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Evaluation of Outdoor Environment from the Viewpoint of Children

Shima Oloumi^a, Mohammadjavad Mahdavinejad^{b*} & Alireza Namvarrad^c

^aDepartment of Architecture, boushehr branch, Islamic Azad University, Boushehr, Iran

^bDepartment of Architecture, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

^cBachelor of Architecture, Islamic Azad University, Islamshahr, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

Children have different views in comparison with adults about environment. Our researches show that childrens leisure time almost spent in non-physical activities, thus they have less opportunities to experience the environment. This leads loss of environment awareness. Important questions of research are: What are the differences between children and adults in case of usage of outdoor spaces? And what are the environmental characteristics of child-friendly outdoor spaces? Qualitative research method is adopted for analysis. Conditions are observed on the basis of six environmental characteristic: scale, safety, amenity, accebility, sociability, variety. The results show meaningful differences between children and adults in usage of environment and children's preferences are influenced by developmental needs, physical and social factors.

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Keywords: children; outdoor environments; influential factors; environmental psychology; affordance.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +98 21 8288 3739, Fax: +98 21 88008090.
E-mail address: Mahdavinejad@modares.ac.ir

1. Introduction

Nowadays the cities grow and grow more without necessary consideration to the social needs, especially for children. Our children suffer from lack of enough physical activities as well as lack of enough social relationship. Therefore improvement of the quality of these spaces has a significant impact on personal growth and social interaction. Children and young adolescents form an important social group within society. Understanding young children's perspectives about their environment is important and should be taken into consideration in research as well as in practice. It is noticeable that in the recent years, most of children's leisure time is spent watching TV and doing other non-physical activities. Hence, creating more recreational spaces is considered to prevent idleness, loss of awareness of one's environment and lack of interaction with the environment. Unfortunately, it is in most cases observed those children's spaces have been designed without consideration of their real needs. For example, only little attention has been paid to their psychological characteristics such as a need for variety in color and shape. To actualize children's creative abilities it is crucial to pay special attention to the balance between the spaces designed for children and their developmental needs and abilities. This study examines children's preferences of outdoor environment. The influence of the environment on children's growth from the view point of developmental and educational psychology is studied and could be used in the designing process by architects and interior designers who design children's spaces. A designed space for environmental education can facilitate learning and create a more childlike atmosphere.

2. Review of the Literature

In a report by Cook and Hess (2007), Scott (2000) suggested that there is a large gulf between adult observation about child's understandings of a situation and the child's own perceptions. Thus, it is agreed that adults can't actually see the world from a child perspective (Cook & Hess, 2007) and children's perspectives are recognized as separate and different from those of adults. However, since the need to understand young children's perspective have been emphasized into practice.

2.1. Psychological Models of Learning and Developing

Jean Piaget, one of the most famous psychologists, especially because of his concentration on the intellectual growth of children, believes that children observe the world differently from adults and understand their environment through direct experience rather than by understanding the language (Seyf, 2000). One of the most important aspects of Piaget's theory is its "stages of developing", He divided this process to four distinct stages: Sensorimotor stage, Preoperational stage, Concrete operational stage and Formal operational stage. In the Sensorimotor stage (from birth to age 2), Children experience the world through movement and senses. During the Sensorimotor stage children are extremely egocentric, meaning they cannot perceive the world from others' viewpoints. In the Preoperational stage (from ages 2 to 7), magical thinking predominates. Children cannot conserve or use logical thinking. In a Concrete operational stage: from ages 7 to 12, children begin to think logically but they are very concrete in their thinking. In this stage they understand how to keep things, arrange them and rank them in different levels. In the last stage: Formal operational stage: from age 12 onwards. Children develop abstract thought and can easily conserve and think logically in their mind (Singer, 1996). Jerome Seymour Bruner also has his own theory in this field based on cognitive learning. Same as Piaget's theory he focused on how children gather information from the environment, organize it and keep it in their mind. In his research on the development of children, Bruner proposed three modes of representation: 1) enactive representation (action-based) in which children save events in their life in an active manner, 2) iconic representation

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