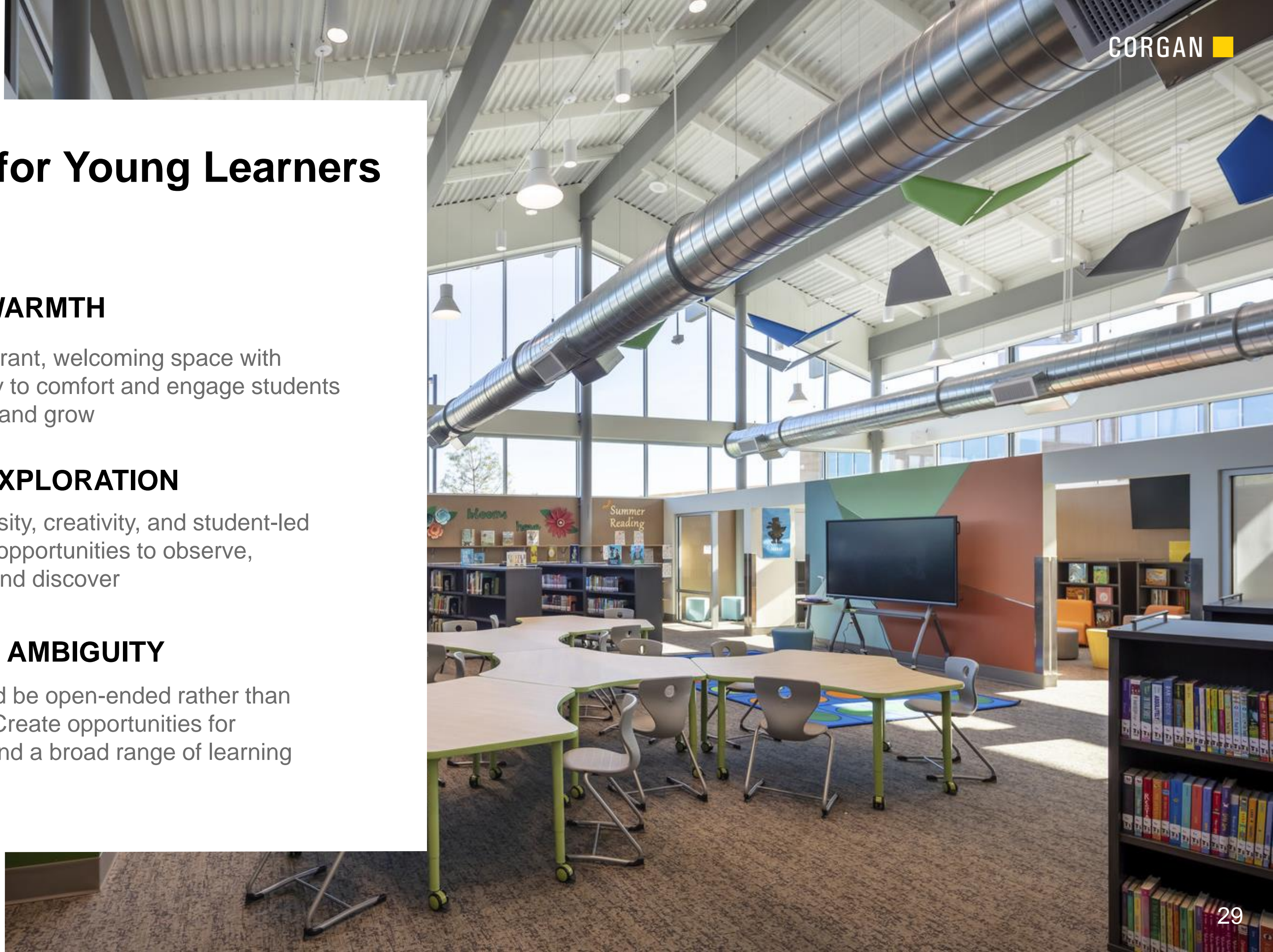
## INSPIRE EXPLORATION

Support curiosity, creativity, and student-led learning with opportunities to observe, experiment, and discover

3

## EMBRACE AMBIGUITY

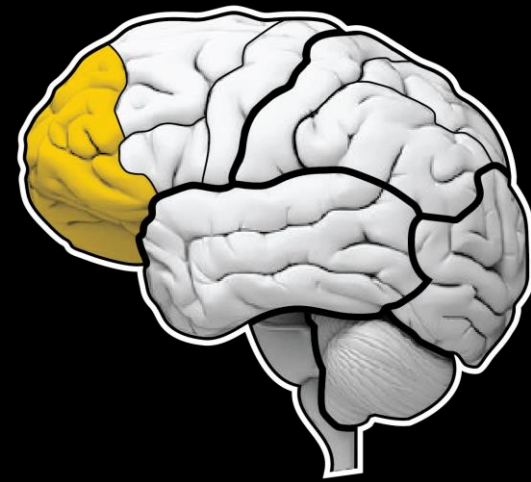
Design should be open-ended rather than prescriptive. Create opportunities for imagination and a broad range of learning experiences





