

Architecture in School, School in Architecture

(Editorial)

School spaces as learning environments have attracted little attention in the past. Aesthetics, natural lighting, the use of suitable colors, the connection between interior and exterior spaces, sustainable development, etc. were not in the foreground when new school buildings were being planned or when old ones were being renovated. Schools and preschools used to be built just like any other building; running through the middle of schools were cramped corridors where clothes and shoes were left, with closed classrooms on both sides of the corridor (Taylor 2009). In the classrooms there were heavy desks, typically for two students, arranged in two or three rows, with all chairs facing the blackboard and the teacher. The classroom arrangement was suitable for frontal lessons, with all students learning the same content, and “traditional” teaching methods, where the teacher’s speaking dominated.

Nowadays, frontal lessons are supplemented by group work, pair work and individual work. “Traditional” teaching methods are supplemented by other methods, such as practical work, experimental or laboratory practice, various workshops, etc. School classes today involve a variety of didactic strategies: problem-solving classes, project classes, experiential learning, ICT-supported learning, etc., where students’ own activity and active participation lead them to new knowledge and new ways of thinking. Active learning relates to students’ experiences and to learning in real-life circumstances. The classroom, where students spend most of their time, should therefore allow and encourage active learning and open up a space that makes thinking possible.

Contemporary views of teaching and learning emphasize learning in different ways, in different places and at different times. A school learning environment should, therefore, encourage students to learn outside the classroom too, for instance in corridors and around the school as well, since schools’ exterior spaces constitute instruction. Moreover, practically all history of science, art and philosophy “teaches” us about the profound importance of space to thinking, and about the real variety of the spatial circumstances of thinking. Thinking is like a journey: in the Age of Enlightenment, Rousseau was walking through the Forest of Vincennes when he was suddenly struck by the thought of the corruption of human civilization, which became the leitmotif of his life and work (Rousseau 1959, p. 1135). Nietzsche, who left an indelible mark on the following century, declared the glamorous St. Mark’s Square in Venice to be his “space for thinking” (Goetz 2001, p. 159). Deleuze, after whom the twentieth century will one day be known (as Foucault (2008, p. 61) put it somewhat prophetically), situated the issue within a broader framework, developing the daring concept of “geophilosophy”, which

studies the spatial coordinates of thinking in all senses of the word (Deleuze and Guattari 1999, p. 88).

But let us return to school space. The space where educational work takes place is considered an additional factor of instruction, as we are fully aware that the young are susceptible to the symbolic messages that the school building conveys along with its surroundings. When school instruction is a communication process and space is an additional factor of instruction, then school space itself must be interacting with the users of the space. In view of this, Eleanor Nicholson (2009, p. 45) writes that the school building communicates a great many messages about what is important and what is not. It also communicates, for example, the importance of the place where the school building stands, how much we value energy, what our attitudes are toward natural materials and the environment, etc.

According to Strmčnik (1999), the main task of instruction is the development of intellectual, physical and health, social and moral, and aesthetic and artistic areas. Underlining school spaces as additional aspects of instruction means that school spaces help to develop and encourage these various areas. To give some examples: spaces fitted for group work will encourage cooperation among students; adapted school spaces and equipment will support inclusive lessons suitable for each individual child, regardless of their special needs; appropriate rooms and furniture will encourage students' cooperation and different social skills; works of art will develop aesthetic and artistic areas; various toys and playgrounds will encourage movement, etc.

The word now is *deinstitutionalization*; for that reason, learning environments should be organized in a way that encourages and supports learning, regardless of the different learning styles (visual, auditory and kinesthetic) or children's individual characteristics. It is now generally accepted that we receive information in different ways, in different places and at different times. School space has been called "the third teacher" (Edwards, Gandini and Forman in Burke and Grosvenor 2003, p. 17), "a three-dimensional textbook" (Taylor 2009, p. 3) or hidden curriculum. E. Nicholson (2009, p. 45) also adds that school spaces reflect how and what students learn, as well as how they are taught.

