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The Relation between “Child-Space” at School and the Educational Places Concept

Space as a field of values and interactions

The relation between built and formed space with human behavior and creativity has been already the center of interest for the research. Space contains a reserve of information that conveys in two ways, with symbolism in its architecture and with actions and practices whose development favors. Depending on space characteristics, this process "imposes" (as in the case of a traditional classroom) or "suggests" the subject to adopt forms of behaviors and attitudes (Chombart de Lauwe, 1982, Fischer, 1997).

On the other hand, it is not given that the subject will necessarily reproduce the forms of behaviors and practices that matched with space's characteristics. On the contrary, it often enough uses space according to its own perception, in a manner that differs from the dominant model. Especially with the changes that bring in space, real or symbolic, it projects to space its personal choices, which also constitute a response to the influence of social environment. In this case, the built and formed space becomes a field of interaction that can lead toward in the modification of space itself.

The place, a space inside space, adjusted to the subject

This process can lead to the creation of a *place*. This is a real space, which, however, has the distinctive feature that it was redefined by the subject, which dressed it with meanings and relationships referred to its fictional world.

The concept of *place* allows us to study the interaction between *what we are and what the space is in which we are*. The above finds its implementation, especially in social psychology, environmental psychology and geography. Here, we use the concept of place to point out a) the subjective nature of the child's relationship with space and b) space connections with the world of imagination, two elements that, no matter how paradox it seems, contribute to the development of child's relationship with reality (Piaget, 1998, Fischer, 1997, Proshansky & Fabian, 1983, Hague &

Jenkins, 2005). Therefore, the *place*, is a subjective version of space connected with the desires, choices and capabilities of the subject (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987).

Integrated in an educational context, space is also important from a pedagogical point of view for two reasons:

- The first reason is that it offers an information reserve that refers to subject's experiences and, therefore, it can be included to a learning process. In practice stimuli come from space constitutes learning stimuli for the child, because it provides the child information about the aesthetic, social values, and the culture of its social environment. On the other hand, stimuli from space can motivate the child to develop activities related to processes social learning. (Fisher, Khine, 2006, Spencer et al, 1989).
- The second reason according to which space has educational value, is the potential for interaction that offers to the child with the social environment. This potential can contribute to develop its skills and to cultivate new forms of behavior.

Therefore, space is par excellence a field of activity in which the child is thinking, acting, playing, communicating, interacting, creating places, especially during its playing time (Weinstein, David, 1987).

The classroom, space of the children

At school, child's relationship with space acquires a pedagogical dimension, because space's characteristics, in particular its arrangement and aesthetics, as well as the way of using it, are associated by default with the educational process. (Vayer, Duval, Roncin, 1997, Dudek, 2000, Germanos, 2006).

The pedagogical dimension of space is important in context of cooperative learning. A creative and successful relationship between child and space alongside autonomy and freedom in its movements facilitates the development of communication and interaction in the classroom. The design of **arrangement** and the use of school space can decisively contribute to the learning process and child development, if and when they lead to be created in the classroom:

- Places, connected to the educational process
- Micro-environments of cooperative communication and interaction.

The creation of *educational places* in classroom

The creation of *educational places* in space, presents great interest. Regarding space organization, flexibility and utilization of stimuli and references related to the world of child's imagination, favors making of frequent changes in space. These changes can result in the creation of micro-environments of educational and cultural interest. Regarding the use of space, the freedom of children to intervene in space surrounding them and to adapt it to their own centers of interest, completes the possibilities that space offers to the classroom (Germanos, 2015).

The teacher, alone or with children, can exploit the roads opened in the class due to the freedom of the relationship with space, for developing educational places along with class activities. Implemented researches in Greek kindergartens, related to this

topic, presented the advantages this procedure possesses for teaching, especially if educational places function in context of play. Educational places that were being observed consisted of one module of spaces and activities, which comprised

- A temporary space arrangement based on changes which had mainly a symbolic character, such as a “change” of objects’ identity: a cloth strewed down on the floor “was” a river, a **chair** on the table “became” a hill, ... etc.
- An educational **play** activity, **whose content** was connected with the concepts to be taught.