# Developmental Changes: Adolescents and Place

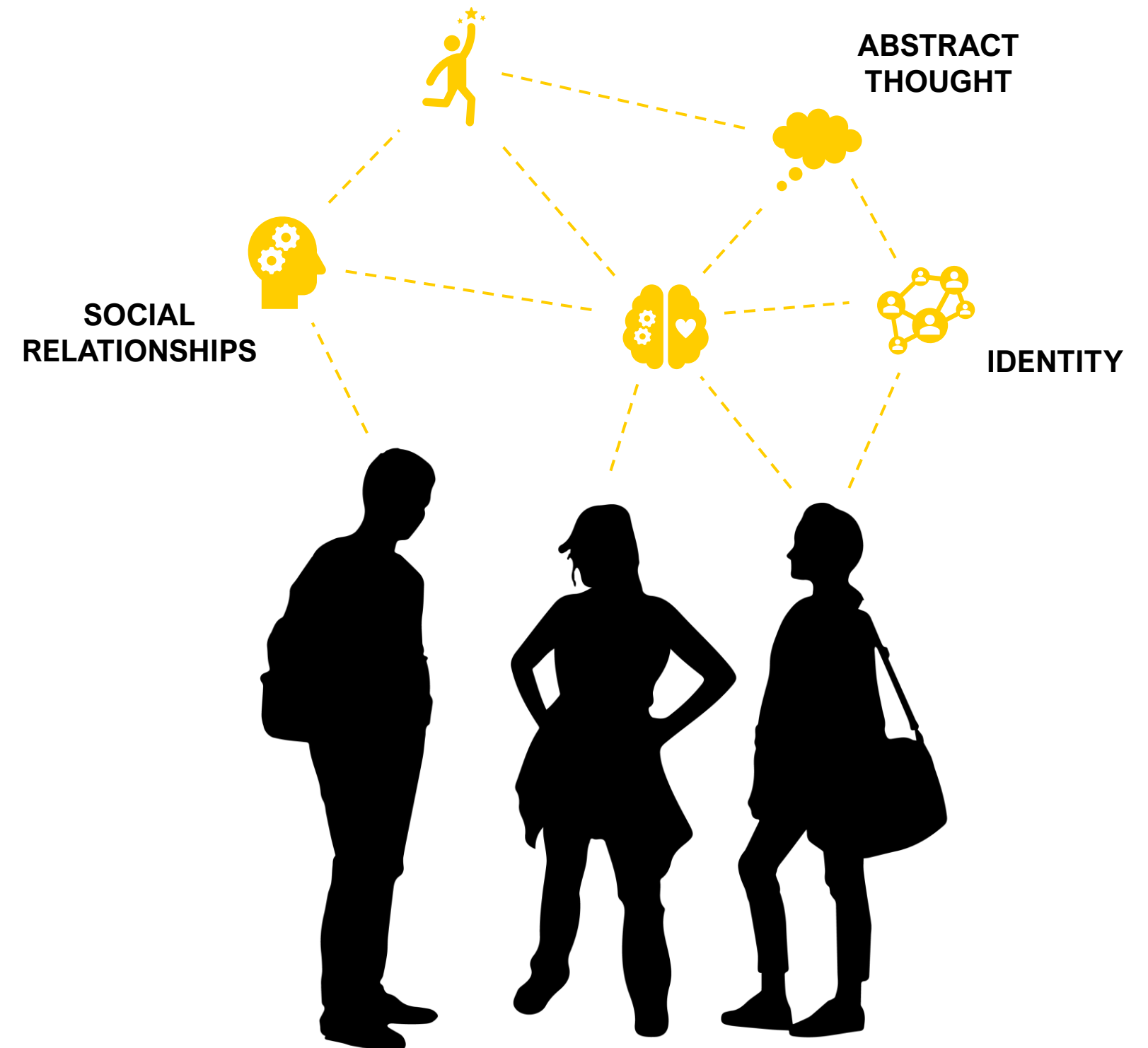
As cognitive abilities like abstract thought advance during early adolescence, **focus shifts from sensory to cognitive engagement with the world.**



With increasing cognitive maturity, adolescents begin to focus on finding deeper meaning in their environment:

- Synaptic pruning: refining neural connections
- Adult vs. adolescent thinking

[Morgan, 2010; University of Rochester Medical Center]



**ADOLESCENTS**



# Creating Places for Adolescents

1

## PROMOTE CONNECTIVITY

Encourage cross-disciplinary thinking, peer interaction, and mentorship. Connect learning to the real world

