Impact of Quality & Supportive Classroom Environments

Can your classroom environment effect learning and behavior?

Creating a quality supportive classroom environment can support learning, promote engagement and interactions for children. Classrooms that support children’s appropriate behavior through effective arrangements will make it less likely children will need to engage in challenging behavior.

Think about your classroom:

- What do you see first when you walk in?
- Are there different areas for different activities?
- Are there distractions?
- Does the arrangement of desks or tables match with the learning strategies you use?
- Where are the materials you use daily? Where are your storage areas?
- Is everything in your classroom accessible to you and all the children?
- When/where are the children most engaged? When/where do the children struggle to be engaged?
- If you have a child or children with challenging behavior, how do you address their individual learning styles and movement needs?
- Does your classroom promote child interactions and a sense of community?

The Pyramid Model: A Place to Begin

Developing nurturing responsive relationships and creating quality supportive environments are the foundations of the Pyramid Model. When arranging, decorating and organizing your classroom you need to take into account how the environment you create will encourage, engage and promote learning for all children.

The following flyer discusses the many different areas and strategies to consider when developing an early elementary classroom.
Classroom Décor: Is it Sensory Overload or Is it Bare Bones?

Have you ever walked into a classroom and thought...there is not an empty spot in this room or where are all the materials, is this an elementary classroom? A room where a primary color blast hits you as you enter: walls covered with teacher store decorations, objects are hanging from the ceiling, bulletin boards covered with learning charts, the book cases and storage areas are overflowing. Or A room that is bare and worn as you enter: chairs, tables/desks exist, a couple baskets of broken or well used supplies, a few well worn books laying about, nothing on the walls except maybe a unused discipline chart and child work from the last holiday 3 months ago. Would you want to hang out in either classroom every day, all day? Overloaded rooms and bare rooms both can effect the learning environment, the behavior of children, relationships in the classroom as well as the overall positive and welcoming feeling.

Early Elementary classrooms need:

- Posted Rules and Expectations where children can see them easily.
- A daily schedule and routines need to be visible so children know what is coming next and directions how to do the activity.
- Any materials that you plan to use for instruction need to be visible to all children.
- Display of children’s work that is rotated regularly.

Storage and Material Accessibility: Am I a Pack Rat?

Teachers are known to the collect a lot of materials and supplies. From garage sales, teacher swaps, “free to a good home” tables, and (the newer addition) a collection of ideas, pictures, lesson plans and articles from the internet that you like to try some day, teachers are always finding things to use in the classroom. Add to your collection, curriculums, worksheets, children’s literature, computer manuals, and all the teaching supplies both you and your children need and you have a large quantity of items to organize, store, and access.

Hints for storage:

- Label and organize materials by activity, time of year, or theme and create a separate “dream box” of things you would like to try someday.
- Have student supplies accessible and organized so children can get them out to use as well as make an easy clean-up.
- Limit materials at children’s desk to the current activity to limit distractions.

Movement and Mobility: Can I get there from here?

Classrooms that are packed full of students, tables, desks, chairs, books, materials, decorations, backpacks and coats can challenge a teacher to get to a child in need or teach individual children. Additionally, children can have mobility limitations, need for vision support, and/or behaviors that need to be monitored closely by the teacher. When planning a classroom these limitations need to be taken into account.

Does your classroom...

- Allow all children space to move about (but not too much space to run about)?
- Allow all children see you and the teaching area?
- Allow you to get to each child if needed to teach?
Creating a multiple use classroom allows the use of various teaching strategies and activities to engage children.

The chart shows the benefits of different arrangements and the effects on learning and engagement.

### Types of Teaching Strategies and What to Think About...

- **Large Group** - either in desks or on a carpeted space
  
  - Can all children see you and the materials? Are there on task expectations? How long are they sitting? Can they move?

- **Seatwork** - individual, in pairs, or groups
  
  - During seatwork is there access to materials and help if needed?
  - Are children involved in cooperative learning or doing individual work?

- **Small Group** - teacher leads or children are in small cooperative groups
  
  - How do you organize your groups and get the children to group? What are the other children doing when you are teaching a small group? Can you monitor and see all the children?

- **Learning Centers and/or Fun Play Centers**
  
  - Are materials available and accessible for all children in center?
  - Can you monitor and visually see all centers? How many children can be in each area? Are instructions posted for how children are to complete the tasks?
Think About Challenging Behavior and Your Classroom...

The arrangement of the classroom, the seating placement of the child, the classroom distractions and the teaching strategies can effect a child's challenging behavior.

As you develop you classroom, think about how to design it to decrease the challenging behavior:

- What activities are positive and engaging for the child? (you can use these for positive reinforcement)
- Where does the child stay on task the best? (Can this be duplicated in other activities?)
- What are your expectations for children staying in their seat or center? Is it okay to stand behind their work area? Can the child sit on the floor to do work, or use fidgets (such as a chair band, a wiggle cushion or a relaxation ball to hold in their hand)?
- Are there peers that work well with the child? Are there peers that escalate the behaviors?
- What distracts the child? (Does sitting close to windows or doors cause child to lose attention?)
- Do you have a quiet space where the child can go to calm down or do work quietly?

Enhance Your Teaching: What Am I doing?

For a teacher, self-monitoring can give you a picture of how you are interacting with all the children in the classroom. The information collected can give you ideas how to reinforce and encouraging learning.

- How much encouragement and specific positive reinforcement do you give? (Which children get the most? The least?)
- Who do you call on to answer your questions?

Try one of these out.....

Pick a child who follows the rules, is engaged and on task. Place 5 pennies in one pocket. During the day each time you use *specific positive reinforcement for the child move 1 penny to the other pocket. How long did it take to get 5 pennies in the other pocket? Now try it with a child who has challenging behavior. How long did it take to move the 5 over? Try with other children in your classroom over time.

Using an audio recorder, record a whole class activity. Later, listen to your lesson and have a class roster to tally off who you call on. Is there a pattern (more girls, more boys, front of room, back of room)? Do some children only get closed (yes-no) questions? Do some children get all higher level thinking open-ended questions? Try this with several different lessons across time and see how it changes.

*Specific reinforcement is reinforcement that describes what the child has done rather than random praise. For example, Great job raising your hand when you needed help!(specific) vs. Good work! (random)