

**Transforming Educational Spaces:  
The Development of a Conceptual Site for Education**

by Lewis, Kathryn Cascio, Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, 2002, 210 pages;  
AAT 3076970

Abstract (Summary)

This study compares schools and museums as sites of education in an effort to determine the most favorable qualities of each and transform such spaces into a conceptual site that is not limited to a particular physical setting. The initial comparison focuses on several variables and their effects on students and teachers: familiarity, time, expected behaviors, setting, visual display, architectural factors, teaching and learning, and the relationship between objects and words. Much of the data for the study comes from the experience of teaching an art methods course to elementary education majors at the Pennsylvania State University. Most of the course took place in the university's Palmer Museum of Art directly across the street from its assigned classroom.

This qualitative study employed action research including ethnographic participant observation and descriptive analysis of student-generated documents such as curriculum materials developed as part of the course. Other data includes interviews with students at the end of the semester to learn their perspectives about art, about museums, their understanding of the museum/classroom relationship, their teaching philosophies, and what they had learned in the class.

This conceptual site allows for multiple voices to be heard and for power to be shared. In this site, the concept of what counts as knowledge is not fixed and individual students' experiences serve as a filter through which new knowledge is acquired and organized. The curriculum in this site is democratic in that it is individualized according to each student and content areas are integrated with one another. Students in the conceptual site take active roles in learning, collaborate with one another, and benefit from multiple types of resources. Critical analysis of the forces acting on learners in a given site and of their political basis leads to empowerment of both students and teachers in the conceptual site.

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