Effective Room Arrangement: Elementary

CASE STUDY UNIT
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Supporting the preparation of effective educators to improve outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities, birth through age 21
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To cite this Case Study Unit:

Standards

Licensure and Content Standards

This IRIS Case Study aligns with the following licensure and program standards and topic areas.

Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)

CAEP standards for the accreditation of educators are designed to improve the quality and effectiveness not only of new instructional practitioners but also the evidence-base used to assess those qualities in the classroom.

• Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

CEC standards encompass a wide range of ethics, standards, and practices created to help guide those who have taken on the crucial role of educating students with disabilities.

• Standard 2: Learning Environments

Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC)

InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards are designed to help teachers of all grade levels and content areas to prepare their students either for college or for employment following graduation.

• Standard 3: Learning Environments

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

NCATE standards are intended to serve as professional guidelines for educators. They also overview the “organizational structures, policies, and procedures” necessary to support them.

• Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions

The Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices (DEC)

The DEC Recommended Practices are designed to help improve the learning outcomes of young children (birth through age five) who have or who are at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities.

• Topic 3: Environment
Background

Student: Edward
Age: 8.3
Grade: 3rd

Scenario

Edward is a third grader who seems distracted during independent work time. He is either not finishing his independent work or is completing it haphazardly. Edward’s IEP suggests he be seated near the dry erase board where the independent work directions are written. However, after sketching the classroom arrangement (below), his teacher begins to suspect that Edward’s off-task behavior may be a result of his seating location (starred). His teacher has decided to rearrange the classroom so that Edward will achieve the following goals within six weeks:

- Increase the quantity of time on-task during independent work
- Increase the number of assignments completed

Possible Strategies

- Minimizing distractions
- Maximizing access
- Matching the arrangement to lesson purpose

Assignment

1. Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
2. Identify three issues (one related to each strategy) that might be the cause of Edward’s distraction.
Background

Student: Cheri
Age: 7.1
Grade: 1st

Scenario

Cheri is a repeating first grader who missed much of her initial first-grade year after being diagnosed with a syndrome characterized by fragile bones. Cheri walks with leg braces and uses a walker, and even minor jostling or bumps can result in bone breaks. Because of her condition, she is protectively seated beside her teacher’s desk, separate from the other students and where there is an easily accessible place to put her walker. Cheri’s academic work demonstrates that she is progressing with her peers; however, her social interaction skills are below grade level. In response, the teacher has decided to reassign Cheri’s seating location to help her achieve the following goals within nine weeks:

- Increase her positive interactions with peers
- Increase her safe movement to and from the group table for small-group reading instruction and into and out of the classroom

Possible Strategies

- Maximizing access
- Increasing ease of movement

Assignment

1. Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
2. Using these strategies, explain why each of the seating locations indicated below (A, B, and C) is either suitable or not suitable for helping Cheri to meet her goals.
Background

Student: Marcus
Age: 7.5
Grade: 2nd

Scenario

Marcus is a second grader with ADHD. Whether tapping or sharpening his pencil, adjusting his seat, “shooting baskets” with his trash, or pacing through the room, Marcus is in almost constant motion. During independent work, his restlessness is often evidence that he is off-task, something that is particularly true when his teacher is working with a small group at the classroom’s group table. When this happens, the teacher is forced to repeatedly interrupt the small group to try to refocus Marcus on his independent work. After speaking with a colleague, the teacher realized that she may not be planning enough physical activity during the instructional day to address Marcus’s needs. In addition, by creating a diagram of the classroom (below), Marcus’s teacher recognized several distractions that might be encouraging Marcus to be off-task. The teacher is planning to enhance her lesson plans with physical activities and to rearrange the classroom or relocate Marcus’s seating position (indicated below with a red star) to help him meet the following goals in four weeks:

• Increase the amount of time on-task during independent work
• Increase the number of independent assignments completed
• Decrease the number of interruptions during small-group instruction
Possible Strategies

- Minimizing distractions
- Maximizing access
- Matching arrangement to lesson purpose
- Increasing ease of movement

Assignment

1. Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
2. Referencing the classroom sketch above, identify and list three items, pieces of equipment, or individuals that might prove distracting for Marcus and therefore need to be relocated.
3. Explain why you would move them. Be sure to clarify which strategy or strategies you are using.
4. How will your three changes to the classroom help Marcus meet his goals?
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Level B • Case 2

Background

Students: Robert  Latisha  Helen  Paulo
Ages: 9.2  9.7  9.5  10.4
Grade: 4th  4th  4th  4th

Scenario

Following their special education math class, Robert, Latisha, Helen, and Paulo join the rest of their class in the lab for science instruction. The special education teacher has requested that the science teacher place these fourth graders at seating locations separate from one another, so as to allow them to interact more easily with their peers. To help facilitate their seating assignments, the special education teacher offered the following information:

Robert
- Needs to be near the dry erase board to see written material or near the demonstration table to see demonstrations.
- Is easily distracted by other students.
- Likes to volunteer to help the teacher.

