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Assignment #1: Physical Classroom Arrangement
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The current configuration of my 3rd grade placement classroom (attachment A) strongly supports student learning and teacher instruction. Positive attributes of this room arrangement include grouping the student desk into quads. All students are easily oriented towards the projection screen at the front of the classroom, no student is situated in a middle seat between two potentially distracting peers, and all children have easy access to and from their seats. Using quads rather than rows also opens up floor area in the library corner for students to gather for read-alouds and mini-lessons centered on the whiteboard easel.

Other assets of the current arrangement include an open and accessible high traffic area in front of the cubbies that allows for smooth transitions and queuing and easy access to backpack materials. Pencil sharpeners are positioned in two widely spaced locations to eliminate crowding. The guided reading table is situated in front of a storage and supply bookshelf and affords clear visibility to almost the entire classroom. Those areas that are not easily supervised from the table (corner behind the student teacher's desk and behind the teacher's desk) are only available for student use during independent reading and only with explicit permission from the teacher. This table is also used for whole group science demonstration and therefore benefits from its location near the sink, classroom closet, and storage cabinet. It has ample floor space around it to allow students to gather without crowding.

Finally, the front of the room contains many important references and tools. Class rules are permanently displayed on the front whiteboard and daily homework is written on an adjoining dedicated smaller whiteboard. The class "reward jar" and color-carded behavior pocket chart are both located in this front area. Due to my cooperating teacher's presence during wiring and installation, the document camera and panel are located near the front of the classroom rather than in the rear of the classroom (behind the location of the guided reading table or at the end of the computer table near the library) like the vast majority of Matoaka's document cameras. While it is not in students'

natural sightline, the location of the document camera allows the teacher to step easily to the front of the room.

In addition to the document camera position, the greatest challenge of this room arrangement is the bottleneck presented by the book boxes in the narrow window well. When the students from another homeroom retrieve their supplies and work, they frequently jostle one another and do not optimize time as they wait and crowd together. Other negative aspects are the lack of effective curtains to block the sunshine glare that bleaches out the video screen, the amputation of the alphabet display behind the video screen (only “A – I” and “P-Z” are visible), the use of the side whiteboard as a bulletin board rather than a changing communication tool, and the location of and lack of interaction with the monthly calendar pocket chart.

In discussing the current room configuration, my cooperating teacher explained that this arrangement is the result of tweaks and refinements over a number of years. She feels the sight lines and traffic flow have been optimized and that the book box corner is not optimal but is nonetheless manageable with strong teacher supervision. She noted her frustration with the sunshine’s impact on the poor visibility of the video screen and said that she has been intending to install some darkening curtains. A continuing challenge is balancing the seat assignments to provide proximity for students who need more frequent redirection. She has split these students between the quad closest to the guided reading table and the quad next to the document camera. With these placements, she is always located next to half of these students and has a direct view of the other half across the classroom.

Under my revised classroom configuration (attachment B), I have incorporated the effective functionality of the majority of the current room arrangement and focused primarily upon eliminating the traffic chokepoint by the book boxes. I debated shifting the computer desk from a long single desk to a pod with 2 computers facing each other but discounted this option due to the narrowness of the room. I also was constrained by the static electrical connections between the room windows and the narrowness of the window well. Whatever is placed in this window well must not require frequent or simultaneous access. In the end, I opted to move my own desk and less frequently accessed items such as the dictionary shelf into the window well. I also relocated into

this area one of the pair of pencil sharpeners currently located near the sink thus reducing the early morning crowding near the sink. The book boxes themselves remain organized in their compact triple-level rack and are now shifted 90 degrees and moved adjacent to the whiteboard. In this position, the book boxes can now be readily accessed across all 4 feet of the rack width. In order to accommodate these changes, a supply shelf has been moved to the opposite side of the whiteboard, displacing homework baskets that have been relocated behind the library corner easel. The homework baskets remain readily accessible to students and are now more convenient for teacher grading due to the increased proximity to her desks.

Other changes include moving the calendar pocket chart up to the front of the room positioned alongside the homework whiteboard and shifting the ABC chart to above the cubbies where it can be referenced in its entirety rather than being severed by the ubiquitous presence of the extended video screen. Finally, I would transform the whiteboard above the computer desks to a more dynamic use, adding an interactive word wall and a schedule for the week highlighting upcoming assessments and special presentations as well as the centers' schedule.

I envision that while this reconfiguration addresses the book box chokepoint, it does not provide privacy and line of sight for the student teacher's desk. In reality, I rarely use this desk either during instructional time or for planning and do not feel that this location would adversely impact function. This corner remains available for partner reading and literature circles at the discretion of the teacher.

In examining the room arrangement of a 1st grade classroom, I was struck by the efficiency of the 6-student tables rather than our 4 desk quads. The tables opened up significant floor space thus providing more room for whole group instruction and spreading out on the floor during center work (puzzles, math manipulatives, etc.) In our 3rd grade classroom, only library corner read-alouds and independent reading "special book spots" necessitate floor space. The students do most work at their desks and therefore have less need to spread out. Floor space dedicated to the library corner was equivalent at both grade levels and the guided reading and adjacent storage bookshelves and supply cabinets were similar. The first grade teacher had grouped together her three work areas (main desk, guided reading desk, and document camera station) and thus

created great efficiency. However, as in most Matoaka classrooms, the document camera and its requisite electrical panel were positioned opposite the video screen and behind the line of sight of her students. This classroom also was free of the awkward window well of our classroom. Book boxes in this classroom were conveniently located inside student cubbies. This option is less attractive in our 3rd grade departmentalized situation where four students rather than two share a cubby over the course of a school day.

In reflecting upon this exercise and other recently observed classroom configurations, I definitely prefer grouped desks rather than rows and would reserve floor space in the library corner for interactive read-alouds. If at all possible, I would like to condense all teacher workspace into one area and to eliminate traffic bottlenecks such as the current choke point near our book boxes. Transcending all of these interests is my concern that I will be faced with fixed document camera wiring that would necessitate teaching to the back of my students' heads. While I am certain that I will adapt and problem solve, I hope to work in a classroom with a more viable configuration.

