

ROOM DESIGN TO FACILITATE MOVEMENT AND LEARNING

The way classrooms are built and the way they are used can affect how students learn and participate in a class. The traditional classroom layout has students sitting at desks or tables and facing the front of the room, where the teacher stands. Students' eyes are directed toward the teacher, and the teacher is the focus of the classroom. This set-up makes it difficult for students learning language to interact and practice language with classmates. In other words, this classroom design leads to teacher-centered learning and little movement or activity on the part of the students. Changing the layout of a classroom can give students more freedom to move and talk, and their learning becomes student-centered and independent.

Since this month's Teacher's Corner is focused on movement, this week offers some ways to reorganize your classroom to encourage movement and active and interactive learning. These suggestions are intended to be flexible and adaptable to a variety of different classrooms. Try a few and see how they contribute to your students' learning.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM DESIGNS

Groups of Four

This set-up is ideal for encouraging small group work. Desks or tables are moved together so that four students sit in a square, facing each other. If students sit and work together in the same group over several class periods or for an entire term, they can build a sense of cohesion and unity with each other. This design is great for group work because students face each other and can work closely as a single unit or individually, if necessary. Additionally, the focus shifts to the students' work and their groupmates instead of the teacher. The teacher now can move around the room and facilitate learning. If your classroom has tables and chairs that cannot move easily, try this set-up with students sitting in small

groups on the floor. While sitting on the floor would not work for every day, your class can try it occasionally to get students out of their usual and fixed seats.

Large/Small Circles

Seating students in small circles, or in one large circle for the whole class, offers a good way to conduct larger discussions. In the circle set-up, each student can see every other student. In addition, students are all placed equally, with no one person getting all the attention, because there is no front or back of a circle. Teachers can also put themselves on equal level to their students by sitting in the circle. Even though students will likely look at the teacher more than any other person in the circle, the circle set-up gives students and teachers a more natural way to include everyone in a discussion.

Wall and Board Work

Position students for group or individual work by having them stand at the board and around the room. Getting out of their seats can help students change their perspective, and by writing on the board or on large pieces of paper taped to a wall, they can step back and see their work in a new light. When out of their seats and standing, students can also look around the room to see what their classmates are working on during a task. Being able to see the work of their classmates while developing their own ideas can inspire and push students in new ways.

Choosing a New Space

It is important to give students some choices with low stakes (or, that allow for student choice but don't change the direction of your teaching or curriculum path). For pair or individual work, give students the option to work where and how they choose within the classroom. Encourage them to use the space that is available and to move into new spaces as a way to break up the routine. Although this offer might seem

small, it gives students a voice in their learning and in how they do their learning. Teachers can also watch how students work in an environment that best suits their learning styles and needs.

Walkabouts/Mingles

Walkabouts and mingles get students to interact while moving around the room. In addition to getting up and moving, students can talk in small groups or pairs and move on to the next discussion or interaction at their own pace. This small bit of freedom allows teachers to see how students function in different group sizes. It can also help you to identify which students may need a little more support in interacting and which students can be expected to lead and participate independently. During walkabouts and mingles, teachers will notice that students are often more willing to talk without the pressure of the formal classroom seating arrangement.