Latisha
- Is shy.
- Is easily pulled off-task by distractions, especially computers.
- Does a good job of pretending to be on-task when she does not understand how to do something or just isn’t interested.

Helen
- Is talkative.
- Will try to monopolize the teacher’s attention.
- Is a strong reader.

Paulo
- Loves science.
- Gets along well with other students.
- Works well in groups.
- Has a crush on Latisha.

Possible Strategies

• Minimizing distractions
• Maximizing access
• Matching arrangement to lesson purpose
• Increasing ease of movement
Assignment

1. Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
2. Assign each of the four students one of the lettered seats in the classroom sketch below.
3. Explain why you selected these specific seating locations and indicate which strategies you used to make your decisions.
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Level C • Case 1

Background

Student: Donna  
Age: 10.8  
Grade: 5th

Scenario

Donna is a fifth grader who has recently increased the amount of time she spends in the general education classroom to two hours. During this block of time, the class works for 45 minutes on math, one hour on social studies or science (alternating each week), and 15 minutes on sustained silent reading. Mathematics instruction in Donna’s classroom is typically conducted with pair interactions. Social studies and science instruction vary in format from pairs to small-group to whole-group, depending on the unit of study. Sustained silent reading is conducted with students seated at their individual desks. The special education teacher anticipates that Donna’s strengths will help her to compensate for her difficulty with reading. Though Donna has progressed this semester to reading on the second-grade level, she remains a shy, reluctant reader.

Areas of Strength

Donna:  
• Participates well in group activities  
• Has a strong interest in science and social studies  
• Follows oral directions well

Assignment

1. Review all of the STAR Sheets.  
2. Complete the room arrangement below by sketching the furniture (e.g., 22 student desks) to meet the class’s instructional needs and to better support Donna. Be sure to designate Donna’s specific seating location with a star.  
3. Explain your rationale for the sketched classroom arrangement.  
4. Explain how you chose Donna’s seating location.
About the Strategy

Minimizing distractions is a strategy that involves arranging the physical space so that a student has as few distractions as possible from classroom materials, equipment, or other students. Minimizing distractions works together with maximizing access (see the following STAR Sheet) to support student learning.

What the Research and Resources Say

- Items (e.g., windows, doors, aquariums), equipment (e.g., computers), and individuals can all be classroom distractions (Evertson & Emmer, 2017).
- Effective teachers proactively prevent distractions and disruptive events in their classrooms (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).
- By minimizing distractions, teachers can also increase students’ sense of psychological safety in a classroom. This is particularly important for students experiencing stressful situations or events (e.g., poverty, homelessness, abuse) (Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011).
- High-traffic areas (e.g., pencil sharpener, trash can) should be arranged so as to avoid congestion and to minimize the distraction caused by their use (Evertson & Emmer, 2017).
- Well-thought-out arrangement can help reduce student distraction when incompatible activities (e.g., silent reading and small-group role-play) are taking place at the same time (Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011).
- When classrooms are well-organized and well-structured, students are increasingly positively engaged (Landrum, 2015).

Tips for Implementation

- Identify potential distractions in the classroom.
- Arrange student seating to avoid these distractions.
- Minimize distractions by relocating items, equipment, or individuals as needed.
Keep in Mind

- A simple way to anticipate potential distractions is to sit at each location in the classroom to experience what the students’ vantages will be.
- Different students find different items, equipment, and individuals distracting.
- Even items that for practical purposes cannot be relocated can be minimized through other means. For example, a distracting computer monitor might be turned to a different angle or blocked by a temporary partition (e.g., a manila folder).

Resources


Effective Room Arrangement: Elementary
Maximizing Access

**IRIS STAR Sheets**

A STAR (STrategies And Resources) Sheet describes a well-researched strategy that can help you solve the case studies in this unit.

**About the Strategy**

**Maximizing access** is a strategy in which the classroom space is arranged so that students have the greatest possible access to instruction, materials, and demonstrations, while teachers have equally easy access to their students. Maximizing access works with minimizing distractions to support student learning.

**What the Research and Resources Say**

- Teacher interaction with students is correlated to student seating location (Good & Brophy, 2008; Evertson & Emmer, 2017; Rogers, 2011; Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011). Students who are seated in closer proximity to the teacher experience increased engagement (Cooper, 2011, in Wubbels et al., 2015).
- Students who are facing an instructional area have easier access to it; those with their backs to it can more easily avoid participation (Wong & Wong, 2009).
- Effective circulation routes and accessibility to storage, resources, and tools are important components of innovative learning spaces (Cleveland, 2011).
- Effective monitoring requires that the teacher move frequently throughout the classroom and that she or he maintain constant lines of sight to each student (Evertson & Emmer, 2017; Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011).
- Frequently used materials and equipment (e.g., pencil sharpener, computer) should be stored in easily accessible locations (Evertson & Emmer, 2017). Students are more likely to use instructional materials that are easy to access (Gettinger & Fischer, 2015).
- An equitable classroom is a more accessible classroom. Visually acknowledging students’ cultural diversity (e.g., through artwork, posters, or photographs) is another way to maximize access for all students (Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011).
- Flexible access to furniture, equipment, and supplies helps establish student independence in the learning environment (Cleveland, 2011; HEFCE, 2006).