2

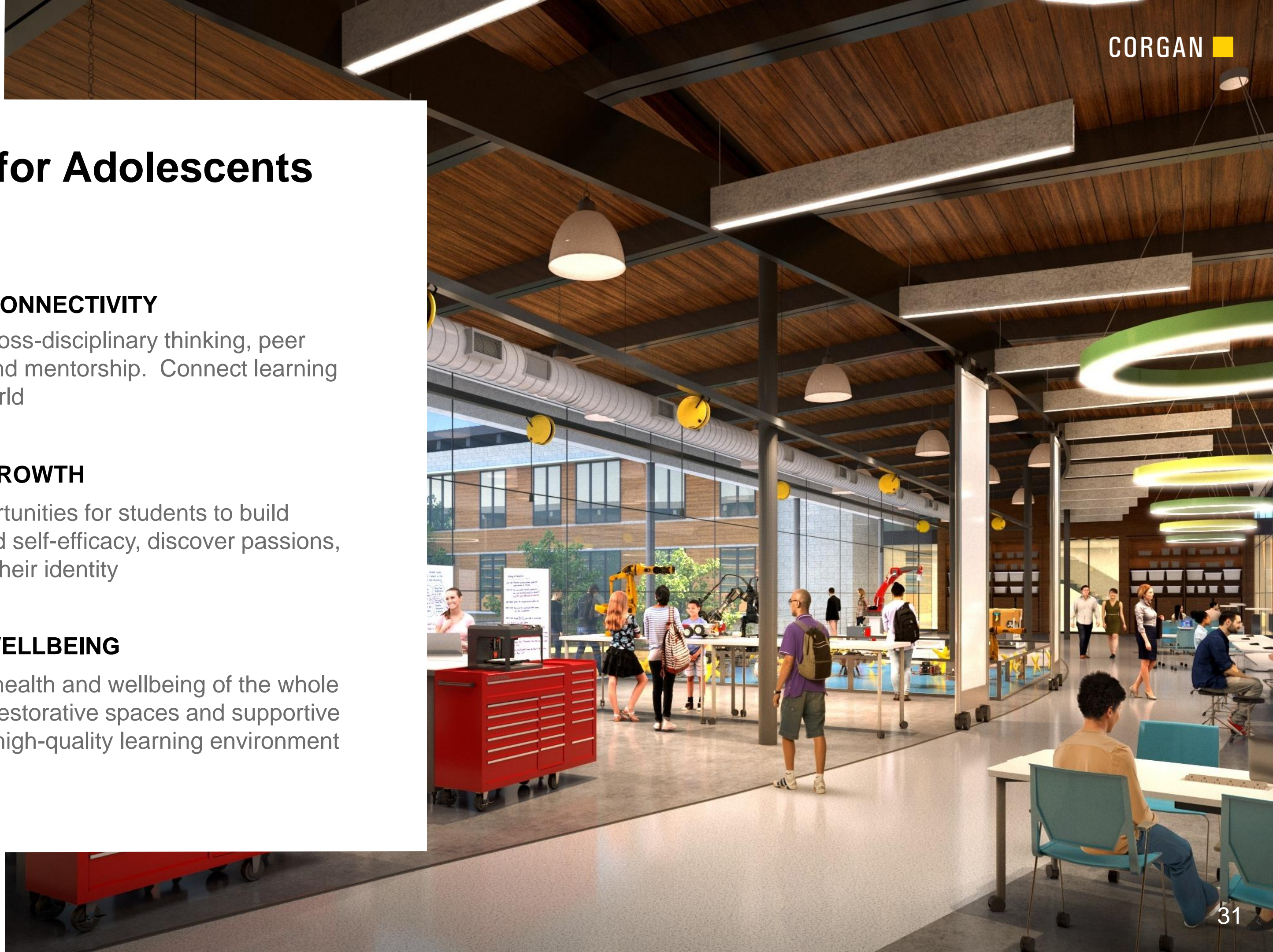
## SUPPORT GROWTH

Provide opportunities for students to build autonomy and self-efficacy, discover passions, and develop their identity

3

## NURTURE WELLBEING

Promote the health and wellbeing of the whole student with restorative spaces and supportive features in a high-quality learning environment





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# Developmentally-Aligned Design Elements

