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Ryan Hannah

Western Michigan University, ryan.hannah09@yahoo.com

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The Effect of Classroom Environment on Student Learning

Ryan Hannah

Lee Honors College

Honors Thesis

Thesis Chair: Dr. Dini Metro-Roland

Committee Member: Prof. Kelly Killen

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A large amount of a child's time is spent sitting in a school classroom. This place is where they will learn the various skills deemed necessary and proper for them to achieve success in the global society. The classroom is where they will gain an understanding of their place in the world and the gifts that they have to offer it. It is where the student develops what they want their future to look like, as well as knowledge of the skills needed to reach that goal. With the classroom being such an important place in the growth of a child it is important to understand the ways in which to affect this environment in order to receive maximum effectiveness in instruction. If schools really do play a large role in teaching the next generation how to be successful members of society then every precaution should be taken to make sure that the learning environment is one that helps students thrive.

If not approached correctly, a classroom can be set up in a way that stifles creativity or does not promote a positive learning environment. There are many things that can affect this environment. There are physical elements such as wall art, arrangement of desks, or resources. Also, there are intangible elements such as the energy of the classroom, the rules, or the sounds within the room. Each of these can impact a student's focus and achievement in the class. They can also affect a teacher's attitude in the class. Included in each of these elements of the classroom is the emotional environment. The way in which a teacher organizes their class, or how they control it, will yield positive or negative consequences for their students. If a teacher is unmotivated or negative there will be a direct impact on the students within the classroom. Similarly, if a teacher is motivated and positive they will likely have a beneficial impact on their students as well. It is important for a teacher to understand this cause and effect in order to understand how to organize their classroom to create a better learning

environment. In this paper, I will investigate several classroom adaptations and argue that their strengths outweigh their weaknesses.

The standard for many classrooms today is to have desks aligned in rows within the classroom. This system of arrangement seems to make students lose focus and creates a higher number of disruptions in the classroom.¹ This structure does not encourage interaction between students and focuses more on the student as an individual completing their own work. Humans are social creatures that want attention, and if they aren't going to be able to get it from their classmates then they will commonly act out to get attention from their teacher.

One of the first areas that make a noticeable impact on student success is the physical environment of the classroom. This can pertain to a variety of details. It can be structure, resources, color. All of these can play a role in determining whether the classroom will be conducive for learning. Each may not have a large effect individually, however together they can work to strengthen a student's ability to learn.

When a student first steps into a room they will make a judgment about the type of class they are going to be taking. They will look to see how desks are arranged. They will notice what is hanging on the walls. The way in which a teacher sets up their class allows them to communicate with their students non-verbally. By adding various learning centers or activity centers the students will know that this is a classroom that likes to do hands-on experiments. It also conveys that they will not just sit and take notes, but they will act out what ever subject

¹ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House* , Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-378. Accessed November 6, 2013.

they are learning. The wall art will demonstrate to the student that the teacher cares about their work enough to show it off. Students will also gain an understanding of the social expectations of the teacher in the classroom based on how the desks are organized. Each of these tools can be used in any classroom regardless of the content.²

If it is English, then the teacher could have a corner of the room set up like a theatre where the students could act out scenes from various plays that they are reading. There could be an area of the room with comfortable chairs and a small library where they could pick a book to silently read if they have finished all of their work for the day. This could be viewed as warm and inviting for a student who does not like to read because now they see that English can involve moving around. The small library will also allow them to choose what they want to read, rather than them having to read what was assigned.³

A social studies classroom could use the concept of creating a separate learning center in various ways throughout the curriculum. If the students were learning about World War I the teacher could organize the desks into trenches so when the students walked in they would pick a side and learn how battles were fought with this new strategy. The desks could be set in a continuous line where each student had to work on only one problem of an assignment to show the structure of an assembly line.⁴

Science classrooms could set up areas to conduct various experiments. Math classrooms could have an activity center focused on real world applications of the content they are learning

² Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House* , Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-378. Accessed November 6, 2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

for that unit. Music classrooms could have a corner where they can listen to audio clips of great musicians from the past. Every subject area can utilize the concept of a center of learning that is separate from the main structure of the class.⁵

Another strategy that can be utilized by teachers is how they organize their desks and resources. A student will notice this rather quickly into the year. How a teacher uses this tool can set the tone for the rest of the school year.⁶ Many students know that if they are disruptive they will get attention. Wanting attention does not have to be a bad thing however. A teacher can organize their classroom where students can interact with others and stay focused on the content at the same time. If the student can meet their individual desires while staying engaged in the curriculum then there will less likely be disruptive behavior. One way to do this is to organize desks into groups. This allows for students to do individual work if they are required, or they can work with partners on specific assignments. If they are creating larger projects they can work as a whole table group to complete it, each with their own specific task.⁷

Another way to modify the seating arrangement is to organize the desks in a circle around the classroom. This will work better with smaller class sizes, but can still be used occasionally in others. This strategy works well with promoting public speaking and classroom

⁵ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-378. Accessed November 6, 2013.

