



Environmental psychology: the environment in child development

Psicologia ambiental: o ambiente no desenvolvimento infantil

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INTRODUCTION

The behavior and the human psychological is influenced externally at various times during their development, the environment in which it is inserted suffers and makes changes in the human being, especially in children who mostly naturally have a curious and attentive to the details around you. Evidencing that the way in which the environment is structured and perceived by children, participate in the social, psychological, environmental, cultural construction and your vision as a being belonging to the world.

It is understood that the organization of space is one of the components of an environmental context, and its interpretation is necessary for the understanding of human development processes. The contextual characteristics, of people and interpersonal interactive fields, possibly occur in a specific context, in which the inseparable elements, overlapping in the action of giving meaning or sense to oneself, to the other and to that environmental context (ROSSETTI-FERREIRA, AMORIM and SILVA, 2004, p.26).

Environmental psychology is an area still little studied and developed, which was derived from traditional psychology (CORRAL-VERDUGO, 2005), consolidating itself as a discipline that has as its central focus of study the way of thinking of human beings, and how this thought governs the integrated and related attitudes of the species with the environment (MOSER, 2005).

In this line of reasoning, Environmental Psychology seeks, in general, to understand how human behavior and its ability to subjectivate how things are influenced by the surrounding environment (SAGER et al., 2003), in order to build a sustainable relationship between man and nature that also provides human well-being (WIESENFEL, 2005).

The major contribution of environmental psychology to child development and education is the evidence that physical environmental aspects influence how people, children and adults, feel, think and behave in a given environmental context. The development of infants and young children is optimized when the entire physical space is planned and structured to support their behavioral needs and activities, as well as those of the adults who educate and care for them (OLDS, 1987).

The social and cultural dimensions are present in the definition of environments, mediating the perception, evaluation and attitudes of the individual towards the environment in which he is present. Thus, a reciprocity between person and environment is studied. This interrelationship is made dynamically, both



in natural and built environments. It happens this way because each individual behaves in a unique and specific way in a given environment, but this environment, in turn, modifies and influences human conduct (MOSER, 1998).

The present work is a qualitative study, of a basic nature, exploratory as to the objectives and using as a methodological instrument the bibliographical research (GERHARDT; SILVEIRA, 2009). Finally, the article aims to find an answer to the research problem "The environment influences how will child development proceed?"

OBJECTIVE

Conduct a literature search on the influence of the environment on child development.

METHODOLOGY

This is a literature review, developed with articles published from 1986 to 2023 in the electronic databases: Portal Capes, and Google Scholar, employing the descriptors: environmental psychology, social issues, child development, child behavior and their respective synonyms, in Portuguese and English languages. Only published articles that dealt with the topic and were available online were included. Articles outside the proposed period, which did not deal with the topic, not available online and repeated articles found in different databases were excluded.

DEVELOPMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

The emergence of the field of Environmental Psychology began after World War II with the process of rebuilding cities. With the implementation of large-scale housing programs as part of the post-war reconstruction policy, architects and urban planners, along with behavioral scientists, became aware that the built environment should reflect not only construction principles and aesthetics, but also other factors such as the psychological and behavioral needs of future occupants (CANTER; CRAIK, 1981).

Environmental Psychology initially emerged under the name of "Psychology of Architecture" and arose from the need of architects to understand the requirements and needs of future occupants of large public works linked to the reconstruction of cities, since they were used to working directly with private clients (LANGDON, 1966). Thus, architects found themselves in a situation where they would have to deal with several clients and meet different needs at the same time. In addition, seeking to utilize the relatively new technology in the management of post-war buildings would require an understanding of the effects of the physical aspects of the environment, such as lighting, thermal comfort (CANTER; CRAIK, 1981).



It is interesting to note that while planners and architects are interested in the study of man and environment aiming at a systematic and direct analysis of human behavior in response to the built and created environment, psychologists have directed their attention to understanding what leads individuals to behave in certain ways in certain places by associating the environmental context (CRAIK, 1973).

In the context of child development, "environmental perception" is understood as being divided into two pathways, where the first is due to the stimulation of the sensory organs by the environment. The other pathway refers to the contextual influences and experiences of children, which in turn interfere with the first. The result is not a simple copy of reality, but a unique and particular construction to the individual on external stimulation (GIBSON 1986; MERLEAU-PONTY, 1999).

Environmental Psychology has become an area that stands out for considering people and phenomena within their environmental context, in a reciprocal relationship in which the environment influences behaviors and behaviors influence environments (GÜNTHER; ROZESTRATEN, 2005). Historically, psychology itself has questioned the need for fragmentation that originated Environmental Psychology, assuming that psychology alone and automatically would contemplate this environmental approach, on the other hand, the focus on the environment would be more complete through Environmental Psychology (TASSARA; RABINOVICH, 2003).

The quality of an educational institution is strongly linked to the structuring of space, because the organization of children's spaces favors the occurrence of certain interactions, and inhibits others, playing an important role in the formation of identity and in the development of children's potential (BORDIGONI and COLS., 1993; WEINSTEIN and MIGNANO, 1993). But generally, the physical characteristics of the context are neglected not only in research on child development, but also in the planning of collective children's environments, be they day care centers, schools, hospitals, except for the general recommendations that they should be rich and stimulating (CAMPOS-DE-CARVALHO, 2004).

ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION

Environmental perception is a recurring theme that comes to collaborate for the awareness and practice of individual and collective actions, thus, the study of environmental perception is of such relevance so that one can better understand the interrelationships between man and the environment, their expectations, their satisfactions and dissatisfactions, judgments and behaviors (PACHECO; SILVA, 2007).

It corresponds to a complex process that provides different behaviors and physiological reactions due to the unique involvement with the personal, objective characteristics of the individual in the situation, the motivations, the previous experiences, which result in a greater or lesser sensitivity of the individual by the personal perception of the same of the place and the inserted objects.



According to Moore (1987) the child is seen as an agent of his own development, and not a passive organism bombarded by stimuli, on the one hand the child's behaviors are affected by environmental characteristics, on the other the child explores, discovers, experiments and initiates actions in his environment.

One of the key concepts for understanding ambience is perception, understood as a set of sensations, experiences, memory and feelings linked to the socio-physical, cultural and temporal context experienced by the person in relation to a place (TUAN, 1980). In one of the first stages of the psychological circuit of the human environmental experience, the studies carried out on environmental perception show that the environment influences numerous situations of human life, from individual aspects to social phenomena (PINHEIRO 1998).

Environmental perception is understood as the process in which the individual receives stimuli from the environment, from personal or individual experiences, through the sense organs that form human perception of certain characteristics of the environment (ALBUQUERQUE; CAVALCANTE; FERREIRA, 2020). Environmental perception based on individual experiences that results in a unique reading of the world would then be a cultural, personal and objective expression (TASSARA; RABINOVICH, 2003).

ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

The major contribution of environmental psychology to child development and education is the evidence that physical environmental aspects influence how people, children and adults, feel, think and behave in a given environmental context. The development of infants and young children is optimized when the entire physical space is planned and structured to support their behavioral needs and activities, as well as those of the adults who educate and care for them (OLDS, 1987).

Several authors point out the importance of considering, in planning the organization of children's spaces, the following functions related to child development: providing children with safety, comfort and personal identity; stimulating children's interest in the proposed activities through the stimulation of the various senses; promoting growth, competence and autonomy; in offering opportunities for both social contacts and privacy (PROSHANSKY and FABIAN, 1987).

Developmental Psychology points out that environmental, social and cultural factors with which children relate in their daily lives, from the first days of life, influence their development. Thus, the combination of these two independent areas, together, generate appropriate proposals to contribute to the quality of early childhood development within home environments with which children relate in their daily experience, from the first days of life. The child begins his relationship with the environment primarily through the exploration of his body, interacting with the environment, modifying and adapting according to his needs, which ends up favoring the construction of his social identity (CRUZ, 2011).



In an environment with spatial restrictions and socio-environmental vulnerability, children experience constant risks, which can be psychosocial or physical. On the other hand, these children can develop collective negotiation skills and plasticity of social use of space in a significant way, as they can start to incorporate, cognitively and affectively, experiences that allow them to learn to deal with the adversities encountered on a daily basis. They start to develop socialization skills, problem solving, ease of negotiation and plasticity of social use of space in a significant way (PEREIRA et al., 2019). However, children who have favorable socio-environmental environments have the opportunity to develop in a positive and fruitful way, which contributes to their mental health and social balance (ZACARIAS and HIGUCHI., 2021).

The physical dimension encompasses all the spaces available to children, their structural elements, the objects available and the different ways of distributing furniture and materials within the space. According to Legendre (1986, 1999), to designate different ways of distributing and positioning furniture and equipment in a place, these can form small areas, clearly delimited on three or four sides by low barriers such as furniture, wall and a possible unevenness of the ground, called circumscribed zones; the furniture can be dispersed throughout the place, leaning against the walls, or even absent, the spatial arrangement being characterized by the absence of zones. This type of spatial arrangement is the most common in Brazilian daycare centers that we have visited; a physical barrier, for example, a high piece of furniture, divides the environment into two or more areas, preventing a total view of the place by the children, although it allows their circulation throughout the room. The educator always organizes the space according to one or another type of arrangement, depending on his/her assumptions about the conception of the child and early childhood education, even if such assumptions are not sufficiently clear or conscious (CAMPOS-DE-CARVALHO, 2004).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In view of the above, it is possible to realize the importance of Environmental Psychology for child development since it receives adverse stimuli from the environment in which it lives. This work provides a redirection of thoughts as to how our behavior and our emotional reactions are influenced by the environment in which we are inserted. In an environment with spatial restrictions and socio-environmental vulnerability, children have as a reflection an experience of constant risks, which may be psychosocial or physical. Through this exchange and influences with the environment, they begin to develop socialization skills, problem solving, ease of negotiation and plasticity of social use of space in a significant way (PEREIRA et al., 2019).

Environmental psychology is a field of psychology that studies how the structure of a physical environment causes different behaviors in a group of people who have a unique perception of the



environment they are experiencing. This usually causes different behaviors and physiological reactions to an environment. Children in their development process are human beings still under construction, who observe and reproduce behaviors that are useful to make their life even better.

The research problem of this study was directly related to how the environment is present in the way it was to be carried out child development, considering that the observation, perception and meaning that the child gives to the environment, will cause different behaviors and reactions to the other present in the same environment. It is important to emphasize that the reasons mentioned enable the individuality of each human being, all being unique in a world with diverse stimuli.

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