**SENSORY ENGAGEMENT**



**RELAXATION & INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**



**PLAYFUL & EXPLORATORY**





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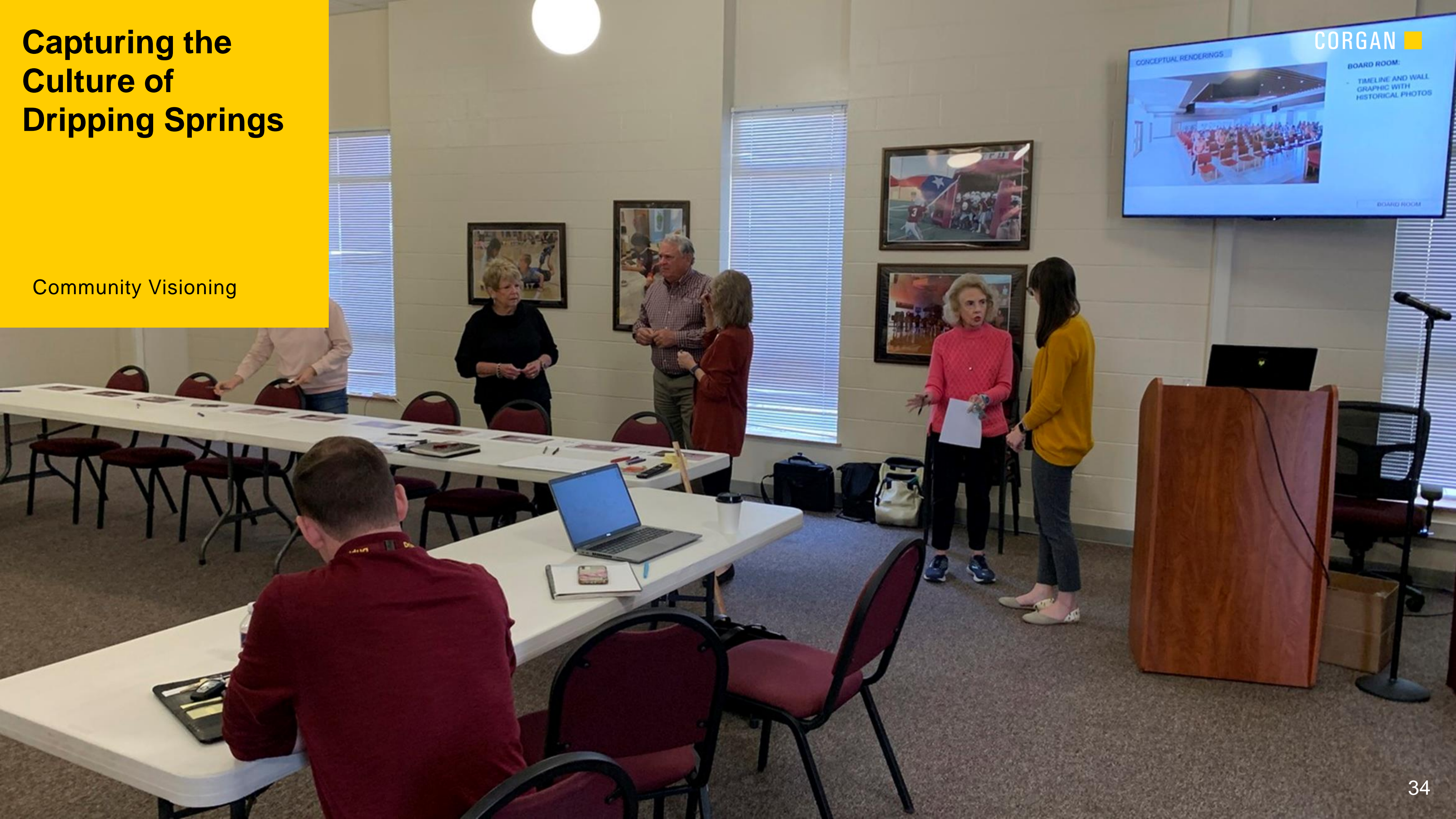
## Place & Identity

- **Memory** - adult inflation of childhood experiences
- Place attachments are an important aspect of identity for some people, but not for everyone
- **Goal attainment**
- **Belongingness and connection** (memories, culture, history)