**Tips for Implementation**

- Provide a clear line of sight from wherever the students are seated to wherever instruction is being provided (e.g., smart board, overhead projector screen, demonstration table).
- Create a clear line of sight from the teacher to the students.
- Consider what procedures or routines can be implemented to enhance student access to needed instruction and supplies (e.g., how, where, and when materials are accessed and by whom).

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Keep in Mind

- An easy way to anticipate better access for students is to sit in each of their seating locations prior to making seating assignments.
- Access can be redistributed by rearranging students around the room.
- Some students require more space (e.g., for a wheelchair) if they are to have equal access.

Resources


Effective Room Arrangement: Elementary
Matching Arrangement with Lesson Purpose

★ IRIS STAR Sheets

A STAR (STrategies And Resources) Sheet describes a well-researched strategy that can help you solve the case studies in this unit.

About the Strategy

**Matching arrangement with lesson purpose** is a strategy for arranging the classroom so as to better support both academic and social-emotional learning. Lessons designed for independent work (e.g., seatwork, tests) are supported by an arrangement of either rows or paired rows. Lessons designed for group work (e.g., centers, teams) are supported by grouped seating arrangements.

What the Research and Resources Say

- Because they indicate both academic and social expectations, seating arrangements should match lesson purpose (Chance, 2015; Evertson & Emmer, 2017; Grimmen, van den Berg, Segers, & Cillessen, 2016; Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011; Wong & Wong, 2009).
- Students feel increasingly challenged and competent when their classroom environment is clearly and coherently structured to support specific kinds of instruction and activities (Kunter, Baumert, & Köller, 2007).
- To keep students actively engaged, teachers should use a variety of instructional formats (Yoder, 2014). Different instructional formats may require different room arrangements.
- Grouped seating arrangements can increase student social interaction, while seating in rows can increase on-task behavior and the amount of independent work that students complete (Grimmen, van den Berg, Segers, & Cillessen, 2016; Wong & Wong, 2009).
- Flexibility in room arrangement enables the use of a variety of instructional formats (e.g., whole-group, small-group, individual) (Cleveland, 2011; Wong & Wong, 2009).
- Room arrangements that support collaborative activities can improve social interactions among peer learners, which in turn can help improve student academic performance (HEFCE, 2006).

Tips for Implementation

- Select a lesson purpose and format and then choose a room arrangement that best supports them, such as the examples on the next page.
- Ask students to help you design effective arrangements for different instructional formats to support their academic and social-emotional learning goals.
- Teach students to rearrange the classroom and provide cues to help them arrange it to suit specific lesson formats. Keep in mind that successful student rearrangement requires practice.

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Possible Room Arrangements

**Independent Work/Tests/Beginning of the Year/Lecture**

**Group Work/Stations**

**Demonstration/Discussion**
Keep in Mind

- Teachers should take care to match their instruction with a classroom arrangement that best suits the goals and purposes of a given lesson.
- Continual rearrangement of the classroom can be disruptive. Teachers should plan their room arrangement to fit the majority of the day’s instruction and find ways to adjust this arrangement to meet other lesson purposes only when necessary.

Resources


A STAR (STrategies And Resources) Sheet describes a well-researched strategy that can help you solve the case studies in this unit.

**About the Strategy**

**Movement with ease** is a strategy for arranging the physical space of a classroom to ensure that both the teacher and students can move through the room without difficulty.

**What the Research and Resources Say**

- Safe and secure classrooms and schools are designed to provide purposeful, effective traffic patterns and consistent student supervision (Sprague, 2007).
- Effective monitoring requires that the teacher move frequently throughout the classroom and maintain constant lines of sight to each student (Evertson & Emmer, 2017). This frequent movement encourages students to remain on-task and gives the teacher insight into their conversations, work, and progress (Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011). It is important to move with purpose so as not to distract students unnecessarily (Rogers, 2011).
- It is typical for students who live in poverty to experience chronic stress. Educators can help alleviate that stress by adjusting the school environment, which includes utilizing movement during their instruction (e.g., physical games, hands-on tasks, role plays) (Jensen, 2009). Additionally, movement may be required for students to process information (Ellison, Boykin, Towns, & Stokes, 2000). Therefore, planning for movement with ease is crucial.

**Tips for Implementation**

- Arrange the furniture and equipment in the classroom to create walking space between and around these items as needed. Plan for efficient traffic flow and teach students procedures and routines for moving accordingly.
- Anticipate special circumstances that may require additional space (e.g., wheelchair use).
- Place frequently utilized supplies, equipment, and materials in easy-to-reach locations and remove unused or unnecessary equipment and furniture from the classroom.
- Include purposeful movement across instructional activities to maintain student engagement.
- Practice emergency drills and other safety procedures.
Keep in Mind

- A simple way to test movement with ease throughout the classroom is to walk through all the designated areas with the chairs placed as though students were seated in them.
- Establishing procedures for moving through the room is necessary to the success of a classroom arrangement.
- Blocked walkways can serve as emergency exit hazards.

Resources


