

Childhood, Learning and Didactics

Bullying and fundamental values in the physical school environment

Marjanna de Jong, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, School of Teacher Education, Malmö University

The Swedish school system is firmly rooted in the fundamental values of society. Values education is a major task in the Swedish curriculum and many research projects deal specifically with solving of conflicts, exclusion of pupils and prevention of bullying.

In a recent study “Attitudes towards the school 2006” (Skolverket) some 3-4 percent of all pupils report that they felt bullied by other pupils. A nationwide action against bullying is taking shape, starting with an inventory of methods used to prevent bullying.

In this project I explore the relation between the occurrence of bullying and the physical environment of schools. In earlier research about bullying, the focus is on social climate, interaction between pupils and between pupils and teachers. With few exceptions, no mention is made of locations where bullying actually occurs.

Most school buildings in Sweden now in use, were built after 1950. Earlier research has described examples of new and remodeled schools, reflecting current trends in teaching, learning and school building. Each building is a unique entity with specific relations to the neighborhood.

Based on the space syntax theory, social and spatial relations are seen as connected. While the spatial organization does not determine behavior, it offers possibilities and obstacles for e.g. movement and meetings, play and bullying, and of course teaching school subjects.

Information about bullying is collected through questionnaires with pupils and interviews with staff. Using syntactical analysis based on graph theory, several spatial properties of the layout of buildings and schoolyards can be measured and compared, and the occurrence of desirable and unwanted behavior is analyzed in relation to properties of the location. Thus, the relevance of design properties and incidences of bullying can be described and discussed.

Knowledge of characteristics of spatial properties can be used in prevention through changes in the design or, when that is not possible, surveillance in places where bullying might occur. Knowledge of pupils' perceptions and experiences is essential for didactics and learning.



Childhood, Learning and Didactics

Bullying and fundamental values in the physical school environment

National curriculum aims:

- Fundamental values of tolerance, solidarity, respect, equality
- Training of conflict solution and social competence

2006: 3-4 % of all pupils felt bullied by other pupils (Report of National Agency of Education)

2007: nationwide action against bullying

Bullying occurs (report 2002 Bliding et al.):

- during lessons, but mostly before and after lessons
- inside the building (classroom, corridors, near the lockers, in the recess area and near the toilets)
- outside the building

Age differences:

- grade 5: most common place is outdoors
- grade 8 and grade 11: most common place is in the corridors

Children's perceptions of unsafe places:

- places for group activity, physical and motoric (football field, swings, climbing frames and slides)
- places for single children's activity, (climbing trees)
- far edges of the school yard bordered by walls, buildings or fences (behind the dining hall, near the garbage cans, close to the road, behind the gymnastics hall, outside the storage sheds)
- distant parts inside the school buildings (toilets, library, dining hall)

Question:

- How are positive values expressed in the school environment?
- What are spatial properties of places where bullying occurs?

Syntactical analysis of schoolyard:

- Several unpleasant places are close to segregated lines

Knowledge about physical properties is essential for surveillance during pause breaks.

Next step in the research:

- Analyse more school buildings and school yards
- Explore the relationship between children's experiences and spatial properties



CiCe Nordic 2007

