

1. Arranging the Physical Environment of the Classroom to Support Teaching/Learning

Arranging the physical environment of the classroom is one way to improve the learning environment and to prevent problem behaviors before they occur. Research on the classroom environment has shown that the physical arrangement can affect the behavior of both students and teachers (Savage, 1999; Stewart & Evans, 1997; Weinstein, 1992), and that a well-structured classroom tends to improve student academic and behavioral outcomes (MacAulay, 1990; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Walker & Walker, 1991). In addition, the classroom environment acts as a symbol to students and others regarding what teachers value in behavior and learning (Savage, 1999; Weinstein, 1992). If a classroom is not properly organized to support the type of schedule and activities a teacher has planned, it can impede the functioning of the day as well as limit what and how students learn. However, a well-arranged classroom environment is one way to more effectively manage instruction because it triggers fewer behavior problems and establishes a climate conducive to learning.

The spatial structure of the classroom refers to how students are seated, where the students and teacher are in relation to one another, how classroom members move around the room, and the overall sense of atmosphere and order. The research on classroom environments suggests that classrooms should be organized to accommodate a variety of activities throughout the day and to meet the teacher's instructional goals (Savage, 1999; Weinstein, 1992). In addition, the classroom should be set up to set the stage for the teacher to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students (MacAulay, 1990). The standards for determining what spatial lay-out is most appropriate to fulfill these functions include: ways to maximize the teacher's ability to see and be seen by all his or her students; facilitate ease of movement throughout the classroom; minimize distractions so that students are best able to actively engage

in academics; provide each student and the teacher with his or her own personal space; and ensuring that each student can see presentations and materials posted in the classroom.

Most researchers agree that well-arranged classroom settings reflect the following attributes:

- Clearly defined spaces within the classroom that are used for different purposes and that ensure students know how to behave in each of these areas (Quinn, Osher, Warger, Hanley, Bader, & Hoffman, 2000; Stewart & Evans, 1997; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Walker & Walker, 1991). For instance, classrooms will contain a high-traffic area around commonly shared resources and spaces for teacher-led instruction or independent work, such as rows of desks. A classroom for students with learning/behavior problems may have separate quiet spaces where a student can cool down or work independently (Quinn et al., 2000; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995), personal spaces that each student can call his or her own (Rinehart, 1991; Quinn et al., 2000), and areas for large and small group activities that set the stage for specific kinds interactions between students and teacher (Rinehart, 1991; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). There may also be spaces to store items, computers, or audio-visual equipment.
- Seating students in rows facilitates on task behavior and academic learning; whereas more open arrangements, such as clusters, facilitate social exchanges among students (MacAulay, 1990; Walker & Walker, 1991).
- It is useful to strategically arrange the classroom to limit student contact in high-traffic areas, such as the space surrounding the pencil sharpener and wastebasket, and instructional areas; and, to seat easily distracted students farther away from high-

traffic areas (Bettenhausen, 1998; Quinn et al., 2000; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Walker & Walker, 1991).

- All students should have a clear view of the teacher and vice versa, at all times (Quinn et al., 2000; Rinehart, 1991; Stewart & Evans, 1997; Walker et al., 1995; Walker & Walker, 1991; Wolfgang, 1996). In addition, the traffic pattern in the classroom allows the teacher to be in close physical proximity to high maintenance students (Shores, Gunter & Jack, 1993; Wolfgang, 1996).
- There is some evidence that it is useful to limit visual and auditory stimulation that may distract students with attention and behavior problems (Bettenhausen, 1998; Cummings, Quinn et al., 2000).
- There is good reason to strategically place students with special needs or behavior problems in close proximity to the teacher's desk (Bettenhausen, 1998; Wolfgang, 1996). Shores and his colleagues (1993) recommend that this be done not only to monitor student problem behaviors, but also to facilitate teacher delivery of positive statements when compliant or otherwise appropriate behaviors are exhibited.
- Finally, it is advantageous to keep the classroom orderly and well organized (Bettenhausen, 1998; Stewart & Evans, 1997).

The physical arrangement of the classroom can serve as a powerful setting event for providing students effective instruction and facilitate (or inhibit) positive teaching/learning interactions. As with other aspects of instruction, the physical arrangement of the classroom should be reflective of the diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics of the students and be consistent with specific learner needs.

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