

# THE EDUCATIONAL SPACE: BUILDER OF A NEW TEACHING BEING

## *Impact of Aesthetic-Spatial Design on the Transformation of Teaching Practical Knowledge*

Ana MÁRQUEZ-ROMÁN y Encarnación SOTO GÓMEZ  
Didactic and School Organization Department  
University of Málaga

[marquezr@uma.es](mailto:marquezr@uma.es)

[esoto@uma.es](mailto:esoto@uma.es)

**Keywords:** educational space; aesthetics; teacher professional development; practical knowledge; practical thinking

**Keywords on Research Methods:** qualitative research; case study; discussion group; observation and pedagogical documentation; documentary analysis

### Proposal Information

Each of the acts that make up our professional teaching development, however small, is closely linked to our educational conceptions and beliefs: the conscious and the unconscious ones. The way in which we present an activity, in which we prepare the classroom space, the materials we choose, the way we interact with children... absolutely everything tells us about our childhood image, our teacher image and of course our image of education (Trueba, 2015).

In the research presented here, the aesthetic design of the educational space becomes the key factor that makes visible the pedagogical conceptions that guide teachers' daily practice. The decisions they make in relation to space design tell us about how they understand and develop the teaching and learning process. That is, these spaces become explicit messages of their practical knowledge, understood as the set of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and emotions that operate automatically and that condition our perception and performance (Peña Trapero & Pérez Gómez, 2019).

The school spaces show in this way the gap between the automatic actions derived from the whole entrenched school culture, and that which teachers verbally support and defend. In other words, they evidence the distance between their actions and their intentions, between doing and saying, between their theories in use and their proclaimed theories (Argyris, 1993; Schön, 1994). Even though this distance is almost inevitable, it is increasingly necessary to make it conscious to try to transform it.

This case study, financed by the University of Malaga and an FPU contract (04/17106) granted by the Ministry of Education of Spain, aims to understand the experience of reflection and pedagogical-spatial transformation lived by the group of teachers of Early Childhood Education of the public school "Frida Kahlo", in a coastal town in southern Spain. And with this it intends to understand how this complex process of transformation from practical knowledge (action) to practical thinking (reflection) (Pérez Gómez, 2017, 2020) of these teachers in relation to the educational space is developed.

Like any story, this one also has a beginning, and it is the visit of three teachers of this school to the public school "El Martinet". Inspired by the beauty of this Catalan school and its conception of teaching and learning, teachers begin the transformation of their practice towards more active and freedom models, where the school space can become an educational space (Acaso, 2018; Ceppi & Zini, 1998; Charteris, Smardon & Nelson, 2017; Nair, 2014). 'Educational' understood here as that process that helps to grow autonomously, critically and creatively (Pérez Gómez, 2012). Some of the first signs of this progressive change are: the absence of blackboards and structured tables and chairs that recall the image of a

traditional and academic school, and the emergence of open arrangements organized in learning environments that promote the flexible development of different knowledge and languages (De Pablo & Trueba, 1994; Riera Jaume, Ferrer Ribot & Ribas Mas, 2014).

Faced with this interesting and peculiar case, we ask ourselves questions that motivate this study: what are the principles that guide the idea of space for teachers, and what do these reveal about their theoretical conception of the educational process? What presence do the different aesthetic factors have (spaces, green areas, furniture, objects, images, colors, sounds, smells, lighting ... ) in the current practice of their classrooms, and what does this tell us about the most unconscious and automatic actions and knowledge that determine their professional development? What methodological-spatial transformations are they developing and how do these changes relate to the transformation of their practical knowledge in practical thinking?

### **Methodology or Methods/ Research Instruments or Sources Used**

Knowing the physical and pedagogical reality that shapes this research means taking into account the diversity of subjective, conscious and unconscious conceptions and assessments that each individual brings to the subject in question. This sets a study focus that cannot be measured objectively, but on the contrary places us in an experience lived and felt by the actors, and which is therefore always subjectively measured by each subject and social subjectivity (Flores, 2015).

The qualitative approach and, in particular, the case study (Stake, 2010; Stenhouse, 1980) appears then in this context as the most appropriate approach to understand these personal conceptions and criteria of assessment. It seeks to make a global approximation of the social situations to explore, describe and understand them inductively. This means starting from the knowledge that different people have involved in those situations and not deductively from hypotheses formulated by an external researcher (Barreto, 2007).

The data collection techniques have been diverse, including: observation and pedagogical documentation of the physical reality of the different learning environments and the performance of the teachers in them; the realization of a discussion group with these same teachers; and documentary analysis.