⁶ Caroline A. Gaurdino and Elizabeth Fullerton. "Changing Behaviors by Changing the Classroom Environment." *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (July/Aug, 2010), pp. 8-13. Accessed November 6, 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

debate.⁸ It engages students because they all become one member of the same group. They are prone to listen more actively and make more eye contact with the person who is speaking.⁹ It also allows the person speaking to take more ownership of their ideas.¹⁰ In this model the teacher has to make sure to create an environment where students feel invited to share their views without fear of judgment. In order to do this the teacher must make sure that the students know the consequences of inappropriate behavior. It is also a good teaching point on how to respect people who have different opinions than their own. To help students understand what is expected of them the teacher can clearly state the order in which the discussion will run. By letting the students know what is expected of them they will have clear guidelines to be held accountable to. The teacher can also vary the method of discussion to break routine for the students. One day they can take turns speaking clockwise. Another day they can call on people to speak next. There can even be days where the teacher draws names from a bowl at random until everyone has spoken.

Classroom organization can also play a very large role in student discipline. When a student walks into a classroom and sees that there is a large mess on the teacher's desk and items scattered around the floor the student can get the idea that the teacher doesn't pay a lot

⁸ David E. Campbell, "Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement among Adolescents." *Political Behavior*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Dec., 2008), pp. 437-454. Accessed November 6, 2013.

⁹ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-378. Accessed November 6, 2013.

¹⁰ Lindsay L. Cornelius and Leslie Rupert Herrenkohl. "Power in the Classroom: How the Classroom Environment Shapes Students' Relationships with Each Other and with Concepts." *Cognition and Instruction*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Investigating Participant Structures in the Context of Science Instruction (2004), pp. 467-498. Accessed November 6, 2013.

of attention to detail. With this mindset, the student may begin to look at what other flaws the teacher might have. If a teacher does not show that they care about organization then a student will most likely develop that attitude as well.¹¹

A teacher can use this knowledge to their advantage, however, by structuring their classroom in an organized fashion. They can post the rules on the wall so that each student knows exactly what is expected of them and the consequences if they choose not follow them. They can keep resources in a single location that is easily accessible to the students. They can have specific files where they turn in work or find missing assignments. These all will promote organization among students because the students will now have a model after which to structure things in their own lives. Also, it will show the students that the teacher cares about detail and will most likely catch the student trying to get away with things that are against the rules.¹²

There is a balance to running an organized classroom. If there is too much structure set in place it can stifle creativity, and if there is not enough structure it can lead to distractions and little focus. This is why teachers can have a very difficult job. They must balance freedom and spontaneity with rules and guidelines. To achieve this, teachers can implement more engaging activities or lessons into the already established classroom structure. Students can create a map of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in Social Studies class, but they are still expected to clean up their markers and colored pencils once they are done. They can create a sketch of

¹¹ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-378. Accessed November 6, 2013.

¹² Ibid.

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in their English class, but they must make sure to put away all rulers and paper. A teacher could even include the clean up into their participation grade.¹³

Activities like this create an excellent opportunity for the teacher to utilize another classroom technique. When students work on projects rather than worksheets it allows for the teacher to have a finished product which they can hang in the classroom. Hanging students' work is a great opportunity to build rapport with the students and creates a visually stimulating environment to look at. When a student walks into a classroom with previous students' work hanging on the walls it conveys certain information to them. First, it lets the student know that the teacher does in fact look at the assignments. The student will be able to assess the expectations for assignments based off of what was acceptable for previous students. Second, the student will see that the teacher cares about how the students do. The teacher values the assignments enough to hang them on the wall instead of throw them away or pass them back. This encourages the student to value the assignment more as well.¹⁴

Teachers must be cautious when using this strategy in the classroom. There can be a tendency to hang the "best" student's work in the most viewable location. This conveys information to the students as well. If a student is particularly gifted at drawing the assignment may have been a lot easier for them. However, another student may have put in a lot more effort, but did not have the same skills at drawing. They could become discouraged if they see that their effort was not recognized. This could make them not want to try as hard on the next

¹³ Arnold H. Lindbald Jr., "You Can Avoid the Traps of Cooperative Learning," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 67, No. 5 (May-June, 1994), pp.291-293. Accessed December 23, 2013. Accessed December 23, 2013.

