

ABSTRACT

Despite all events unfolding in space, mainstream research often overlooks the influence of space in teaching and learning. There is some research, however, showing how space makes various educational experiences available. This research adds to a growing body of spatial research in education. The research reconceptualised space in a grade 6 English classroom in order to explore ways of working with space. The research sought to understand (1) spatial relations in the classroom, (2) the redesign of space and (3) the experiences of living in a reconceptualised space. In this case study thirty one grade 6 learners and a teacher collaboratively redesigned their classroom space. Observations were recorded over a six week period. Four Community of Enquiries and interviews were conducted with participants. Using Lefebvre's (1991) spatial theory and Foucault's (1977) work on knowledge, power and discourse the data was analysed systematically paying special attention to learners perceptions and behaviours prior to and following the reconstitution. The findings show how relations between participants are governed by time and manifest in the spatial layout of the classroom. Prior to the reconstitution the normalisation of theft and strong gendered boundaries created antagonistic relations amongst participants. Learners also expressed a strong desire to belong in the classroom and the broader schooling community. Having reconstituted the space, space also reconstituted the participants. In the redesigned space learners' agency and voice was amplified and the space became more conducive to learning. The benefits of the reconceptualisation were learners entering into stronger communal relations with peers and increased participation from learners and broader take up on the school of the grade 6 class' ideas. The challenges of the reconceptualisation were the alienation of other grade 6 learners and teachers finding learners' voice and increased agency more challenging to manage. Systematic work with space presents a range of insights into the social relations in classrooms that are often otherwise invisible.