This diversity of techniques offers us the possibility of contrasting and triangulating the data obtained through each one of them, providing this with greater credibility and validity to the investigation. The lack of coherence between them has become, precisely, the key to detect categories and axes of interest. Thus, for example, while the review of documents has given us, mainly, information about what the participants "say they do", the observation and documentation has given us more information about what the participants "do". The triangulation of both techniques has allowed us to realize the distance between proclaimed theories and theories in use by the teachers.

The same issue is pointed out by Walker (1989), stating that "*the most effective way to identify problems is to identify any discrepancy that arises: between what people say and do, or between theory and practice*" (p. 180).

### **Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings**

The importance of this research lies in the understanding that the reflection on space design involves and concretizes an educational philosophy and a way of teacher being consistent with a truly educational process.

The aesthetic design of the space thus becomes the germ for teachers to begin to rethink their own practice, to reprogram their already automated cognitive and emotional mechanisms. In this way, the physical-spatial change is also accompanied by a process of personal and professional reconstruction, a

reflexive process towards congruence between its educational principles and the actual practice in its classrooms.

In this regard, it should be noted that, despite the still existing contradictions between their declared theories and the spaces they offer - fruit of their experience in traditional schools until a few years ago - all of them currently feel the aesthetic improvement of the environments as a duty towards childhood, since they have the right to grow in stimulating, rich and freedom contexts. Thus, the changes that have been made and that show that real interest and involvement in the subject, are strengthened by perceiving a new and educational performance and relationship with the learning of children in the Early Childhood service. It's a process in which pupils acquire an increasingly active role.

The results of this research allow us to draw two relevant conclusions:

a) The process of spatial transformation reinforces in teachers the questioning of other educational variables until now unquestionable, reconstructing their practical knowledge or theories in use. This happens especially in those teachers with previous dispositions based on commitment and intellectual concern.

b) These spatial and personal transformations allow the development of new teaching dispositions in consonance with less interventional pedagogical theories.

## References

- Acaso, M. (2018). *Pedagogías invisibles: el espacio del aula como discurso*. Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata.
- Argyris, C. (1993). *Knowledge for Action: A Guide to Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Barreto, M. (2007). Notas sobre investigación e infancia. *Infancias Imágenes*, 6(1), 34-39.
- Ceppi, G., & Zini, M. (Ed.) (1998). *Children, Spaces, Relations. Metaproject for an Environment for Young Children*. Reggio Emilia: Reggio Children Domus Academy.
- Charteris, J., Smardon, D., & Nelson, E. (2017). Innovative learning environments and new materialism: A conjunctural analysis of pedagogic spaces. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49(8), 808-821.
- De Pablo, P., & Trueba, B. (1994). *Espacios y recursos para ti, para mí, para todos. Diseñar ambientes en educación infantil*. Madrid: Escuela Española.
- Flores, L. M. (2015). La cuestión del clima y el espacio escolar: lineamientos y proyecciones pedagógicas. En Errázuriz, L. H. (Ed.), *El (f)actor invisible. Estética cotidiana y cultura visual en espacios escolares* (pp. 101-109). Santiago, Chile: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes.
- Nair, P. (2014). *Blueprint for Tomorrow. Redesigning Schools for Student-Centered Learning*. Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.
- Pérez Gómez, Á. I. *Educarse en la era digital La escuela educativa*. Madrid: Morata.
- Pérez Gómez, Á. I. (2017). *Pedagogías para tiempos de perplejidad. De la información a la sabiduría*. Rosario: Homo Sapiens.
- Pérez Gómez, Á. I. (2020). Los desafíos educativos en tiempos de pandemias: ayudar a construir la compleja subjetividad de los seres humanos. *Praxis educativa*, 24(3), 1-24.
- Peña Traperó, N., & Pérez Gómez, Á. I. (2019). Las disposiciones subjetivas de los docentes en la superación de las resistencias al cambio ante procesos cíclicos de formación basados en la investigación (Lesson Study): Estudio de un caso. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 30(2), 569-587.
- Riera Jaume, M. A., Ferrer Ribot, M., & Ribas Mas, C. (2014). La organización del espacio por ambientes de aprendizaje en la Educación Infantil: significados, antecedentes y reflexiones. *Revista*

*Latinoamericana de Educación Infantil (RELAdeI)*, 3(2), 19–39.

Schön, D. (1994). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Routledge.

Stake, R. (2010). *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work*. New York: Guilford Press.

Stenhouse, L. (1980). The Study of Samples and the Study of Cases. *British Educational Research Journal*, 6(1), 1-6.

Trueba, B. (2015). *Espacios en armonía. Propuestas de actuación en ambientes para la infancia*. Barcelona: Octaedro.

Walker, R. (1989). *Métodos de investigación para el profesor*. Madrid: Morata.