road! On the other hand there are plenty of visual delights. Two of the illustrators, Winnie Mertens *(Please Michael)* and Frances McGlynn *(Irene's Idea, Minoo's Family)* boldly pattern their quilts, cushions and clothes. In *Please Michael,* hair, flowers and leaves are intricately drawn. Both of Frances McGlynn's books use the space on the illustration page imaginatively. Even *Families Grow in Different Ways,* the least successfully illustrated, has one splendid illustration of the two children swinging. The fifth book, *The Last Visit,* is illustrated in a markedly different style. Not only are the drawings boldly black and white, they also have an odd, edge to them. They have power; they even bring to mind the style of Edvard Munch. But they are rather frightening–a child I showed the book to pronounced them creepy and was puzzled by the bare feet–and seem at odds with the intent of the text, which is to reconcile death and birth.

None of these books is the perfect production that one might hope for, indeed *must* hope for. The authors are still feeling their way. The project the group has launched, however, is a worthwhile one, and parents, teachers, and librarians will want to look at these books. If Before We Are Six wishes to continue–and I suspect the commercial publisher is reluctant to touch this kind of material–then more resources, especially in design, and opportunities to broaden their understanding of their audience and their task should be made available to the group.

Lorna A.D. Morey, who teaches Renaissance literature and Linguistics at Notre Dame University of Nelson, is a single parent with a long-time interest in non-sexist children's books.

Early Childhood Education

ALLAN SHELDON

The Learning Environment, Chris Nash. Methuen, 1976. 189 pp. $6.95 paper.

Chris Nash writes that "Any environment has four dimensions (time, space, people, things), and each dimension can contribute to learning." The central idea in her book is that those involved in Early Childhood Education had better base their work upon an understanding of this concept if the children's learning is to be meaningful. The author begins with the premise that the child can learn and does learn effectively at home because he knows his environment in all of its dimensions, and he plays and learns within these dimensions naturally. If the child finds a toy absorbing he can explore at length uninterrupted. If he doesn't like what is on T.V. he can go find something else. He has many opportunities every day to talk with people, to look at, to play with, and to learn from things. In contrast

to this is a situation Chris Nash calls E C D (Early Childhood Deprivation), and she cites an "extreme" example in which children from two to four years of age sat around tables in a bare classroom listening to a teacher and colouring ditto sheets. Meanwhile, at home the environment was "rich in natural life, sounds and smells from which to learn." The question which comes to mind is, how extreme is this situation? The bare classroom certainly is a thing of the past, but I know at least one house where children bring home the ugly purple ditto sheets five days of every week. Ms. Nash's book is subtitled *A Practical Approach to the Education of the Three-, Four- and Five-year-old.* So what are we to do?

The book takes the four dimensions of the learning environment one by one and attempts to show how the teacher can translate the ideal into the classroom situation.

The teacher who cries "Give us something practical" may be a little dismayed when she reads early in the book that "it may be tempting to begin by selecting recipes for activities to fit into ongoing programmes, [but] this would defeat the purpose of the Learning Environment Approach." I hope that such a teacher will read on, for Ms. Nash's book is eminently practical in a way that no E C E recipe book (and they are legion) could be.

The child's concept of time develops late in comparison with other concepts, and yet the child who enters an E C E class is usually faced with assumptions about time that are quite beyond him. The author compares children's and adults' views of time and suggests that the teacher will teach most effectively only when she understands the difference and talks to the child in terms of what *happens* rather than of what *will happen.* She advocates task orientation over time-tabling, and she suggests a planning board approach for helping children to recognize when they begin and finish activities. Time is the dimension with which children have the most difficulty, and it influences decisions about the dimensions of space, things, and people. She also discusses these other dimensions very thoroughly. For every dimension there are many useful suggestions for teachers, and a final section of the book, "Getting It Together," provides questions (as does the whole book) for teachers wishing to plan further professional development in the learning environment approach.

Throughout the book the author follows through with her early promise that her "rationale lies less within a specific value system than with educational theory." Chapter by chapter, Piaget, Montessori and other authorities in learning theory, psychology, reading, the development of creativity provide the philosophical props for the learning environment approach. The knowledge Ms. Nash discusses is not new; what is relatively new is the integration of the philosophy with the practice. There is no way that *The Learning Environment* can be turned into a recipe book by E C E teachers, but for those who can stand the heat this fine kitchen contains all of the necessities.

Allan Sheldon teaches English and Children's Literature at Medicine Hat College, Alberta.