

TEACHER PRESENCE AND DISTANCE IN THE CLASSROOM

A resource for fostering learner autonomy

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Proxemics



Presence



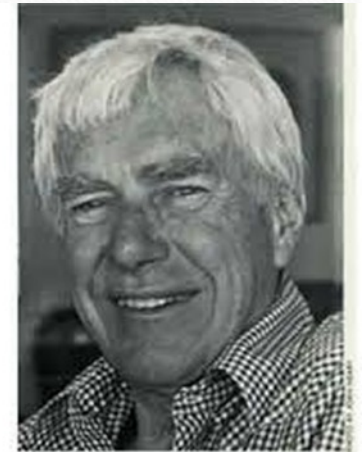
Autonomy

How are we to help students achieve greater
autonomy? or?

PROXEMICS

FROM THE WORK OF EDWARD T. HALL (1971)

- “the interrelated **observations and theories** of man’s use of **space** as a specialized elaboration of **culture**” (p.13)
- (The Hidden Dimension, 1971).



Proxemics, Edward T. Hall (1971)

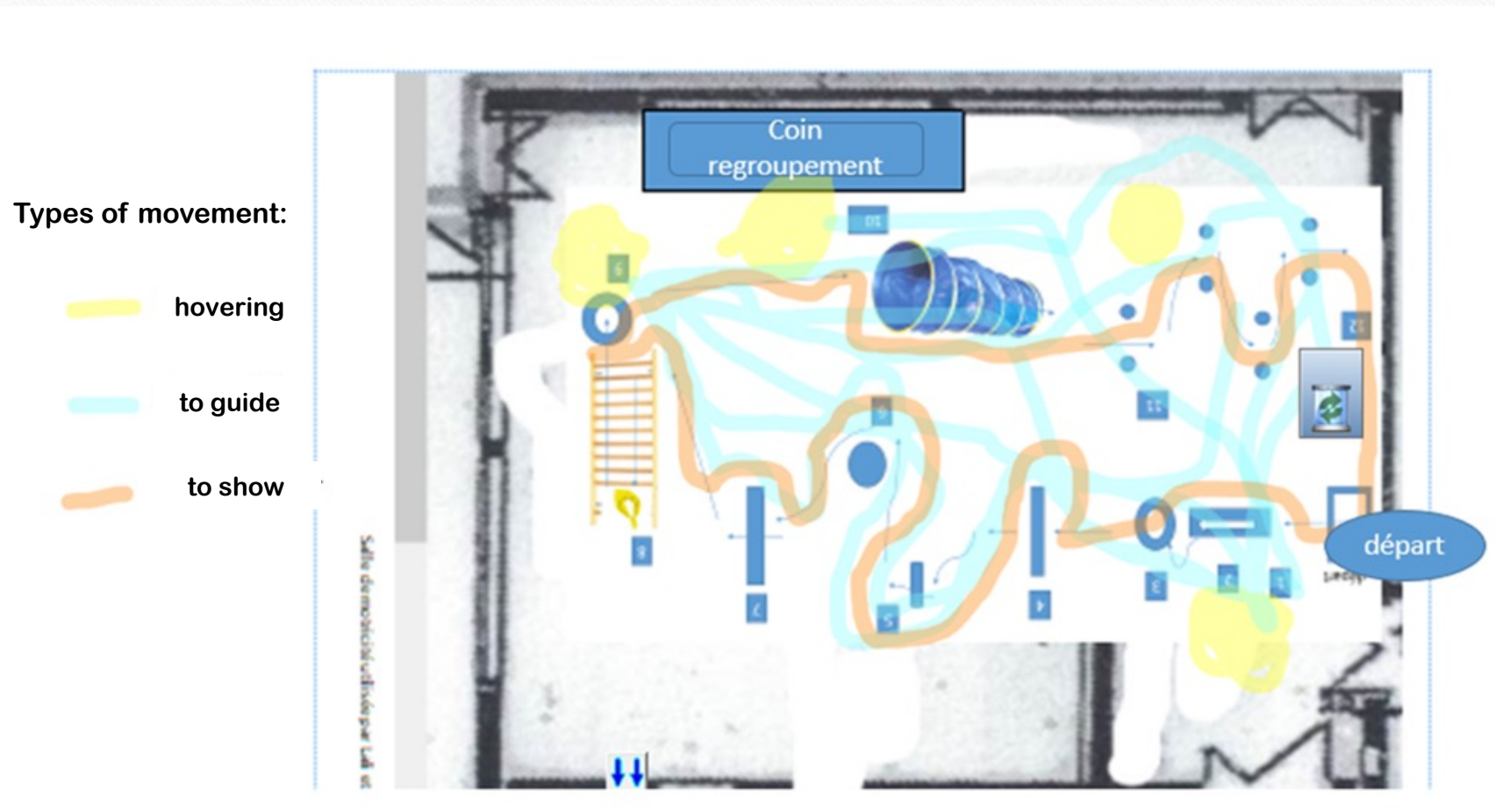
Hall developed an original theory of intercultural communication based on the analysis of non-verbal communication, with particular attention to perceptions of space and time.