¹⁴ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House* , Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-378. Accessed November 6, 2013.

assignment because they don't feel that putting in effort matters. One way to help overcome this obstacle is to allow students to redo assignments until the teacher feels they are acceptable to hang on the wall.

However, this strategy is another one where a teacher must find the right balance for their specific classroom. Although it is important to make sure that the teacher is not choosing favorites in the classroom, it is important for a teacher to realize the strengths and abilities of their students. Part of a teacher's role is to help students discover their talents and then become motivated to use them. If a teacher notices that a certain student is particularly gifted in art then it is the teacher's job to find the balance between showcasing that student's ability, while simultaneously not neglecting the work of others. One way that a teacher can do this is to utilize the student's skill in creating lesson plans and visual elements to pair alongside the lesson. Meanwhile, they can have a separate board where they showcase each student's work equally. This way each student is receiving praise for their work, while the student that is particularly gifted in that skill is able to use it for the benefit of others.

To further help, teachers can preemptively crush any negative thoughts similar to these by having a discussion with the class before the project. Let the students know that their work will be hung around the classroom after completion. This will hopefully encourage them to work harder knowing that their work will be viewed by other students. The teacher can also discuss the manner in which they will hang the finished products. This could be random, drawing names, alphabetical, or any other variety of strategies. Letting the students know this will prevent any mindset that the teacher doesn't like them and didn't want their work to be

seen. Each time the class does a project where the results are hung around the classroom the teacher can rearrange where each student's work is hung. Each of these strategies will need to be tried in the classroom to discover which one is most effective. Every classroom will have a new group of students with new abilities and struggles. The teacher must determine what is best for each group. What works during the first class may be a complete failure in the next class. Trial and error will help a teacher be able to create a better environment for their students.

Developing rapport with students is essential in creating a good classroom environment. It can be difficult, though, to maintain authority if not handled well. There are a few strategies that a teacher can use to establish a good relationship with their students. The first one is how the teacher dresses. It is understandable that a teacher must maintain a level of professionalism in their attire. Teachers should not dress in the exact same fashion as their students either. However, if a teacher is always wearing a suit or dress they can be perceived as unapproachable. This is where the balance comes into play. A teacher should be dressed professionally enough to establish authority, but relaxed enough that a student isn't intimidated to ask them questions. The teacher should convey that they are the rule maker, but that they also genuinely care about the student's problems or questions. To do this teachers should dress modestly but relaxed. They should cross fun with professionalism.¹⁵

Again, balance is difficult thing to find in this area. While it is important to remain professional in the workplace there is debate over infringing on a teacher's personal liberties. A

¹⁵ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 376. Accessed November 6, 2013.

teacher must find the middle ground in remaining professional and modest with being laid back and approachable, and protecting their and their student's liberties with sacrificing for the benefit of the students. Regardless of the specific choice that each teacher has the freedom to make, it is important for that teacher to then be aware of the impact it will have on their students and the changes that they will have to make to their classroom accordingly.¹⁶

The second dynamic of a classroom that can impact a student's learning is the non-physical environment. This consists of things such as sound, temperature, seating arrangements and others. These are elements of the classroom that a teacher can't physically touch, but they can alter them to increase focus and classroom productivity.

Another way to use rapport to benefit the classroom is to find the different leaders within each class. Every set of students will have unofficial leaders within the group. There are two main types of leaders. The first set of leaders are those who are the highest in academic performance. The second set are those who are the social leaders of the classroom. Each of these groups can be a major asset to a teacher if they are used correctly.¹⁷

The more academic leaders can be used in numerous ways. One of the ways that they can be utilized in the classroom is by pairing them with students that are lower performing or struggling with the specific content. With a classroom full of students needing to learn the material it can be hard to ensure that everyone has a firm understanding. There sometimes is just not enough time to get to every student individually to assess whether they learned the

¹⁶ Betty Jo Simmons, "Teachers Should Dress For Success," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 65, No. 5 (May-June, 1996), pp. 297-298.