The connection of space relationships with the educational process allowed children to acquire an experience of space associated with new concepts. Educational space became a *material field of pedagogy*, attuned with the active participation of the child and its pleasure from participating in this form of educational process (Germanos, 1997, Germanos, Tzekaki, Ikononou, 1997).

The formation of cooperative communication and interaction micro-environments

In the examples of interventions presented in this site, space redesign leads to conversions in its arrangement, aesthetics and equipment (that is, its *organization*), through the creation of space structures that contribute in strengthening dialogue and cooperation. Moreover, these changes require the cultivation of a new concept for the use of space in classroom that is associated with child’s active participation and its initiative’s.

The main changes in the organization and use of space are:

- A new arrangement of the furniture, in order to create micro-environments for the group, which
 - will be adapted to the development of “face-to-face” type communication, among children
 - will include the potentiality of double orientation a) towards group's interior and b) towards other groups in order to facilitate communication and interaction in the classroom.
- A space formation
 - for every group of the class
 - for every child, which, this way, will have its personal space.
- The design of a flexible space that will facilitate the development of different forms of educational and cultural communication and interaction. This attribute favors the application of different teaching techniques.
- The connection of space aesthetics with the creation of a positive psychological climate in the classroom.
- Children’s freedom to intervene in space, alone or in group, to change its arrangement and aesthetics and, ultimately, to associate it with their own centers of interest and appropriate it. This procedure helps them make places in the classroom.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the pilot interventions in school spaces, made with the implementation of Pedagogical Space Redesign method, showed the importance of changes in the organization and use of space (Germanos, 2009). Even in cases of simple interventions made exclusively with what was already in the school (without making new constructions, or buying new furniture and equipment), redesign of the arrangement and aesthetics of school spaces contributed significantly to the reorganization of child's relationship with space. This evolution created *space conditions* for the development of cooperative activities, the adaptation of educational environment to child's centers of interest, and in general, for the harmonization of cultural exchanges in class.

On the other hand, at the level of space use, the adoption of cooperative educational practices in class (that were made possible by the new space arrangements) strengthened the process of cooperative skills acquisition by children and transformed their relationship with space. The changes recorded are related with the appearance of pleasure as a factor of class function, as well as with the creation of a positive psychological climate in classroom (Germanos, 2009). This climate contributed to the establishment of more and better communication and approach between pupils that, subsequently, led to the forming of a strong social and cultural cohesion linked to the respect for individual differences in classroom.

The new conditions of space arrangement and aesthetics strengthened the process of creating places in the classroom. Appropriation of space by children and the release of their relationship with space, strengthened their initiatives in creating their own places. On the other hand, these two factors contributed to the formation of educational places, integrated in the cooperative operation of the class.

Moreover, pedagogical redesign was connected with the evolution of class' psychosocial factors' process. Before pilot interventions, class values and standards (functioning in the traditional form) were based on passive presence, competition (called "fair play"!) and stereotypes on pupil behavior. On the contrary, in cooperative classes that emerged from the process of pilot interventions, these factors were replaced by the active participation in educational process, cooperation, dialogue and companionship as parameters in everyday life of the class (Germanos, 2009).

Finally, the creation of educational places gave another dimension to the educational process, because it "built" learning process on the centers of interest and pleasure of children.

However, from our point of view, the benefits of the pedagogical redesign of space surpassed the results of upgrading the educational process. The correlation of space with what the child really is and not with what it should be, contributed significantly to the formation of *a new culture of school space*. This new culture has enriched social and cultural exchanges enhancing the mutation of roles and relationships in the classroom to a new, cooperative quality. In addition, it contributed to the democratization of the function of the (formerly traditional) class, and to the creation of a positive psychological climate. The profound meaning of pedagogical

redesign can be found in the fact that it became the “bridge” by which the transition of school class from the traditional to the cooperative form carried out.

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