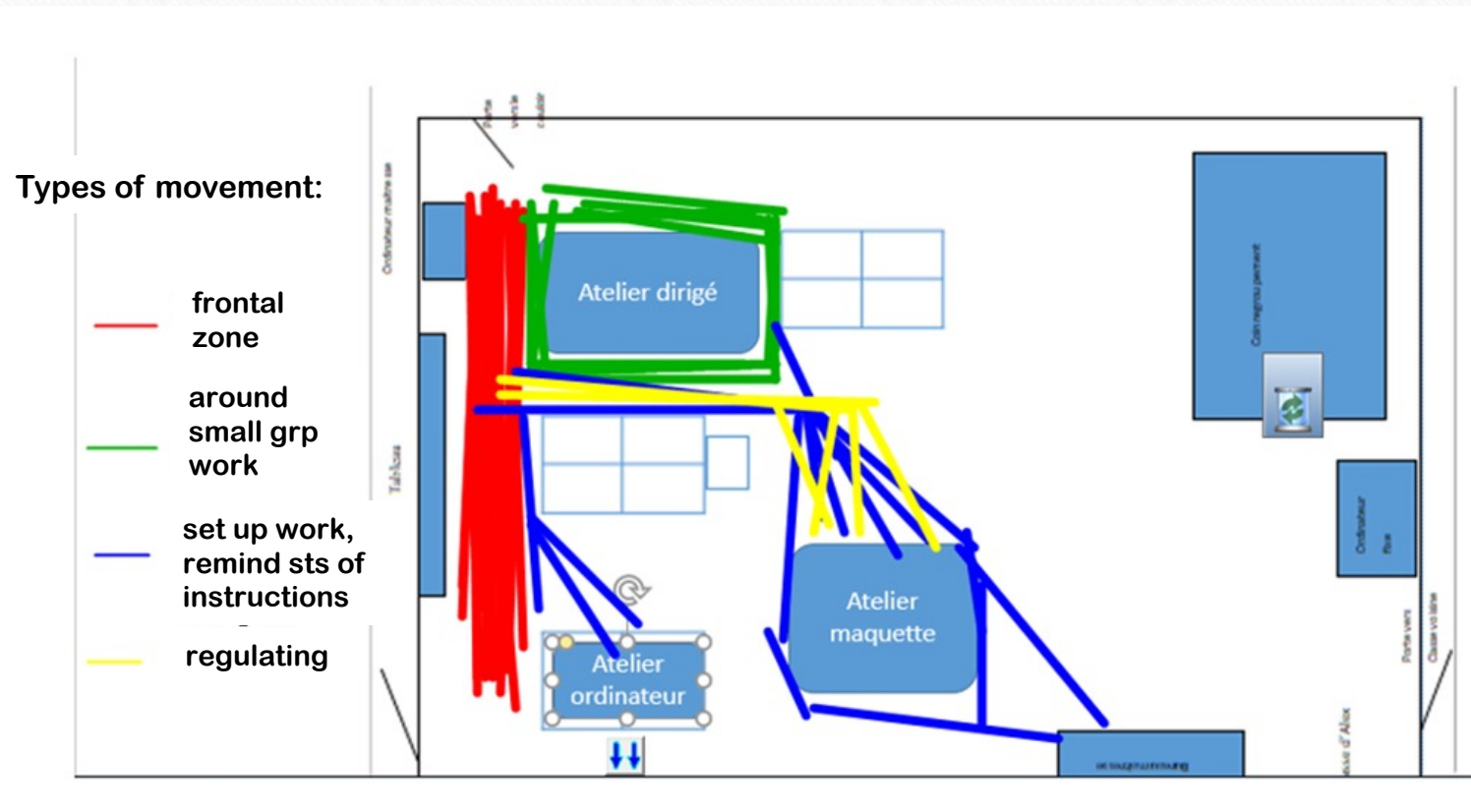
The study of social distance between individuals

