More Than Bulletin Boards: How to Build a Dynamic, Engaging Classroom Environment That Encourages Innovation and Collaboration!

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The BIG Ideas for Today…

- What researchers, teachers, and students are saying about classroom environment

- Classroom Environment: The Two-Sided Coin

- Ideas for developing each side of the "coin"

- We really *are* better together! Invite us into your own classroom environment. What's working for you? What's not? What would you change?

So, what's the difference?

The Physical Context	The Relational Context
• Spatial Design	• Daily Schedule
• Bulletin Boards	• Routines and Procedures
• Variety of Materials	• Content and Curriculum
• Standards-Based Activities	• Teacher-Student Interactions
• Print-Rich Environment	• Overall Climate (feeling tone, emotional safety, choice, collaboration)
• Overall Set-Up (temperature, safety, freedom of movement, allows for play and work)	• Play-based Teaching and Learning

What Research Says About Classroom Environment and its Importance

❖ A rich literacy environment with authentic literacy-related activities and quality teacher-student interactions leads to increased literacy skills in kindergarten, even with young, at-risk students. (Nielsen & Monson, 1996)

❖ In a study where play centers were re-designed to include more deliberately defined areas, enhanced with labels, environmental print, thematic elements, and authentic literacy props, the amount of literacy behaviors increased. More literacy behaviors can lead to increased literacy learning. (Neuman & Roskos,1990)

More Research Findings

❖ Adding authentic, meaningful environmental print to thematic centers, coupled with interaction with a more knowledgeable other, lead to increased reading skills. (Vukelich, 1994)

❖ Children learn literacy when immersed in classroom environments that weave natural literacy experiences throughout the day. (Bowden, 2005)

❖ Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that interactions among humans are the basis of the development of thinking.

❖ We as educators need to set up our classrooms to maximize social interactions. Promoting cooperation, teachers can view their classroom as a community of learners with a shared value of helping one another. (Yamauchi & Kuwahara, 2008)

Putting it All Together…

❖ By providing a variety of materials, time for hands-on explorations, a print-rich environment, and quality interactions with caring adults and/or more able peers, early childhood teachers can promote rich learning experiences across the curriculum for all children!

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What Teachers Say About Classroom Environment

The Physical Context

- The overall setup of centers, materials, bulletin boards, furniture placement, colors, schedules posted, and displays of student work are main components.

- The temperature, lighting, and overall condition of the classroom is important. Are the walls and cupboards nicely painted? Old and dingy?

- There should be adequate shelving, storage space, and furniture.

- Bulletin boards should be interactive, engaging, current, and colorful.

- There should be co-created charts and lots of student work displayed.

- Information should be organized and accessible to students at all times.

What Teachers Say About Classroom Environment

The Relational Context

- A pleasant environment is positive for students, but a cluttered, messy environment can be distracting.

- Classroom management and climate affect the overall classroom environment. You can sense that when you walk into the room.

- Noise level affects classroom environment. It will vary, depending on the activity, and should be mutually agreed-upon by the teacher and students.

- A teacher's can-do, positive attitude affects the students, and inspires them to do their best. A teacher can choose to make her classroom an exciting place to be.

- If a teacher is organized, it shows she is prepared, and expects the same from her students.

A Few Final Thoughts About Classroom Environment

- It's half physical, and half emotional/mental.

- It has more to do with people and interactions than the actual building itself.

- When I stopped teaching "stuff" and I started teaching kids, it made all the difference for me and my students. (J. Ross)

- How do you raise student achievement? Let kids know you care about them! (K. Sturr)

- Relationship is the context for all teaching and learning.

  *** *No Significant Learning Happens Without a Significant Relationship.* ***
  (J. Comer)

What Kids Like About Our Classroom Environment

- **Our stuff**: toys, games, stuffed animals, Bono, little book bags we get to trade, Legos, playdough, Tinkertoys…

- **Our centers**: art table, playhouse, science table, computer, post office, puzzle table, library corner, and tables where we can put our heads down if we're noisy, and lots of choices…

- **Working and playing with other kids**: sharing, when kids treat us well, that you can move back up on the star chart if you're being rude and then you're good….

- **Our walls**: calendar, points chart, noise level chart, star chart, Alphafriends, numbers we can count…

- That we feel happy here, and we learn a lot!

Classroom Environment: The Two-Sided Coin
Side One: The Physical Context, and What We *Do* There

- Creative Ideas for Room Set-Up

- Interactive Bulletin Board Ideas

- Optimally Using Your Available Space
  (And finding new space you didn't think you had!)

- Encouraging Ownership: How Students and Adults Can Plan and Create a Dynamic, Engaging Classroom Environment- Together!

Creative Ideas for Room Set-Up

- ❖ Include developmentally appropriate interest areas in each content area that meet standards and allow for movement and choice. Try literacy centers in the morning, and "Exploration Stations" in the afternoon that include blocks, dramatic play, art table, science center, etc.

- ❖ Provide engaging materials.

- ❖ Emphasize rules for the interest areas, and respect for others.

- ❖ Keep children motivated by periodically changing and/or adding materials that promote wonder, curiosity, and exploration.

- ❖ Provide enough time for explorations, and to complete tasks.
  Jacobs, G., & Crowley, K. (2010).

