

USING THE PHYSICAL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AS A TOOL FOR
LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

Ellen Suzanne Fisher

Dr. Benyamin Schwarz, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Literacy has been identified as the main goal of K-12 education in the United States today, for its value to individuals and to society. Balanced literacy and related methods are pedagogically based on the constructivist premise that intrinsically motivated and strategic literacy arises from personal engagement by the reader-writer with the material. To this end, the elementary-level classroom may be viewed as a setting that is designed by professional teachers to provide opportunities for engagement in the activities of literacy. Constructivist classrooms are intended to be child-centered, yet teachers' sense of self-efficacy and place-identity is as tied to the physical environment as is that of the students, but often ignored. School districts that do not factor environment-behavior research on the transaction between people and the physical classroom as they attempt to implement curricular change may be omitting a necessary element of success. This qualitative study examined the relationship between the physical classroom and literacy through a critical case study conducted in an common public elementary school, located in the United States and found that the physical classroom affects the practice and outcomes of literacy education and learning would be enhanced by the purposeful design of the environment to support constructivist pedagogy and engagement with the material of reading and writing.