¹⁷ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 376. Accessed November 6, 2013.

information or not. Finding leaders knowledgeable in the content area can help solve that problem. While the teacher instructs the class as a whole, these leaders can be paired with students that are struggling to make sure they are getting more individualized attention. This will benefit the struggling student because they will gain the knowledge that they are lacking, but it will also benefit the student teaching because they will have to practice their knowledge by demonstrating it.¹⁸

It can work the other way around as well. The teacher can allow the more academic students to guide the class as a whole, while the teacher goes around to individuals that are struggling and gives them personal help. This can be good because the information is being presented to the class from a peer instead of the teacher. This could help the students focus more on the material since it is not the teacher presenting it. It also allows the individuals struggling with the material to receive special help from someone who is trained in the content area. This will also build rapport between struggling students and the teacher by demonstrating that the teacher cares about their success. This may encourage them to bring problems to the teacher in the future, rather than accepting a failing grade because they don't think they will get help.¹⁹

The second group of students that a teacher must identify to benefit their classroom is the social leaders within the class. These are the students that are top athletes, musicians, artists, or comedians. These students are liked by the majority of the students. They may not be

¹⁸ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-378. Accessed November 6, 2013.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the highest performing academically, but they set the tone for how focused the other students will be. These students can sometimes be the disruptive kids in class if they do not receive enough attention. Knowing this, a teacher can turn a potential problem into an asset for classroom discipline.²⁰

Since these students have a variety of skills and abilities they can be used in numerous different roles within the classroom. A student who is gifted in art and design can help the teacher decorate the walls and windows of the classroom to make it a more entertaining environment to learn in. A student who is musical might know of different songs from certain time periods or with certain messages that relate to the content that is being taught. This will allow the students to receive information about the material in a different medium. Each student leader could use their skill to keep the class focused on the task at hand. This does not mean that every student doesn't have a unique ability or talent. However, there are certain students who present themselves as leaders that the students are more inclined to follow. A teacher should not try to crush this leadership, but instead they should partner with the student so that the student helps lead the rest of the students down the same path that the teacher wants to go. If the teacher encourages these students in their leadership and ownership of the classroom they will set an example that the students will use to encourage their peers to follow. To do this a teacher must learn what encourages this student and what causes them to rebel. Again, teachers are not only there to teach content, but they are also in a

²⁰ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior." *The Clearing House* , Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-379. Accessed November 6, 2013.

position to teach social skills. The educator must learn to mentor these students in a way that promotes positive interactions with themselves and their classmates.²¹

This all focuses on going along the journey as a class instead of as individuals. Going as a class does not mean that each student loses their uniqueness. It simply means that each student will use their unique skills and abilities to benefit the class as a whole. It will teach them that their actions do not just affect themselves, but their peers as well. The hope is that students will realize that they have talents that others can benefit from, and that the student will then use those skills selflessly to benefit society. One of the responsibilities of teachers is to create students that will be beneficial and productive members of society, and this strategy is a great way to achieve that goal. Ways to incorporate this into a classroom could be to make the class a town, and each member has their own job to perform to benefit everyone else based on their skills. If everyone is to receive all that they need then each student must use their skills to help. If a student is not helping then the teacher can teach the kids how to positively motivate each other by leading by example. In social studies you could portray a certain time period. In English you could act as if you were living in the location of the book. Science classes could make exploration teams, or math could create contractors or accounting firms. The goal is to bring real world situations into the classroom so the students are already thinking about how they can benefit each other when they graduate.

When thinking of all of these strategies it is important for a teacher to take into account that they will have students in their classrooms that have special needs. These students will

²¹ Arnold H. Lindbald Jr., "You Can Avoid the Traps of Cooperative Learning," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 67, No. 5 (May-June, 1994), pp.291-293. Accessed December 23, 2013.

need special accommodations in order to be successful as well. A lot of the modifications that have been mentioned can benefit students with and without individual education plans. Organizing desks in a circle creates a large space for students to move around if they need wheelchair access. Organizing them in groups can help students that have anxiety disorders by allowing them smaller communities in which to work and talk. Varying the assignments from worksheets to projects can allow students with ADD or ADHD to remain focused. Overall, creating separate activity centers allows all students a space to get away if they need a break or a place to regain their thoughts.²²

