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HOW TO MODIFY AN ORDINARY CLASS ROOM TO A MULTISENSORY SPACE

Liisa Lassila

*Laurea University of Applied Sciences (FINLAND)
liisa.lassila@laurea.fi*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the idea of a multisensory class room. The Multisensory Space is an easily modified space where landscapes (photographs and images), sounds and multisensory items create different cultural and learning environments for the visitors. The Space is the core of the Multisensory Space Method. The Method has been developed in Finland at Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

This method can be applied when creating learning environments for different contexts, and it can be utilized in the activities of different organizations, such as learning institutions. Learning institutions can use the method for making their education more versatile and interactive.

The Multisensory Space is created around a certain topic. The space is not supposed to be an exhibition but a place acts as an inspired learning environment. The process of creating and building the multisensory environments is an important learning process for the clients. Also, in the ready-made space, people gather together to encounter, interact and freely discuss.

Keywords: Multisensory Space, learning.

1 THE MULTISENSORY SPACE

The Multisensory Space is developed at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Laurea produces new competences in the field of service innovations and carries out professionally orientated education, regional development and R&D activities by following the Learning by Developing (LbD) operational model.

Laurea employs approximately 500 personnel and has approx. 8 000 students, of which approx. 1 200 study in the adult education programmes. Laurea operates in the Greater Helsinki Region in seven units. [1]

The Multisensory Space class room is built in year 2009 in Laurea. It has been used in our Social Service Education at Laurea Tikkurila for more than five years. In 2013, there were over 120 students who built multisensory spaces. Multisensory spaces are also used as a ready-made learning environment for students and visitors.

The Multisensory space provides shared experiences for all the senses. Its key idea is to promote learning, encounters between different people and different cultures and enhance well-being. The space is not supposed to be an exhibition but a place where people can meet each other while the environment acts as an inspiration for discussion and thoughts.

Not only the space itself but the whole process of planning and building it with different kinds of persons is usually an essential part of the multisensory method.

The idea of the Multisensory Space is that it is an easily modified space which can be used for different purposes and can even be built to different environments. The Space can be set in two different ways: as a permanent solution (a class room), or as a temporarily solution (for some event).

In the Multisensory Space, there is

- something to see (visual effects, such as fabrics with different colours, photographs; landscapes created with projectors and lighting)
- something to touch (objects, fabrics)
- something to hear (music or other sounds)
- and something to smell and taste (food, drinks)

1.1 The ready-made environment

The Multisensory Space can be built around a certain topic, without a thorough process before building. Such examples are a relaxation space, a Parisian café for language studies, a Somalian living room for multicultural encounters or intercultural learning. Common for all the different kinds of Spaces is that they should act as a relaxing, comfortable environment which encourages interaction and communication between individuals who visit the Space. The Space is not supposed to be an exact copy of some particular real-life environment. The idea of the space is to provoke thoughts, memories and feelings.

The important thing with the ready environment is that:

- it is relaxing and comfortable
- it feels safe for anyone to bring up their thoughts and talk about their feelings in the Space
- it encourages communication and interaction between individuals
- it uses different senses to create a feeling of being somewhere else than in an ordinary public space
- it resembles some ways (no matter how creatively) the environment the participants want to present

It is recommended to pay attention to the way in which the ready-made Space will be used. For example, in a Parisian language café it is important to create an atmosphere which encourages people to use the foreign language with different people, and in a Somalian living room, the Space should enable encounters between different kinds of people in an environment that feels both inspiring and cozy.

2 THE MULTISENSORY SPACE AT LAUREA

In Finland, at Laurea University of Applied Sciences, the Multisensory Space has been set up in a classroom as a permanent solution. At Laurea Tikkurila, the space is a room about 30 m² in size with white walls where videos or pictures can be reflected. There are also curtain rods supporting different kinds of curtains and fabrics.

The landscapes and soundscapes of the spaces are digitally stored. There are picture- and sound recordings from different cultural surroundings. More material can be found in the storage. The physical multisensory space is an easily modified space where landscapes, sounds and items create different cultural surroundings for the visitors.