When planning new or renovating existing school buildings, it is necessary to take into account the needs and wishes of their users, in order to ensure greater participation by students and others who are involved (teachers and other school staff), as well as architects, builders and other stakeholders. Relevant literature refers to "consensus design" (Day 2003). It has also been argued (Burke and Grosvenor 2003, p. 19) that children are "natural builders" and that they have "a natural talent as planners and designers". Day (2003, p. 21) adds that if learning environments were to improve, children would enjoy attending school more and would be absent from classes less often. It seems worrying that many people live in places that they do not feel connected to and, consequently, they do not value the places where they live and work (*ibid.*, p. 11).

Different concepts of instruction, teaching and learning have provided the foundation for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary views of school and pre-school spaces as architectural objects. Various research and projects interrelate

the areas of architecture, art, pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, ecology and other sciences, disciplines and movements. Emphasis is placed on the materiality of school space and the question of how the materiality of school space itself – playrooms, classrooms, interior and exterior spaces, etc. – allows for spaces for thinking, creation, socialization, association and non-exclusion.

The history of thinking is closely related to the question of where we are when we are thinking. Thinking, of course, is omnipresent – in Nietzsche's philosophers (Nietzsche 2005), Rousseau's children (Rousseau 1969) and Lévi-Strauss's natives (Lévi-Strauss 2004). However, thinking is not something that develops in and of itself. It needs some kind of drive, and certain conditions have to be met for it to "get underway"; this is something quite different from prescribing the "right" methods of thinking or appropriate spaces for thinking.

Instead of the traditional postulates of the so-called intentional pedagogy, in which everything had to be carefully planned and prescribed, and instead of the presumably alternative and "new" pedagogy, in which authorities are supposed to be rejected (perhaps even dangerously approaching Lyotard's description of "the postmodern condition" (Lyotard 2002)), the history of thinking is now facing a different path. This path originates in the research on the importance of space both for the formation of knowledge and its "transmission", that is, the teaching that is part of thinking and creation.

Yet such thinking is connected with the senses, with the hand, the body, with movement and space – it is always already located in "body-space". This new line of flight (*ligne de fuite*) was first drawn by Gaston Bachelard (2001) with his idea of "the poetics of space", and it has been developed by recent humanistic studies in the field of architecture – predominantly by Juhani Pallasmaa (2005) in the English-speaking world and Benoît Goetz (2002) in the French-speaking world, while in Slovenia the architect Emil Navinšek (Briški 2008) could be placed among these names. Within these frameworks we can start thinking differently about school and at school as well. Or, perhaps not – indeed, it cannot be prescribed, the only thing we can do is create the right circumstances.

School can start to be thought of as a potentially free space, "far from the madding crowd", where we could put into brackets the multitudinous identities that burden us ever more heavily. When in school, we suspend class and gender differences. When in school we are "all equal" in the sense that school space protects us both from external pressure and – paradoxically – from school ideology itself, that is to say, from "school as a leading ideological apparatus". It can protect us from ideological practices and hidden curricula simply by allowing and permitting us to move in space, to change places. That is what makes the concept of "dislocation" so important.

When in school we are – or should be – in a "freed space". It is perhaps no coincidence that the first demand made by the students of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, after having occupied the faculty in the fall of 2011, was to be given "autonomous space", whereupon they established what they called "freed lecture rooms". It was their attempt at creating a space where thinking could perhaps be possible, and was the very first item on their agenda!

Internationally, the connection between architecture and pedagogy is relatively well established, whereas it is only making its first steps in the fields of theory and research in Slovenia. Here, we should mention the project within the Target Research Project “Slovenia’s Competitiveness 2006–2013” called “The Architecture of the School Environment in the Function of Hidden Curriculum (2010–2012)”, which was also the framework within which the majority of the papers published in the thematic section of this “Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies” were written.

The articles published in this issue of the “Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies” are directed at a couple of areas. They examine school space from the philosophical viewpoint as a “space for thinking”. **Eva D. Bahovec’s** text “*What is a Good Space for Thinking? Philosophy, Architecture, Schooling*” presents various philosophical perspectives on architecture and construction. It connects building, living, thinking, and it deconstructs traditional “binary oppositions” all the way to the opposition between the internal and external, being as it is part of the basic definition of space as such. In this context, the author sheds light on school as an institution of the modern age, governed by “ideological practices” and “discipline power”. She introduces “a space of meeting” and within it “the ethics of suspension”, which could open up new possibilities for thinking, learning and teaching.