# Capturing the Culture of Dripping Springs

Community Visioning



**CORGAN** ■


CONCEPTUAL RENDERINGS


BOARD ROOM:  
- TIMELINE AND WALL GRAPHIC WITH HISTORICAL PHOTOS


BOARD ROOM



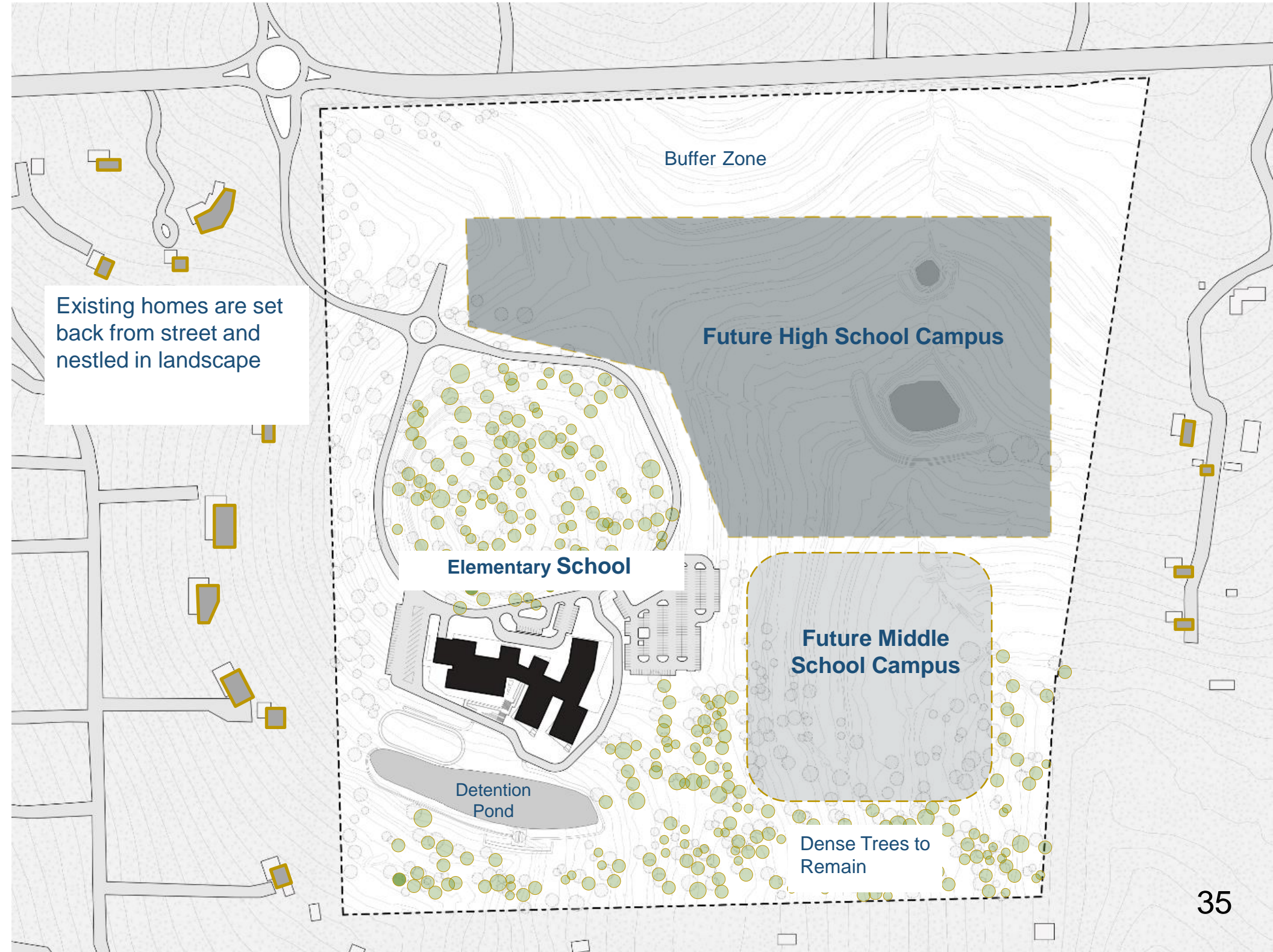
# Key Takeaways

- 

**MASTER PLAN CONSIDERATIONS**  
 This will be a “place” that students would experience through their education from elementary school through high school.
- 

**RAPID CHANGE**  
 Places are changing rapidly in Dripping Springs and there’s a lot of sensitivity to that- concern about water conservation, traffic, development, light pollution.
- 

**ACCOMMODATING GROWTH & PRESERVING HISTORY**  
 Dripping Springs has been a small, beautiful town - how do you keep that feel and support growth?





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## Place Attachment and Wellbeing

- **Belongingness**
  - Individual wellbeing and **social capital**
- Sense of connection as a protective factor
- Safety and security
- **Emotional and cognitive restoration**
- Impact of broken place bonds: health, academics, affect

“...place attachment bonds, while intact, are **positively associated with quality of life, life satisfaction**, and various other dimensions of **wellbeing**”

*Scannell & Gifford, 2017*

“...**broken or ‘stretched’ place bonds** are associated with **physical health problems, lower grades, sadness, longing, alienation, and disorientation**”

