

The Importance of Classroom Design

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The first thing you notice when walking into a classroom - especially an elementary classroom - is how it looks and how it is set up. Although it may not seem very important, the design of a classroom is crucial to a student's education. The design of the classroom affects student behavior and work ethic. There are many elements to consider when designing a classroom, but three very important ones are the effects of furniture arrangement, the opportunities activity centers bring, and the importance of a literature center.

Furniture arrangement in the classroom has a great effect on student behavior. According to Zifferblatt (1972), there is a direct correlation between student behavior and furniture arrangement in the classroom. He discovered that the most effective arrangement was desk clusters of 2-3 desks, the teacher's desk in a corner, and distinct separations of different areas in the classroom. The desk clusters worked well because it gave the students a chance to interact with one another while still being able to stay on task and pay attention to the teacher. The teacher's desk being in the corner was effective because the teacher was not able to give instructions from his or her desk. The teacher moved around the classroom a great deal, making sure all his or her attention was on the students. Just as the students need to be free from distractions to give their full attention to the teacher, the teacher needs to be giving all attention to the students, without being distracted by other tasks. Another idea to consider when thinking about furniture arrangement is the lesson for the day. If the teacher has a lesson planned that is more geared towards discussion, arranging the desks in a circle would be very helpful. The circle arrangement helps promote on-task oral input from students (Black, 1985). This arrangement creates a more open environment in which students feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas with their peers. It also creates a more focused environment because the students know they are expected to participate and they want to give on

task comments. Having distinct separations of areas in the classroom is important because it makes it more difficult for students to get distracted from doing the task at hand. For example, if the students are sitting in their desks listening to a math lesson and all the toys for free time are in close vicinity to the desks, students will very likely want to go play with toys instead of listen to the teacher. If there is a barrier between these areas, such as a bookcase to act as a wall, the students will be more focused on the lesson being taught.

A second important element to designing a classroom is setting aside space for different activity centers. Activity centers are distinct areas designated for small themed activities. These centers allow students to explore their interests and find out what they like to do best. It is important for children to do this because they need to explore their options to see what they enjoy most so they can carry these skills and interests outside the classroom (Komendat, 2010). One example of an activity center could be a science center. This could have different activities such as planting seeds or observing change in a rotting apple. Another example of a center is an art center. Here kids could make crafts and art projects to express their issues and feelings. It really instills a sense of accomplishment in children when they can take pride in an art project they did themselves. Also, there could be a drama center where students can use their imagination to act out scenes and situations in the classroom. This can help special education students calm down and sort through their frustrations. For these activity centers to work effectively, the teacher should allow the students to explore the centers for around thirty minutes without any instructions. This self-guided time sparks creativity in the students' minds because they can choose what they want to do instead of being told (Komendat, 2010). With these activity centers, students get the opportunity to explore these subjects with a more hands-on approach. All of these centers give the children opportunities to

use their imagination and show their creativity. This makes it very fun for the students and leaves them wanting to learn more.

One activity center not mentioned above-yet perhaps the most important-is a literature or library area. It is important to expose children to reading and writing at an early age. Children who are read to on a daily basis have an easier time developing reading skills and often have a more complex vocabulary than their peers (Morrow, 1982). It is recommended that teachers have a library corner in their classroom to promote reading. This corner should have a shelf or two from which students can choose a book to read. It should also be in a quiet area, perhaps partially blocked off from the rest of the classroom. It also helps to make the reading area comfortable by putting beanbags or soft chairs there. All these elements make the reading space attractive and inviting to students. According to a study done by Morrow (1982) in which a library corner was added to a classroom that didn't have one prior, the use of literature by students during their free-play time increased after the addition of the library corner. This shows that giving the students a fun library corner and books to choose from increases their interest in literature and their use of it in every day life.

In conclusion, classroom design is very important and can affect students' behavior in the classroom. Different desk arrangements produce

different behaviors from students. Activity centers can be very helpful in opening up opportunities for the students to be creative in many different subjects. It is important to get students involved with literature so they have an easier time with reading in their future. Students need to be in a classroom that is designed to benefit them by making sure there are minimal distractions and maximal opportunities for quality learning.

References

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