

CREATING SPACES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS SPECIFIC FOR THOSE WITH AUTISM

Shireen Kanakri, PhD, Assistant Professor
Ball State University, USA

Abstract

Autism has been generally ignored by the interior design community and excluded from building codes and guidelines, even those developed specifically for special needs individuals. In reference to this exclusion, Baron, of the International Code Council Stated, "I know of no building or accessibility code that incorporates requirements specifically to address children with autism. However, accessibility in general is addressed in the codes developed by the International Code Council" (Baron, 2003), (UN Global Program on Disability, 1993).

Therefore, one of the primary aims of this research is to correct this exclusion by developing a preliminary framework of interior design guidelines for autism. Deasy and Laswell discuss the architect's use of common patterns of cognition to guide and manipulate user behavior in a space (Deasey & Laswell, 1990). If one looks at the meaning, or the cognitive value given to an experience, it becomes clear the way in which a user typically interprets his interior environment.

Colors are one of the most important issues in interior design. No specific references are made in the mandates regarding individuals with developmental disorders or autism, but the term "consideration" is used in reference to "other communication disorders" (UN Global Program on Disability, 1993). Individuals with developmental and psycho-social disorders, of which autism is one, have been overlooked (UN Global Program on Disability, 1993).

To reach this goal of developing a framework for architectural guidelines for autism, a teacher questionnaire survey has been distributed in the field for 140 teachers in different specialized schools in autism around the state in USA. Colors need to be studied in real contexts because it is experienced in environments where complex patterns interact with human perception and behavior.

Research results indicate that environment is important to the treatment of autism because it influences behavior. This research gives compelling reasons for the architects and designers to modify the environment for children with autism. These modifications will help these children develop their skills, cope with the visual problems and improve their behaviors.