- Speakers' relative positions to one another → spatial relationships people maintain among one another and the non-verbalized meanings they draw from such relationships
- The question of “territory” → territoriality
- How distance is perceived → implicit (nonconscious) regulation of behavior

Moving about in a sports room

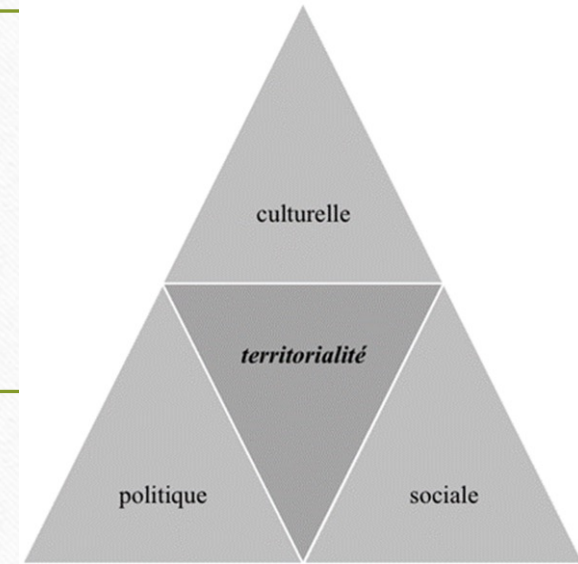


Moving about in a classroom



Territoriality

- Notions of public and private space
- Relationships maintained in the territory of the class
- “From nursery school through elementary school, the neutralization of children's bodies by putting them in fixed places seldom left outside of recess and the orientation of tables in relation to the singular object that is the black- or whiteboard (interactive or not) tell us one thing: there is a center of joint attention that must be created and maintained, even if this ritual is modified for occasional group work.” Bouysse Viviane IGEN
- <https://www.canope-ara.fr/podcast/conference-refondation-ecole-maternelle-12-1-amenagement-de-l-espace-une-variable-determinante>