Some students may have needs that need to be met individually. There are ways to easily accommodate them as well without changing things for the rest of the class. If a student has a visual impairment the teacher can either make powerpoints in larger font or print the powerpoint off for the student to follow. If the student has a hearing impairment the teacher can wear a microphone or have the student sit closer to where the teacher will be speaking. They can also allow the student to use a tape recorder so they can listen to the instructions again at home if needed. All of these can be done easily to benefit all of the students.²³

These circumstances can also be met with the strategy of pairing the higher academically performing students with those that are having difficulties understanding the material. The students can repeat instructions as needed or explain the assignment in a way

²² Caroline A. Gaurdino and Elizabeth Fullerton. "Changing Behaviors by Changing the Classroom Environment." *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (July/Aug, 2010), pp. 8-13. Accessed November 6, 2013.

²³ Erin C. Schafer and Melissa Sweeney. 2012. "A Sound Classroom Environment." *ASHA Leader* 17 (4): 14-17. Accessed November 6, 2013.

that the teacher might not be able to. It will also allow the struggling students to get help without having to address it in front of the entire class.²⁴

Some argue that there is too much of a push towards cooperative learning. They argue that many things in today's world require someone to be able to do things individually, and learning to rely on others in cooperative work may stifle their individual learning.²⁵ Critics also argue that group work only allows the teacher to assess the final product and does not provide feedback about each individual throughout the assignment.²⁶ Though these claims may have some merit to them there are several solutions as well. Teachers can assign specific tasks for each student in a group to ensure that they are not stealing the work of others. By doing this it forces the students to complete their own individual assignment that can be assessed and monitored throughout the group project. As a teacher begins to implement various strategies they will find that some work better than others. Some of these things may work well together, such as organizing desks in a circle which creates space for a learning center. Other things may not work together, such as low lighting and quiet music, which may increase the possibility of putting students to sleep. A teacher must use trial and error to refine their strategies to meet the needs of each class. The various strategies each have strengths and weaknesses which will vary by location and class.²⁷

²⁴ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior." *The Clearing House* , Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 376. Accessed November 6, 2013.

²⁵ Erin C. Schafer and Melissa Sweeney. 2012. "A Sound Classroom Environment." *ASHA Leader* 17 (4): 14-17. Accessed November 6, 2013.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Arnold H. Lindbald Jr., "You Can Avoid the Traps of Cooperative Learning," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 67, No. 5 (May-June, 1994), pp.291-293. Accessed December 23, 2013.

In regards to sound, teachers must be mindful of this element in the classroom. Sound can play a very important role in the attention and success of a student. Things such as a noisy hallway or a student tapping their pencil repeatedly on the desk can greatly distract a student. There are ways to counter these distractions though. Something as simple as closing the classroom door can benefit students. Grouping students that prefer quiet next to each other can increase their attention. It can also be beneficial to have learning centers in the room where students can go to find a quiet place to work as well. Some students prefer to have a little noise to prevent distractions. Allowing them to listen to their headphones quietly can increase their productivity. Another strategy would be to turn on some music quietly for them to listen to while they work. This could be a useful time to use students who are musical to find soothing songs that promote concentration.²⁸

Along with sound, light can play a major role in determining whether or not a student is engaged in the lesson as well. The majority of schools use fluorescent light bulbs. These create a buzzing that distracts as well as make it difficult for someone who prefers natural lighting. It is understandable that some classrooms do not have the ability to utilize natural lighting in the classroom. However, the use of lamps with softer lighting can create a warmer environment for students to focus. There is potential danger here though because it could lead to students becoming more sleepy and lazy, so teachers must look for this and make adjustments as needed. The teacher could also break their classroom into sections. The desks could use

²⁸ Karen Burke and Barbara Burke-Samide. "Required Changes in the Classroom Environment: It's a Matter of Design." *The Clearing House* , Vol. 77, No. 6 (Jul. - Aug., 2004), pp. 236-239. Accessed November 6, 2013.

standard lighting, while the reading corner could use lamps. This allows students with different preferences to utilize the section of the classroom that they will be most productive in.²⁹

Another aspect of the classroom that is difficult to control but can play a large part in keeping students engaged is the classroom temperature. This can be a tricky facet to modify in the classroom since many schools use a central heating system. Too cold or too warm of a classroom can make students sluggish or inattentive. Also, poor circulation of air can create dust or air pollution that can affect students' allergies. A classroom with fresh, warm air can create an atmosphere conducive to learning.³⁰ Students will look for anything to distract them from the lesson, regardless of how trivial it may seem. Removing problems created by things such as temperature, light, or sound removes potential distractions for students.