*Scannell & Gifford, 2017*





# Soft Fascination

1

## COMPATIBILITY

Intuitive engagement with the environment

2

## ESCAPE

Experience a restorative sense of release in the environment

3

## EXTENT

The environment feels captivating and fully immersive

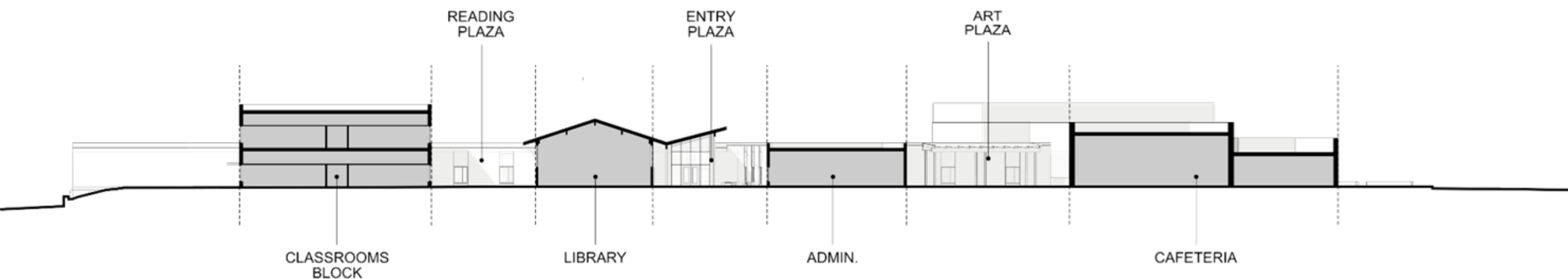
[Kaplan, 1995; Morgan, 2009]





Cypress Springs Elementary School

# Connection to the Outdoors



This design approach allowed us to provide natural light into each space. It also gives teachers the opportunity to capitalize on good weather and the pristine site.



# Exploring Experiences with Place

## *Discussion*



Recall your place of attachment.

**Why do you feel attached to this place?**

*Think about the feelings and experiences that make this place significant to you.*





**In one or two words, why do you feel attached to this place?**



# Place-Based Learning

“We’ve all experienced the **power of place**: those moments when we’re **immersed** deeply in experiencing the **world** around us...**learning in these moments is organic and visceral.**”

*- Tom Vander Ark and Carri Schneider*





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## Place-Based Learning: Activating Informal Learning Environments

- **The whole world becomes the “classroom”**
- Student-led and hands-on
- **Learning as a contextualized process**
- Connect students to their local community and the real-world
- **Utilize places and their resources as a foundation for learning**
- Can utilize technologies to overlay digital tools and resources on the real-world context



[Smith; 2016; Teton Science Schools, 2021]



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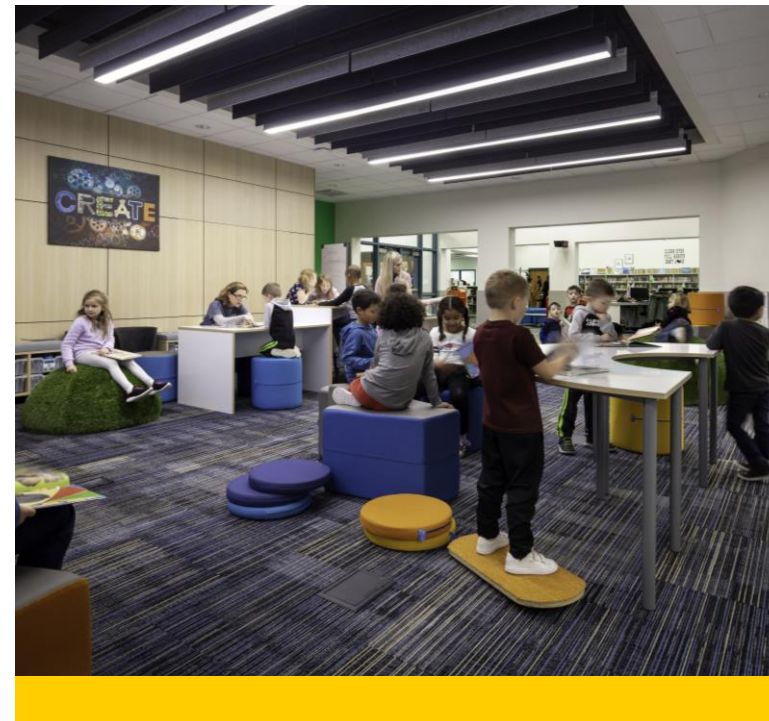
## The Benefits of Unstructured Learning in the Real World



