

Classroom Management Strategies

in an Active, Flexible Classroom

By Amy Uelmen



Teaching in an active, flexible classroom creates space for learning and engagement, comfort and choice, and limitless lesson design! However, setting expectations from the start and being intentional is crucial in helping others find success.

Here are six strategies for helping teachers and students thrive in a flexible classroom setting.

1. MAKE A MENTAL SHIFT

Letting go of control and being comfortable with students moving seats when and where needed can be difficult. Your classroom might not look the same each day. Seats might not be in the same spot, desks might not be lined up in perfect rows, and table heights might vary. While this can feel strange at first, remember that you're encouraging productivity, comfort, and flexibility — the real value different seating and workspaces bring to your classroom. It sends the message that your classroom is everyone's classroom.

2. SET GROUND RULES

Make sure you set expectations with seating and workspaces. Establish how each piece can be and should be used. Help students understand why specific pieces were designed the way they were, what kind of learning each one supports, and what they might like or dislike about each piece. Consider creating graphics for quick reference, such as when a wobble seat or a tall table is a good choice (and when

it isn't). This will help your students make informed choices when deciding where to learn.

3. DISCUSS DIFFERENT SEATING OPTIONS

Students sometimes need guidance in selecting how and where they sit, enabling them to choose the best place for them rather than the closest spot to a friend. Providing prompts for students based on how their body or mind feels will help them make informed decisions.

- **"I have lots of energy."** → **"I need a seat that allows me to move while I listen and work."**
- **"I didn't sleep well last night."** → **"I need a supportive or cushioned back on my seat."**
- **"I've been sitting all morning."** → **"I need to move to a standing desk or a taller table."**
- **"I am feeling anxious."** → **"I need a solo spot near the back of the room."**

4. CREATE DIFFERENT LAYOUTS

Think about your lessons and create three go-to layouts that match how you teach. When you introduce a learning activity, tell students which layout they should follow before starting and have them help you move the pieces into place. Your students will quickly learn each of your layouts, and it will take less time each time they move to a new layout.



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5. DESIGN LEARNING WITH ENGAGEMENT IN MIND

Students sometimes have a lot of energy, which causes challenges with focus and concentration. When designing activities and lessons, build in opportunities for students to collaborate, move around the room, and share using a variety of media. For example, encourage your students to vote with movement by moving to a corner of a room or standing up/sitting down. Give students opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas in a way that works for them.

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6. TALK WITH YOUR STUDENTS

Get feedback from students about your space. Ask your students what they like and dislike about the chairs, tables, layouts, and the overall classroom. Some example questions might be:

- **What would you change about our classroom?**
- **When do you like to sit with others? When do you like to sit by yourself?**
- **When you need a quiet space, can you find one?**
- **When you need a creative space, can you find one?**
- **When you need to take a break or refocus, where do you go?**

Encourage your students to share what's working and what isn't and see if they have ideas or solutions. Come up with a plan that everyone can agree upon. Remember, the classroom is everyone's classroom. What works well for someone might not work well for someone else. Be flexible and open-minded. 🌞

Designing the Early Childhood Classroom

By Kate Larson

Key factors to consider

Provide right-sized seating

Learners can ideally choose from a variety of seating at certain times and in certain areas; it might be tucked into a cozy corner or sprawled on a rug. Beyond seating, educators should plan for students' level of gross motor development.

Choose flexible furniture

Furniture that nests, stacks, moves out of the way, or is modular and offers multiple configurations supports more organic learning and play.

Make navigation easy

Teachers may need a lot of labeling to communicate expectations for various areas. For preschool and 4K students, all signage should contain pictures or symbols.

Minimize visual clutter

Storage with covers, curtains, or doors to block items from view can help decrease visual noise. For items used only weekly or quarterly, teachers can plan storage accordingly, so the right materials are easy to access.

Consider the sound landscape

The shrieks and giggles of excited young learners can create notable noise levels. Arrange furniture in ways that dampen sound and consider acoustic panels or room dividers to help reduce noise.

Encourage discovery and exploration

A room designed to improve flow, maximize space, and reduce clutter and noise will inspire young learners to embrace the joy of learning! 🌞