



Module – Inhabiting the World

Georgia Sarikoudi (GRE)

1. Why teach this module?

People tend to view space as an abstract dimension in which human activities take place; however, it is actively involved in human actions and relationships. Especially in children's lives and school experiences, space matters. The school space, in particular, is an essential factor in the learning process which defines social interaction and relations into schooling experience. The term "space" refers not only to physical space (classroom, yard, the road to school) but also to the social area where multiple behaviours, identities, cultural backgrounds and power dynamics are unfolded.

The module aims at explaining how social anthropology through its methodological tools, fieldwork and ethnographic writing, may contribute in critically understanding issues such as the role of space in the interaction of children with culturally diverse backgrounds and identities. This module will give teachers the chance to see space, especially the space of a school, as a field of expression and interaction (e.g. How do children use school space to express identities, preferences, conflicts?)

2. Ethnographic Entry Points

According to Soja (1989) the term "spatial turn" describes the growing academic interest in the category of space in social sciences. Disciplines related to education pay significant attention to the concept of space. Burke & Grosvenor (2008) discuss the transformation of schools and examine the traditional and innovative (e.g. open-air) school/classroom designs with reference to cross-cultural "ideas about childhood, education and community" (p. 12). Ethnographic studies focus on space(s) as an effect of action in primary school (Adler & Adler 2003). The Adlers explore some of the patterns that children develop in this social space, noting the gendered cultural differences, their socialization, the dynamics and social stratification that are developed in after-class activities. Þrastardóttir (et. al.) (2019) published ethnographic research among 8th and 9th graders at one public school in Iceland focusing on how students make use of different spaces in one compulsory school and how activities in these spaces produce ideas about gender. The school environment favours dividing practices between boys and girls. The gender division is maintained through practices that support particular forms of masculinity with an emphasis on athletic embodiment and sports knowledge and it also affects power relations in the classroom.

Some studies pay attention to the space that children pass on their way to school. Morojele and Muthukrishna (2012) provide insights into the meaning of the school journey and how children (re)define the various places and spaces and the social interactions embedded in this journey in the rural area of Lesotho in South Africa.



3. Ways of understanding

To understand space and its interaction with school, we need to have in mind some basic anthropological concepts.

“Funds of knowledge” (Moll, 2010)- is the cultural knowledge that children (especially those with migrant background) carry with them. Teachers should be aware of students’ cultural experiences to help them in their social interactions at school as well as with their class performance.

Othering (San Martín 2017)- the condition of “othering” is the labeling of a person or a group as someone who belongs to a socially subordinate category than the “self”. Migrant populations are usually subjected to inclusionary or exclusionary procedures based on cultural features. Educators need to be able to act as cultural intermediaries and offer opportunities to students with a different cultural background, and a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Migration- During late-20th-century, global economic changes, migratory and cultural flows, and transfer of products and ideas, have challenged assumptions about the firmness of concepts such as space and inhabitation. What are the meanings of space at a time when continuous streams of people, information, ideas, and goods transcend national boundaries and are no longer linked to a single place of origin? In a post-colonial era, locals and immigrants design and recreate their lives in many places. The same year, Liisa Malkki (1997) criticized the idea of a “rooted” society or culture in a particular territory that dominated anthropological studies of culture and space as well as popular discourse. The concept of a society or culture “rooted” in a given territory. Teachers and educators should have in mind this understanding of globalization and of the constant movement of people that create multiethnic and multicultural classrooms.

Mobility, migration, and displacement make space to be considered in more complex ways than merely adapting to the physical environment. Schools across the world have an increasing number of students with a migrant background, and it becomes the place where various cultures and identities are met. Teachers need to get trained to be able to help students adjust to this new environment, express their ideas, and interact socially with their classmates and teachers.

4. Suggested Exercises

The module will be divided into two parts, and it will last for two weeks and 8 hours in total. In the first 4 hours, students will get familiar with some basic anthropological concepts (space, mobility, funds of knowledge) and with ethnographic examples about space meanings and practices in schools. In the second part, teachers will be asked to organize small projects into their classes. They can agree with their students to rearrange desks every week, and then students will note if/how this change affects their interactions with their classmates and with their teachers. This is a task for teachers in primary school classes. Another project that teachers could carry out is to walk with some of their students from school to their homes. They can ask them to describe during this walk their essential places and spaces (parks, gyms, coffee shops, bookstores, churches, etc) where they feel more comfortable (and why) to express their identities (cultural, sexual) and form social relationships. This project concerns teachers and students in high schools.

5. Learning Prospects

- Participants will become familiar with basic anthropological concepts about space, place, and their connection with education and schooling.
- Participants understand how school space defines social interaction and relations.
- Participants get the opportunity to design research projects and learn how vital is space inside and out of class for the development of student’s identities and their social interactions.



6. Literature

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Further Readings

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