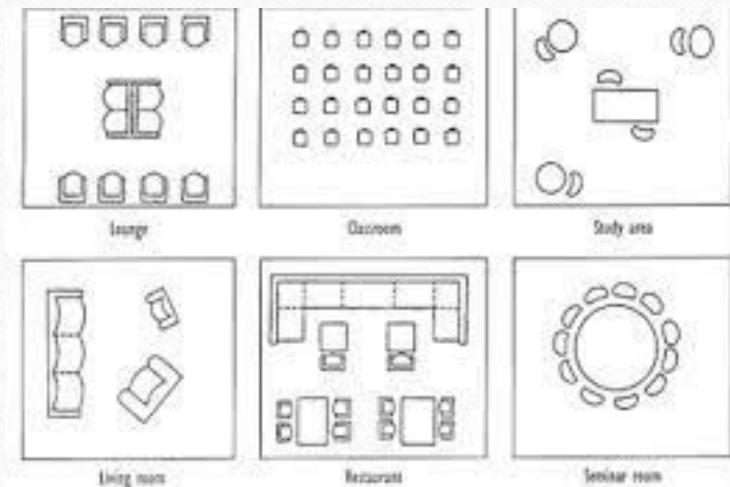
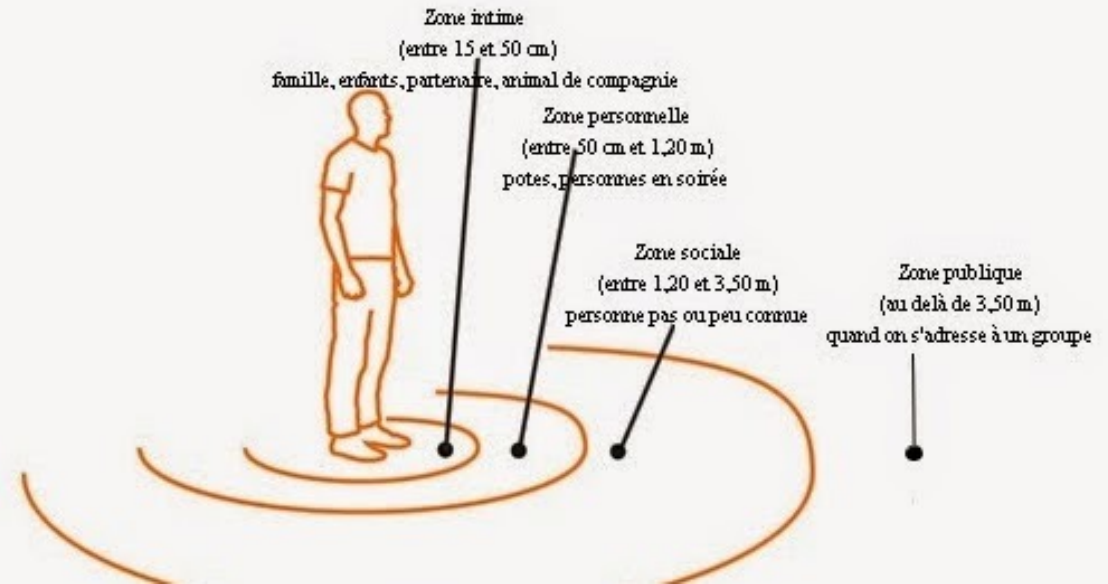
What about relationship as an integral part of communication?

- Proxemics looks at the notion of **distance**, below the threshold of awareness (Carminatti, 2019. *Le déjà-là proxémique*).
- **Edward Hall**, close to the anthropologist **Bateson** and the **Palo Alto School** (theory of communication and interpersonal relationships), focuses more on what people do than on what they say when they answer a direct question. We are more interested in the “pattern”, the *structure* of the relationship than in its content.

Hall postulates the existence of four types of distance: intimate, personal, social and public. These distances correspond to modes of communication that characterize everyday social interactions and that vary from one culture to another.

Based on the spatial arrangement of communication, Hall distinguishes between sociofugal spaces (which prevent social contact) and sociopetal spaces (which provoke social contact) (Hall, 1966). He gives the example of waiting rooms in doctors' offices and hospitals (where the seats are positioned linearly) for sociofugal spaces; and the example of restaurants and café terraces (face-to-face position) for sociopetal spaces.

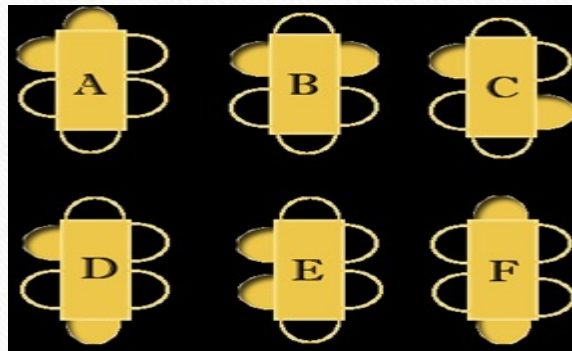
Quid de la classe?



Sociopetal versus sociofugal arrangements of furniture
Source: Barron, Buller & Woodall, 1982

These distances vary according to different criteria

- **cultural context** → primary school, middle school, high school, university
- **relationships we have with others or the image we have of them** → What image do you have of the pupils/students?
- **interlocutor status** → learner/student
- **the situation:** In a cooperative situation, individuals usually sit side by side to share materials and ideas. If there is competition, individuals prefer to sit across from each other, and in a co-action situation where people are working on different tasks, individuals prefer to stand at diagonally opposite corners so as to avoid seeing each other.



What about the way we occupy space in the classroom?