The final modification for a classroom that is utilized by many teachers is the student seating arrangement. This small adaptation can have large impacts on the success and motivation of the students in a class. There are numerous different ways to organize the seating structure within the classroom. Pairing this skill along with the organization of how desks are arranged can greatly increase student productivity. A teacher must be mindful of not only where in the room a student is seated, but also by whom they are seated.³¹

There are several ways to arrange students. A teacher can organize them by behaviors, interests, cognitive abilities, or randomly. Each has their own benefit. One way to gain

²⁹ Karen Burke and Barbara Burke-Samide. "Required Changes in the Classroom Environment: It's a Matter of Design." *The Clearing House*, Vol. 77, No. 6 (Jul. - Aug., 2004), pp. 236-239. Accessed November 6, 2013.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior." *The Clearing House*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 375-379. Accessed November 6, 2013.

perspective on how to organize the students could be to allow them to sit where they would like at the beginning of the marking period. This will allow the teacher to see which students like to work with each other as well as how well they work with each other. Once the teacher has a firm grasp on this they can determine how they want to structure the class. If students are disruptive or unproductive the teacher could move that group closer to where the teacher is stationed or break that group up entirely. It is important to note the motivation of the members if broken up though. It may be better to let them sit together but be more closely monitored. This will be up to the teacher's discretion.³²

A teacher can also pair students with different cognitive abilities together. This will allow the students that need help more individual attention, as well as provide an opportunity for a student with higher academic performance to relearn the material by teaching it. This will also promote leadership and cooperation amongst the students. Another benefit will be that the teacher can instruct the class as a whole while knowing that each student is receiving individual attention as well. This structure must be addressed at the beginning of the class and monitored throughout to make sure that each student is doing what they should be though. It can be easy for a student that understands the material to become frustrated with one that does not. This is a good opportunity for the teacher to educate the former student on the benefits of helping others.³³

³² Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior." *The Clearing House* , Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 376. Accessed November 6, 2013.

³³ Arnold H. Lindbald Jr., "You Can Avoid the Traps of Cooperative Learning," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 67, No. 5 (May-June, 1994), pp.291-293. Accessed December 23, 2013.

Grouping students by interest can be beneficial when creating projects because they will already have a connection with their peers so it will be easier to conduct group work. They may even have the same mindset on how to approach an assignment which will allow them to complete it more efficiently. This will also allow for the same material to be presented in numerous ways based on their interests. One group may like graphs and charts while the other likes sketches and pictures. Each can learn the material in the way that will best help them remember.³⁴

Organizing students randomly can be beneficial as well. This ensures that students don't take their seating arrangement personally. They will not think that the teacher specifically moved them because they were not performing well enough. This will help to make sure the student doesn't lose motivation. It also keeps any one student or group from feeling singled out. The downfall of this system is that it may place students next to each that do not work well together. A teacher should be mindful of this when using this technique. They can create a random order and then make adjustments if necessary.³⁵

When making adaptations to the classroom the teacher cannot forget about the emotional environment. This is the atmosphere created by the teacher that can either encourage or discourage students to be successful. This covers things such as creating lesson plans the students will find more engaging, motivating students to use their skills, hanging work, or providing positive feedback. These are things that should be considered when utilizing

³⁴ Steve Grubaugh and Richard Houston, "Establishing a Classroom Environment That Promotes Interaction and Improved Student Behavior." *The Clearing House* , Vol. 63, No. 8 (Apr., 1990), pp. 376. Accessed November 6, 2013.

³⁵ Ibid.

any of the other tools mentioned. The emotional environment is laced into every other section discussed when talking about the benefits or harms experienced by the students.

Overall, the classroom environment plays a crucial role in keeping students engaged and allowing them to be successful within the classroom. The teacher can modify the environment to achieve these results. There is a multitude of ways in which to do this. They can arrange the desks in different patterns. They can decorate the walls with different assignments or items. Students can be used to help lead the classroom in the way that the teacher wants to go. Even adapting the lighting or the temperature of the room can increase the effectiveness of instruction in the classroom. A good teacher is aware of these elements and the importance that they play in student success. Without giving attention to the environment of a classroom the teacher is setting their students up to be less successful.

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