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"Exploratory" and "descriptive" aspects of environmental psychology course within the interior design education

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Abstract

Identifying human attachment to the environment by developing different degrees, spatial ranges and dimensions, this study aims to further the growing body of knowledge about the discipline of Environmental Psychology within the process of interior design solving problems. Environmental Psychology provides an analytic point of view up on the existing built environment with a rich and diverse set of quantitative indicators for characterizing spaces in many ways that are potentially relevant to a variety of psychological responses, including choosing routes while locomotion, orientation and disorientation, spatial knowledge acquisition, perceived spaciousness, privacy and social interaction, stress and fear, and aesthetic judgments (Kolb, 1984). Experimental Learning Theory defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". This study makes the emphasis on "exploratory" and "descriptive" aspects of the Environmental Psychology within the real life context, providing comprehensive information to be inferred and issued in a complementary manner in interior design education. In such a way that; viable physical environment, social organization and norms, characteristics of people objectives are to determinants empirically whether, and how the use of experience and practices can improve design problem-solving by both novice and expert designers. In this context, this study presents applied samples and outcomes of course works of case-based instruction and its description development to be applied as medium synthesizing and/or assimilating with various observations for new idea generation process of design.

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1. Introduction

Environmental psychology is that branch of psychology that studies the relationship between people and the socio-physical features of the built and natural environment, in order to enhance human wellbeing and to improve human-environment relations. It emerged as an autonomous field of scientific inquiry at the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s. Environmental psychology is the study of the impact of the physical environment on people and the impact

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of people on the physical environment. It is an area of applied psychology, although a substantial portion of the research is devoted to theoretical and methodological development. A research problem in environmental psychology has three facets: the molar environment, the psychological characteristics of persons (or groups), and the intra-person psychological processes. Major research focuses include acquisition, representation, and use of spatial and non-spatial knowledge in environmental choice. In this context, the course of Environmental Psychology covers subjects such as perception, cognition, personal space, privacy, territoriality, crowding, way finding and spatial orientation and aims to improve students' knowledge about human behaviour, people and their interaction with the environment (interior/exterior). Examination of the interrelationship between environments and human behaviour is among the objectives of the course. Definition of the terms including environment, natural environment, social settings, built environments, learning environments and informational environments helps to explore and define design parameters affecting humans interaction with their social and physical environment. *Experimental Learning Theory* defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”. This study makes the emphasis on **"exploratory" and "descriptive"** aspects of the Environmental Psychology within the real life context, providing comprehensive information to be inferred and issued in a complementary manner in interior design education. In such a way that; viable *physical environment, social organization and norms, characteristics of people* objectives are to determinants empirically whether, and how the use of experience and practices can improve design problem-solving by both novice and expert designers.

2. The course of environmental psychology within the design education

In design education, learning and teaching methods aim to balance the creative process with a critical awareness of more objective criteria in the development of a proposition. Each design outcome tends to be unique, non-repetitive and immanent in its conception and development (Demirbas, Demirkan, 2007; 2003) . The rationale of the curriculum has to enable the students to build up a model that will guide them to understand and apply the knowledge, skills, process and theories of design and to provide a balanced synthesis between the artistic, technological and humane aspects of the profession (Demirbas, Demirkan, 2007; 2003). For this reason, design students have to identify and cognize these circumstances. Although the studies classify different learning types and/or styles in different ways, their aims and approaches are similar. Felder (1996) claims that since the instructional approaches around the cycle of learning models are similar, it is not important, which learning style instrument has been chosen. Among the various learning style theories, Kolb's (1984: 41) ELT that defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. [and in which] Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” was chosen to underpin this study. ELT suggests that learning is a cycle that begins with experience, continues with reflection and later leads to action, that becomes a concrete experience for reflection (Kolb, 1984). In the Experiential Learning Model, there are four phases of the learning cycle, namely concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC) and active experimentation (AE) (Demirbas, Demirkan, 2007; 2003; Boyatzis, Mainemelis, 1999).

2. 1. David Kolb's Learning Style Inventory

In 1971 David Kolb developed the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) to assess individual learning styles. While individuals tested on the LSI show many different patterns of scores, research on the instrument has identified four statistically prevalent learning styles -- Diverging, Assimilating, Converging, and Accommodating.

Diverging: The Diverging style's dominant learning abilities are Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO). Research shows that they are interested in people, tend to be imaginative and emotional, have broad cultural interests, and tend to specialize in the arts. In formal learning situations, people with the Diverging style prefer to work in groups, listening with an open mind and receiving personalized feedback.

Assimilating: The Assimilating style's dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Reflective Observation (RO). Individuals with an Assimilating style are less focused on people and more interested in ideas and abstract concepts. Generally, people with this style find it more important that a theory have logical soundness than practical value.

Converging: The Converging style's dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE). They have the ability to solve problems and make decisions based on finding solutions to

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