

Meredith professor researches classroom environment

KRISTA KEARNEY

Features Editor

Research shows that classroom environment can have an effect on the way students learn and the way teachers teach. Ownership of space, comfort, and physical appearance of a space can affect the reactions of the people who use it. Dr. Monica McKinney, an education professor at Meredith College, researched how space, particularly in the classroom, is defined as a place by the students and teachers who use the space daily and how the space influences learning and teaching.

In her presentation during the faculty symposia series last semester, McKinney spoke about her experiences with studying classroom space and the ways students and teachers relate to it. Her interest in the area was sparked by her involvement in graduate school with the A+ Schools Program, a program that

includes an arts-enhanced curriculum that emphasizes hands-on work and offers more music, art, dance and drama courses. McKinney observed classrooms around the state and used her observations to offer new ways to make the program work in spaces that were not always ideal. This involvement led to a focused study of one elementary school, with a concentration on a particular 5th grade classroom. McKinney interviewed and observed the students and teachers in the classroom, as well as the music, art, drama, physical education, computer and media teachers whose classrooms the students visited during the week. She derives most of her analysis from these observations and interviews.

Using a definition from previous research on space, McKinney explored the bond between people and place through perception and interpre-

tation.

"Each individual has a unique combination of place experiences, and therefore, a unique place history, but these place experiences are highly mitigated by culture and society," stated McKinney in her presentation.

In her research, McKinney discussed many aspects of what makes a space, a place. She discussed familiarity with the space, the physical relationship a person might have with the space, such as the integration of their senses of sight and hearing, and the sense of ownership a person might feel towards the space. She revealed that most of the students she studied felt some ownership towards their own desks, but felt most ownership of the room was delegated to their teacher. Teachers also felt that they were the ultimate owners of the room, but felt that making students feel like part owners was important. Teachers

that must share classroom, in year round schools or even on a college campus, might have issues surrounding ownership of the room they teach in because it is shared.

McKinney also discussed how the arrangement of desks or workspaces in a classroom can affect students learning abilities. She asserts that group arrangements are best suited for open discussions, debates and cooperative activities. Further discussion detailed where certain types of students should be placed in the group arrangement to maximize group work.

Though most of her data for analysis came from elementary schools, McKinney suggests that her findings can relate to a college classroom. She encourages teachers to consider how their own classroom arrangements might affect their teaching and their students learning. She challenges professors to find ways to

create meaningful spaces in their classrooms, even though they may only teach there for three hours a week. McKinney also encourages teachers to find ways to create a sense of ownership for themselves and their students in this type of shared classroom.

McKinney is currently involved in a follow-up study of the schools using the A+ program. Her focus is now on the sustainability of the arts programs in these schools. McKinney hopes to study use of space in classrooms in Wake County year round schools, where students and teachers share spaces during the year.

NATIONAL NEWS BRIEFS

Gay Marriage Controversy

AUDREY TAMER

Staff Writer

Last week, San Francisco, California married fifty homosexual couples at the city's town hall. The first couple to be legally married in the city was two women who have been living together for nearly fifty years.

The action of the city of San Francisco directly contradicts the California family law that explicitly states that the state only recognizes the marriage of a man and a woman. Despite the law, Phyllis Lyon, 79, and Del Martin, 83, were legally married by the county assessor.

Mid Thursday afternoon had already entertained the nuptials of fifty other homosexual couples. Others clothed in wedding attire were waiting in a line to tie

the knot. County officials did state that although the marriages were valid in the city of San Francisco, they were not sure where else the marriages would be viewed as valid. Action was not expected until next week in the matter of whether homosexuals would be married in San Francisco. The Campaign for California Families said they would file a lawsuit in opposition. The lawyer for the group said in an article in the *New York Times* that the marriage certificates issued to those married on Thursday were "not worth the paper they [were] written on."

Massachusetts lawmakers are under pressure concerning the same issue at hand in California. However, they have decided to postpone their vote on gay marriage. There was an 11th hour filibuster and finally the group decided to put the vote off until next

month. The decision to postpone the vote occurred on the second day of a Constitutional Convention convened to ban homosexual marriage, but allow civil unions for same sex couples. The meeting was adjourned after the rules of the legislature stated that they must disburse at midnight. Those opposed to the proposal ran the clock out by giving speeches. Upon leaving the building, legislatures in favor of the measure were greeted by gay couples singing, "God Bless America." Speeches were delivered by multiple members of the legislature including, Elizabeth Malia. Malia is the only openly gay member of the House. She is a Democrat.

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