The contribution “*What Kind of School do We Want? The Architecture of Schools as an Element of (Hidden) Curriculum*” by **Ksenija Bregar Golobič** continues with philosophical considerations of space, thinking and learning. It focuses on the presentation of the central concept of school as an ideological apparatus – the concept of “hidden curriculum” – and it clarifies some of the misunderstandings related to it. It goes on to show why it is important to situate “hidden curriculum” in its original context, born in the epistemological shift “as a concept among concepts” developed by its creators M.W. Apple, P. Jackson and others, as well as, in a broader context, L. Althusser and his use of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In view of that, the article stresses that space is an “element” and an integral part of curriculum itself, not an external “factor” to be taken into account from now on. Space “equals” hidden curriculum; it is in plain sight, but very difficult to notice, eliminate and change for that very reason.

Gregor Bida’s “*Hidden Curriculum, Ideology, Space*” is the next article published here. It examines the central concepts related to “space as an element of curriculum”. Its departure point is the difference between the “traditional” concept of ideology as false consciousness (in people’s minds) and the understanding of ideology as practice (in ideological state apparatuses, such as school). “Ideological practice” means that ideology is the driving force behind everyday life in school, the basic organization of space and time, everyday rituals, etc. The author then presents the notion of fantasy, which Žižek employs to extend Althusser’s “ideological practice”. Based on that, the text provides a more detailed clarification of the relationship between space and hidden curriculum, and it shows how, in return, this set of concepts helps give a more concise elaboration of Žižek’s “ideological fantasy”.

The journal also publishes the text *“Learning Factors and School Environment Messages”* by **Majda Cencič** and **Marjanca Pergar Kuščer**, which focuses on the messages of school environments. It presents the results of an empirical, non-experimental research study comprising 251 primary school teachers. By filling in a written questionnaire, the teachers evaluated the factors they believe are encouraged by their internal and external school environments. The results show that the responding teachers valued ecology highest and, on average, school space the lowest. It is worth bearing in mind that, according to the responding teachers’ evaluation, renovated schools did not receive statistically significantly better results than unrenovated schools.

A concrete example of collaboration on classroom furnishing is given in the article *“Where Should I Sit? Furnishing School Classrooms as a Learning Activity”*, written by **Katja Sudec**. In word and image it describes and explains the project “Designing the learning environment”, which focused on furnishing classrooms. The project was based on Montessori pedagogical principles. In addition to two architects, the refurbishment also involved students of design and architecture, as well as the school’s students, teachers and parents. The classroom was fitted with a podium (stage) for sitting and lying upon, as a drawer for school bags and various school materials, as a stage, etc. They also designed different seats, for instance hammocks, footstools, sitting pads, etc., each of which supported a different function of the body (for instance, children’s movement and motor functions) and influenced communication, self-confidence, etc. The author concludes by saying that the project encouraged lively interior architecture in a holistic relationship among everyone involved, as well as creative, artistic learning.

School grounds as a constituent and important part of instruction, of which better use should be made, is the topic of **Ina Šuklje Erjavec’s** article *“Significance and Possibilities of School Grounds Usage in the Education Process”*. Alongside the definition and characteristics of school outdoor space, the article critically approaches the importance of school grounds as hidden curriculum; it also synthesizes the findings of international and Slovene research on the use of school grounds. The findings, originating in studies of school outdoor space of a selection of primary and secondary schools in Ljubljana and Nova Gorica between 1999 and 2002, show that school outdoor spaces of Slovene schools remain underused, very poorly furnished and equipped, and sometimes even dangerous. Hard sports fields, “park” surfaces and untended lawns with shrubs are their predominant features. Enclosing and locking school grounds are also typical, which means limiting choices concerning a variety of activities, especially for older children and teenagers.

The views of school space published in the articles should encourage relevant considerations both on the side of professional workers in education, as well as architects and others who plan new school buildings or renovate old ones. They may also encourage us to start thinking differently about school, not to close its door

to “the poetics of space” and, for those working in schools, not to close ourselves to its “hidden curricula” and all sorts of other limiting ideological practices. It is impossible simply to step out of ideologies; however, it *is* possible to create other meanings that are related to other situations, and grow from “other spaces”.

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