

Designing a classroom is an important task to promote the success of students. The classroom must work with the type of instruction being done, and must be a safe place for students.

The most important factor in organizing a classroom is ensuring that all students are safe. Having positive feelings about the classroom is the first step to facilitating student success. No student's physical well-being should ever be compromised due to the way a classroom is set up. My class will be set up to have wide aisles. Aside from its necessity for student with certain physical disabilities, it makes it less likely that students will hurt themselves by tripping over something, or disturb other students when moving through the classroom. It is also necessary to ensure that students feel psychologically safe. Students should feel that they are able to express ideas without fear of being hurt, that they are respected, and that the classroom is a comfortable place to be overall. One way that this can be accomplished is by having soft items in the classroom, like couches, pillows, and carpet. In my classroom, I plan to have beanbag chairs and a rug that students can use during reading time. I would also allow students to bring in one thing from home that makes them feel good, so that they can use it to relax if they are having a bad day.

A classroom should be set up to facilitate social contact, and should be balanced with the teacher's style of instruction. My first choice for room organization would be a horseshoe pattern, so that students would be able to work with partners easily, and all students would be able to see the board easily. Students should also be able to use their classmates as resources if the teacher allows, and in most instances, this is a behavior that I would like to foster. It also allows me to cater to the needs of students that have difficulty staying on task, and students with physical disabilities. In this set-up, I would place students who are distracted easily in places where they are not directly facing another student (i.e. – at the bottom of the horseshoe), and this would make it very easy to keep my eyes on them. Students with physical disabilities would not have to worry about successfully navigating in the aisles; this arrangement would allow for more space for students to move. However, I would at least want to have movable desks so that group work can be done on a regular basis. If this is not possible, there would at least be a wide space in the middle of the desks that students can use to spread out and do group work, or

to sit during read alouds. Areas for guided reading and computers would be behind the horseshoe, and near my desk. In this way, students doing work at their desks will not be disturbed by others, and I would be able to see everything going on in the classroom.

People feel comfortable in places that represent them. This is no different in classrooms. Both teachers and students need to have something in the classroom that represents them. One way that I plan to do this is by posting student artwork and class work around the classroom. This makes the classroom look inviting, and students will be able to celebrate their accomplishments and those of their classmates. In the first few days of school, I would also want the students to create a class motto and a nickname that would be posted in the classroom, on a board labeled "About Us." These will be created as a class, and will be incorporated into the class routines and theme if possible. In this way, students will have a shared identity. Along with this activity, I would have students write something, or draw a picture that represents something about them, and these would be posted on the About Us board. It is also necessary for students to see themselves as individuals within the larger entity of the class. I would also want to have some items that represent me. For example, I like stuffed animals. So I would have some stuffed animals in the room, and possibly incorporate them into the class. For example, a stuffed animal could be used as a hall pass. I would also want to include a picture or piece of writing about myself on the About Us board.

A classroom should be a place where students discover something new every day. This should be reflected in the arrangement of the classroom. Students should be able to explore their world in many ways, and these should be represented in the classroom. In my classroom, I would have an accessible library, and hopefully computers. I would also want to have educational games and manipulatives readily available for students to use, either during instruction or free time.

Lastly, a classroom must be inviting and aesthetically pleasing. Decorations can make students feel excited about school, and feel comfortable in the classroom. I would start the year by covering the walls with colorful cut-outs and pictures. However, as the year progresses, I would remove some of my decorations, and add student artwork. I think that this would make students feel even better about being in the classroom.

Along with the points above, creating a caring environment requires all people to give and receive respect. This would be one of my classroom rules. I would want to model respectful behavior for my students, and show them examples and non-examples of respecting their peers. The most important thing for me to stress to my class would be that I want to be respectful of them at all times, and that I would not tolerate disrespectful behavior.

Group work can also be an effective use of time in the classroom, and I would like to use it in my classroom. During reading, I would like to do literature circles and guided reading. Literature circles would not necessarily need to be based on reading skills, because I may be able to get books on tape that students can use. Guided reading groups would have to be based on ability, but they would be flexible groups. Students would be placed in groups based on what skills they need, and would be able to move among groups.

In math, I would do more partner work, because it would make it more likely that every student could use the manipulatives or other materials without having to fight over them. The materials would be more useful for the students if they were able to use them while I was teaching, rather than having to share them within a larger group of 3 or 4 students. This would also work well if I would like to have students do peer tutoring, although I would not want to make this a regular practice, so as not to frustrate the students who were tutors.

In Science or Social Studies, I would group students using mixed skills and/or random grouping. This would be done for in class projects or experiments. Students would work together, and each student would have a job or role in the group.

Motivating students is key in decreasing off task behavior. Dealing with behavior can take up a lot of time in the classroom. One way to motivate students is by providing rewards, such as Star Points (discussed later). As a teacher, I would also want to show my genuine enthusiasm for the subject material. Students are always interested in topics that relate to their lives, so I would also try to connect these topics to content being covered in class. Also, I want to use new strategies into instruction, and provide choices when possible.