

WCES 2012

The physical environment factors in preschools in terms of environmental psychology: a review

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Abstract

This paper sets out an explanation about the importance of the environmental psychology in preschools. The field of environmental psychology has emphasized how the physical environment affects feelings and behaviors. Preschools are systems in which the environment is just one of many interacting pedagogical, socio-cultural, curricular, motivational and socio-economic factors. Effective learning setting is a combination of several different factors; adequate usable space, noise, air conditions, color and lighting. This study considers implications from recent researches about physical environment in preschools and their reflections to the literature in the light of environmental psychology.

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Keywords: Preschool, Environmental Psychology, Physical Environment

1. Introduction

An environment is a living, changing system. More than the physical space, it includes the way time is structured and the roles we are expected to play. It conditions how we feel, think, and behave; and it dramatically affects the quality of our lives. The environment either works for us or against us as we conduct our lives (Greenman, 1988). Physical environments play an important role in the behaviors or cultural practices that take place within them. The quality of the environment, the presence and condition of its features, the decay that it suffers, and the level at which it is maintained, are all factors in the quality of the activities that take place in it (Durán-Narucki, 2008).

Environment and behaviour specialists have noted particular concerns with design features of these settings that impact the very youngest children—children whose age means they have very short attention spans and are easily distracted by visual movement and by noise (Bell et. al., 2001). Until the preschool age, children are presumed to view environments egocentrically, relating them only to themselves. Gradually, this mode is replaced by a fixed frame of reference in which the child orients in the environment in relation to some fixed landmarks (Bechtel & Churchman, 2002).

What places afford we argue is not just important for the child's here-and-now but also for their long-term personal cognitive and emotional development. There is now growing body of literature that evidences what children gain from their experiences of places: ranging from those 'special places' which allow for the imagination, and a sense of personal control and freedom, to those social venues where one can learn about one's community, and be recognized by others for one's part in it. Designing and supporting places which maximize the chances for a child's cognitive and social development are therefore another campaigning issue where environmental psychology can offer convincing evidence, in support of those arguing for the rights of the child (Spencer & Blades, 2005).

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The physical environment is a critical part of any child care program and has an important role in children's behavior and development. The many children cared for outside the home will spend most of their waking hours in such a setting. It is therefore critical that such places support all the developing child's needs. Physical attributes contribute to the meaning of place by supporting or inhibiting the individual's ability to control, personalize, and have meaningful relationships in the space (Maxwell & Evans, 2002).

2. Method

The literature of environmental psychology was reviewed carefully in the light of pioneer studies and leading theories of certain disciplines such as educational sciences especially early childhood education and psychology. Exclusively on-line literature search within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and PsycInfo etc, were conducted. As one may find many contradicting theories of, this descriptive study particularly focused on centering the whole discussion of the article around the fundamental principles of environmental psychology are accepted as universal by different disciplines. It is also that the interested people reach the synthesis information, related scientific research, contemporary developments in the boundaries of the article.

3. The Factors In Physical Environments

Many aspects of the school children's attitudes and mood such as their concentration, interest, attention, stress, fatigue and arousal probably affect their scholastic performance. These qualities may in turn, be affected by the psychosocial factors, work organization, educational methods as well as the physical environment as climate, light and noise (Lundquist, Kjellberg & Holmberg, 2002). Environments can be defined based on their objective, hard and quantifiable physical properties, Specific aspects of the physical environment include: lighting, noise, color, and air quality (Spivack, Askay & Rogelberg, 2009).

3.1. Space

Indoor and outdoor environments are arranged to encourage different types of play which are interesting, safe, appropriate and challenging for children. Appropriate space should be set aside for play. It should be big enough to allow for the free-ranging activities of a child in relation to her age and developmental progress. Play space should be safe and should also lend itself to exploration and investigation by the child.

Creating public and private zones in child care spaces is complex and should be paid great attention to activity area in classrooms. Center-wide gross motor or group activity areas could locate away from rooms where infants sleep. Unsuitable environment can create excessively noisy spaces (Maxwell & Evans, 2000).

Children need space where they can play with others but also smaller, quiet spaces for their own solitary activity, providing opportunities for autonomy and independence but also a secure base to which they can return or retreat, as and when necessary. Indoor and outdoor places are both important. Children seek adventure and challenge in their play outdoors; they explore places and enjoy transforming spaces to create imaginary worlds (Tovey, 2007). The indoor space should be large enough to accommodate a desirable number of children. The centre's capacity is determined by space for indoor activities. It is computed based on the minimum space requirement per child, that is 3m² of usable floor space, excluding service areas. Any single activity area for children must be able to accommodate no less than 4 children at 3m² per child after deduction of the passageway. As for infant care, the minimum space requirement per infant is 5m². Similarly, the minimum space requirement does not include the space for service areas, entrance areas, hallways, passage ways and diapering areas. the child care centre must have access to outdoor play space. If this is not possible, there shall be an additional indoor gross motor activity area. The space provided, both indoors and outdoors, shall be at least 30 m² or one-fifth of the centre's capacity at 5 m² per child, whichever is more. The gross motor activity area shall exclude service and children's activity areas (Child Care Division Ministry of Community Development, 2011).

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