Environmental Print Center

Ask children to look for…

- Letters of the Week

- Capitals and Lower Case Letters

- Sight Words

- Numbers

- Colors, Shapes, and Sizes

- Patterns

- Anything Else!

How to Enrich Center Areas for Literacy

- **Block area**: provide a basket with index cards, tape, and markers for kids to make labels for their structures. Provide clipboards and pencils for creating blueprints. Provide resource books.

- **Legos**: provide books about airplanes, and butcher paper on the floor for drawing an airport; include a map on the wall for possible destinations.

- **Field trips**: take clipboards to document what they see, label pictures; use the information to write about the trip later at a center.

- **Dramatic Play**: Provide books to read to your dolls at bedtime, telephone books, address books, a calendar for marking important dates, a note pad for grocery lists, cookbooks, etc. To play store or restaurant: include a cash register, materials for making play money, order pads, etc.
  (Goldhaber, Lipson, Sortino, & Daniels, 1996)

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More Authentic Language Arts Experiences

- Encourage children to read environmental print, such as: t-shirt logos, print on backpacks and lunchboxes, print on snack packaging, signs and labels, etc.

- Create a writing area with a variety of writing materials and a setup that encourages children to work together and support each other.

- Utilize "the teachable moment" for reading and writing opportunities. (Bobys, A., 2000)

Word Walls

- Do phonemic awareness activities with students' names (clapping syllables, onset and rime, matching beginning sounds, comparing and contrasting). Other possibilities: add sight words, cvc words, theme words, and high-interest words from environmental print samples (e.g., Disneyland, Spongebob, etc.)

- Be intentional about having kids use the word wall! Try activities such as I Spy, write words in the air, refer to the word wall often, and do activities where kids have to refer to it.

  Brabham, E., & Villaume, S. (2001).

Optimally Using Your Available Space
(And finding new space you didn't think you had!)

- Use lap desks or clipboards on the rug.

- Put crates for storage at the end of tables.

- Use things that stack: beanbags, storage tubs, and blue chairs instead of the wooden ones.

- Use tables instead of student desks.

- Turn your sink area into a science center.

- Use area rugs and blankets to delineate space (e.g., listening center, quiet reading areas)

- Use study carrels to turn any area into a "private office" for children who need it.

Encouraging Ownership: How Students and Adults Can Plan and Create a Dynamic, Engaging Classroom Environment- Together!

Your students can collaborate with you to…

❖ Decide on categories, sort books into baskets, and label the baskets for the classroom library. Try this with playhouse items, too.

❖ Decide on class rules, and appropriate noise levels for various activities, and create charts.

❖ Brainstorm and plan changes to the room layout, create and put up bulletin boards, set out materials needed each day, and help choose centers activities.

Classroom Environment: The Two-Sided Coin
Developing the Flip Side: The Relational Context, and Who We *Are* There

- Building Relationships, Collaboration, and a Cohesive Classroom Community (We really *are* better together!)

- Let's Make a List: "Planning Your Day the Kindergarten Way"

- Team Building Activities

- Democratic Discipline and Problem Solving

- Setting and Practicing Procedures as a Community

- How to Encourage Playful Innovation, Collaboration, and Choice in Learning

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Building Relationships, Collaboration, and a Cohesive Classroom Community

❖The emotional environment is every bit as important as the physical environment, if not more so. The physical and emotional environment of the classroom plays a huge role in a child's ability to listen, concentrate and write

The Effects of the Classroom Environment | eHow.com Cindi Pearce

❖Students learn what they care about, from people they care about and who, they know, care about them .

Barbara Harrell Carson, 1996, *Thiry Years of Stories*

❖Without question we have had a breakdown in the sense of community. The solution is to restore a sense of community...and doing within the school.

James Comer

Team Building Activities

- Community Circle With a Science Inquiry Twist

- Standards-Based Sharing

- Playing With Ideas: Guess the Connection!
  (from the Disney Imagineers)

- Incidental Math With the Calendar and Number Line

- "Let's vote on that!"

How We Solved Our "Play Problem"

- Use quieter stuff.
- No playhouse or art table today.
- Move clip to a lower voice level on the chart.
- Clean out the scrap box- too much paper!
- Be more careful with the materials.
- Have the loud kids do work instead.
- Put our heads down after lunch or if we're noisy.
- On blue-play; green-head down; yellow-no play, just work in a quiet place away from everybody; red-away from everybody, by the homework chart.
- Let the unfinished artwork people do art table first.
- Only 6 people at the art table.
- Let half the kids do art at a time (and the other half do something else). Then switch.

Setting and Practicing Procedures as a Community

- Transitions, Center Rotations, Cleanup Songs

- "Lights Out" Signal

- "Singing Through the Day, Karen's Way"

- Bono the Monkey and His Favorite Story

How to Encourage Playful Innovation, Collaboration, and Choice in Learning

❖Consider becoming a "play partner" during Exploration Stations. Encourage children to ask "What if…?" and "I wonder…?" questions as you help scaffold their learning to higher levels. Encourage purposeful play with concrete objects, ideas, or both!

Final Brainstorming and Wrap Up

❖Contact me at jross.imaginethat@gmail.com or at Glazier Elementary (562) 863-8796

❖Thank you for coming today! Please take a moment to fill out the evaluation sheet. I appreciate your feedback.

Have a great day!

Notes