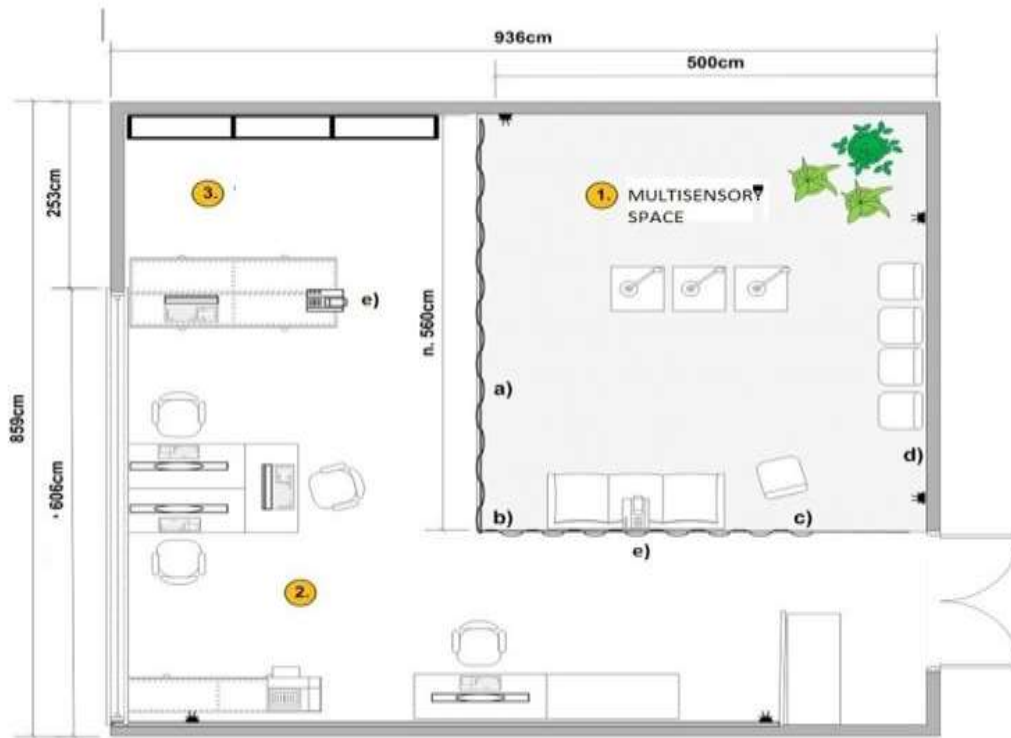


Fig.1 The Multisensory Space at Laurea Tikkurila (classroom height: 327 cm)

The classroom has been divided into two parts with curtains (projector canvas): into the actual Space and into a holding place for movable equipment (storage). The space measures 30 square meters.

Thus, the Multisensory Space at Laurea includes

1.
 - a) a white side curtain (for projecting an image onto a screen)
 - b) a curtain wall (curtains are changeable)
 - c) a carpet covering the area
 - d) wall (for decoration/curtains)
 - e) a data projector
2. Work space (for project staff) including a computer, which is connected into the room's sound system
3. Storage

3 TEACHER'S EXPERIENCES OF THE MULTISENSORY SPACE

For a teacher, the Multisensory Space has given the possibility to teach more creatively and in a more versatile manner. The Space can be used for many kinds of subjects. It gives both joy and inspiration and also new ways of learning and it also allows creating an easy connection with the students.

Additionally, the students have started eagerly and without hesitation to build Multisensory Spaces themselves. They have thought very creatively how different senses can be used in the Space, and they have felt that it is easy to talk and share experiences in the Multisensory Space.

4 SOME MULTISENSORY SPACE EXAMPLES



Fig 2.Multisensory Space for nature or relaxation.



Fig 3. Multisensory Space for a French language café

More information:

www.aistienmenetelma.net

www.laurea.fi/aistien

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[1] http://www.laurea.fi/en/information_on_laurea

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