Reflecting on our use of space: a professional gesture often overlooked at school



Thinking about space allows for and fosters cooperation in learning



Teacher's spatial positioning as a manifestation of professional posture? (Clerc, 2020)

- The way any classroom is set up brings forth three distinct dimensions: distributional, functional and transactional
- Distributional → organization of space
- Functional → emergence of a network of social relationships
- Transactional → the teaching enterprise, more specifically the question of teacher presence!

Teacher presence

- The presence of teachers and learners in the classroom is perceived as “a physical proximity where bodies constitute the interfaces of verbal and non-verbal communication” (Jézégou, 2019, p. 144).
- The learner can feel the teacher's presence and experience a sense of closeness. They can appreciate the teacher's presence to the point of feeling close to them, particularly through the teacher's responsiveness to their requests for help, guidance or support. This feeling of imagined or real presence results from certain kinds of didactic or adidactic interactions (Brousseau, 1998) between the teacher and his or her learners.

What 'kind' of presence fosters autonomy?

- We need to inquire into the quality of Teacher engagement/investment
- via a two-pronged clinical didactic approach:
 - 1) the didactic of disciplines (Brousseau, 1986)
 - 2) a psychoanalytically-oriented clinical approach to understanding the Teacher as Subject (Blanchard-Laville, 1999).
- A theory of the Teacher-Subject “embedded in the didactic” who struggles to achieve his/her quest in its triple relationship to the Institution, the transmission of knowledge, and the ongoing challenge of contingency
- Our clinical inquiry into didactics examines the notion of presence through the lens of the Teacher-Subject and through that part of him or herself that he/she invests in the teaching-learning situation



An individual is “present” by virtue of the fact that he or she is totally or partially committed, is motivated by a diversity of intentions likely to orient his/her actions or persevere in a situation in which he/she has a role to play. Along the presence-absence axis, we identify four potential positions for the Teacher-Subject.

Findings of a study

(Charalampopoulou, Carminatti & Carnus, in press 2023)

- **Manifest presence.** The teacher (T), physically present, speaks in an engaging voice and interacts with his/her students (in-person instruction/IPI) or is present via a digital environment enhanced with various resources (distance learning/DL) (Jézégou, 2019). In both cases, T actively participates in a visible way with his/her body, voice and the numerous resources he/she makes available to the learners.
- **Discreet presence.** T listens, supervises and observes his/her students, either from his/her seat or by moving around the classroom (IPI) or by visiting the virtual groups (DL). In both cases, T participates occasionally with his/her body and/or the resources placed at the students' disposal.
- **Transparent presence.** T remains in the background and interacts little with his or her students (IPI). In DL mode (synchronous), T will even stop his/her camera and/or microphone. In DL (asynchronous), a small amount of resources is made available on the platform.
- **Presence-absence (or absence).** In IPI mode, T leaves the classroom & is absent for a more or less extended period of time. In DL mode, T disconnects from the videoconference. However, his/her teaching materials remain accessible on the platform.

“Helping the learner to...” goes through another kind of pedagogical contract

- a contract that is disciplinary, transversal and digital (Pix).
- the teacher is supposed to acknowledge and create the conditions favorable to learning; the student is supposed to satisfy these conditions; the didactic relationship must abide at all costs and the teacher makes sure that the students' previous knowledge and the new learning conditions he/she is largely responsible for creating offer students the possibility to learn

Autonomy enables students...

- To understand the context and aim of a learning task
 - To make choices according to their needs and preferences
 - To justify their choices
 - To cooperate and collaborate in class
 - To anticipate obstacles that could hamper their learning
- support in the sense of a minimum clarification of mutual expectations with regard to the degree of learner autonomy and the learners' relationship to knowledge seems necessary

Didactic contract

- The teacher shifts didactic focus, aiming less to transmit knowledge, but rather provide students with ways and means to solve diverse learning-related problems; how to take into account and build on their previous knowledge; how to construct new forms of understanding and knowledge; how to make effective use of learning resources; how to recognize, anticipate and solve obstacles on the road to learning; in a word, **how to learn !**
- It becomes necessary to reconceptualize the curriculum (*le programme*) to be taught according to the needs of the didactic contract: didactic transposition accounts for this transformation (Chevallard, 1985)

**Distance and presence are two processes
that can help students become
autonomous (lifelong) learners**

Merci de votre
attention!