### Active, Embodied Learning

*Where* and *how* something is learned is a part of *what* is learned

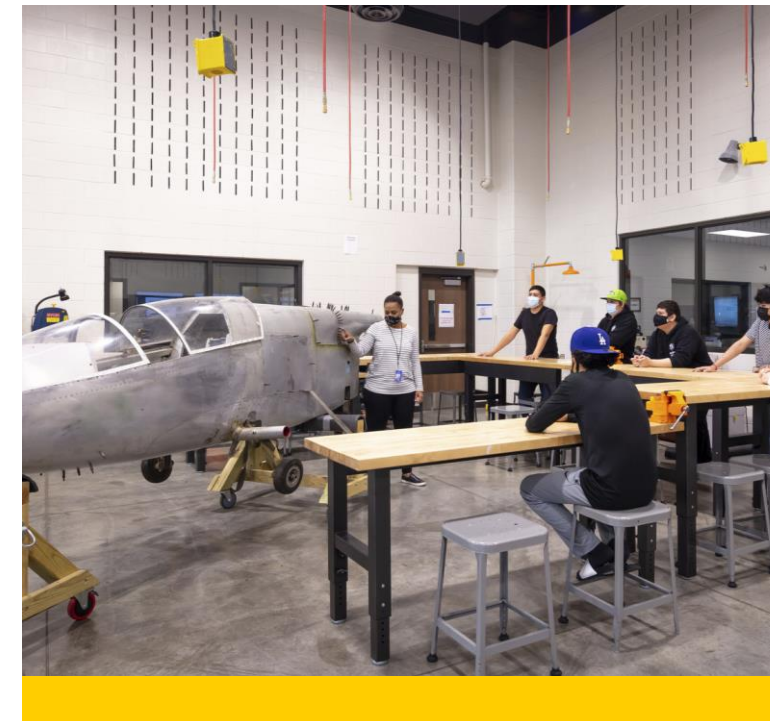
[Gill et al, 2018; Allal, 2001]



### Open-Ended Opportunities

*Learning in an informal context is inherently less prescriptive*

[Merrill, 2020; Nair et al, 2020; Gill et al, 2018]



### Real-World Connections

Hands-on experiences build skills and connect to students' interests

[Gill et al, 2018]



### Nurture Curiosity

Immersive, tactile learning experiences engage students and encourage deeper thinking

[Gill et al, 2018; Lindgren et al, 2016]



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# Opportunities for Learning are Embedded Within “Place”

How can the local environment inspire meaningful learning?



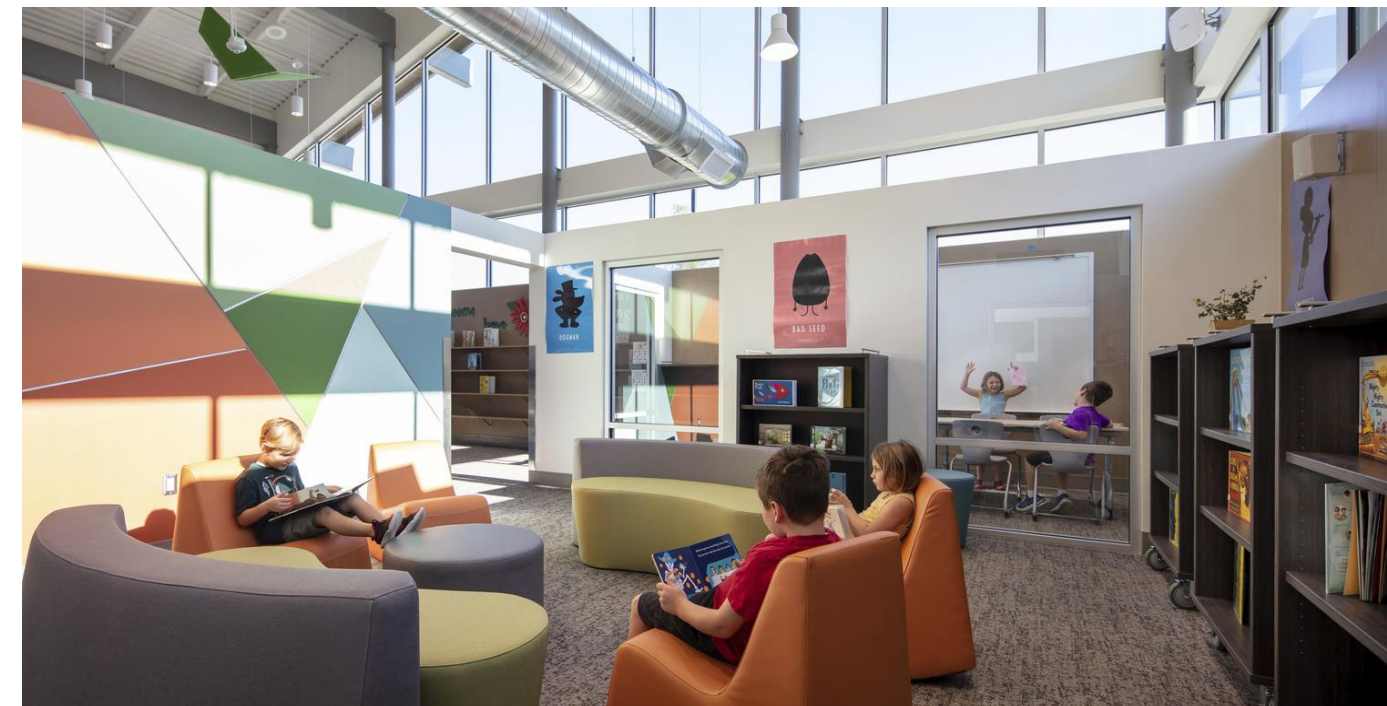
**CONNECTION TO THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE**



**CULTURAL CONNECTIONS**



**HANDS-ON LEARNING**



**EXPLORATORY ELEMENTS FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING**



# Exploring Experiences with Place

## *Discussion*



Think back to your place of attachment.  
**What could you learn from this place?**

*Think about the opportunities it might afford for inquiry, exploration, and immersion.*





# What could you learn from your place of attachment?



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## The Importance of Schools as a “Place”

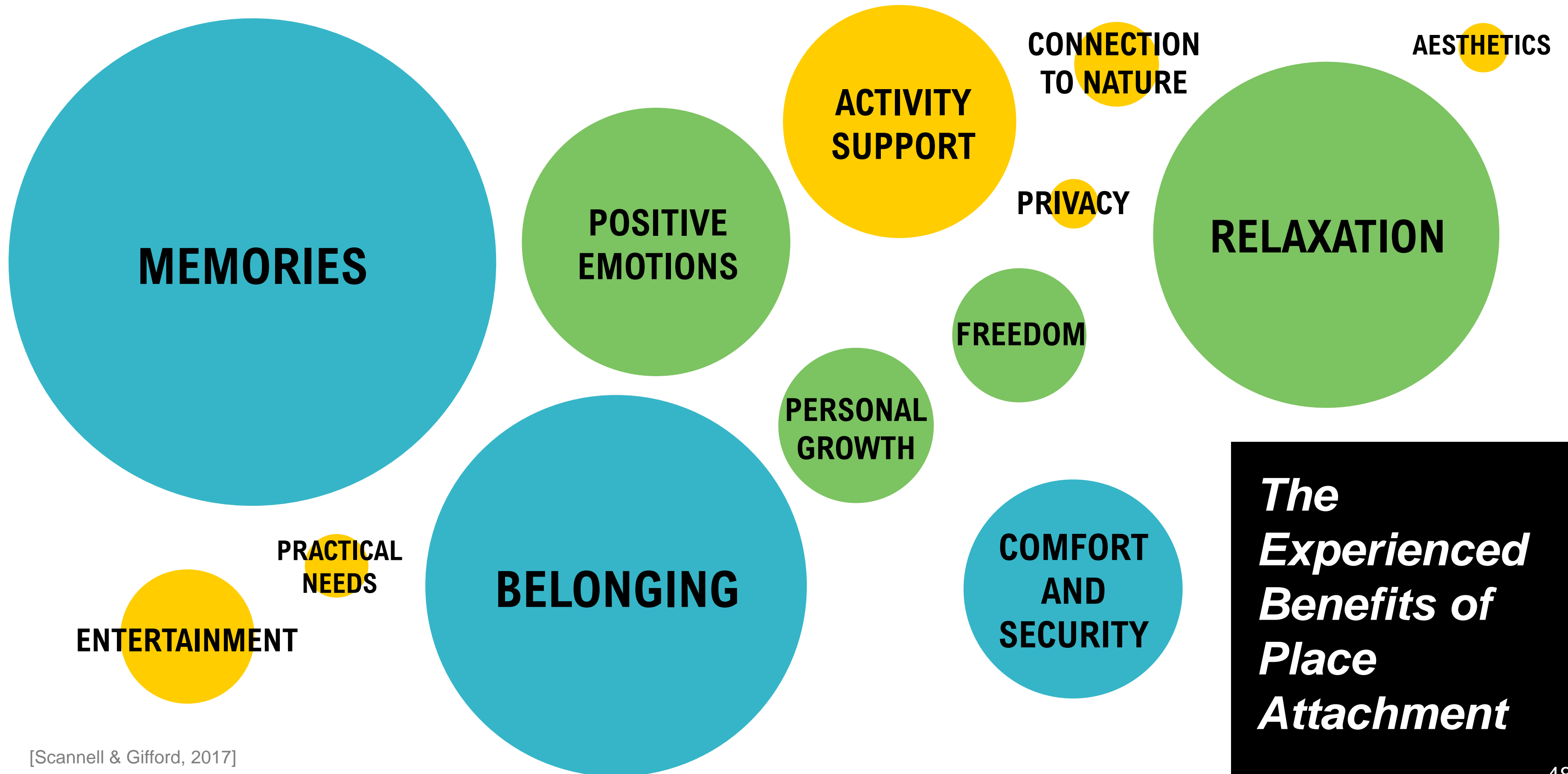


...the **school becomes a second home for children**, it is critical for the children to foster a rich environmental involvement, not only for their **cognitive development but also for growth of their identity.**

- Dr. Sun-Young Rieh



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*The Experienced Benefits of Place Attachment*



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## Schools as “Places”



**1 CULTIVATE A SENSE OF BELONGING**

**2 FACILITATE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS**

**3 LEARNING CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE**



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# Questions?

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