

Does Where a Student Sits Really Matter?-The Impact of Seating Locations on Student Classroom Learning

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Introduction

It seems that there is a common belief that where students decide to sit within a classroom reflects upon their motivation, engagement, and willingness to learn (Benedict & Hoag, 2004; Betoret & Artiga, 2004; Budge, 2000; Burda & Brooks, 1996; Daly & Suite, 1982; Marx, Fuhrer, & Hartig, 2000; Perkins & Wieman, 2005; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Though this belief has become an anecdotal comment, there are indicators suggesting that student location within the classroom affects academic performance (Burda & Brooks, 1996; Holliman & Anderson, 1986; Perkins & Wieman, 2005; Szejnberg & Finch, 2006). Over the past decades, research has explored whether it is the good student who selects the seat at the front of the class or if the seat at the front of the class creates the good student (Burda & Brooks, 1996).

What teachers consider to be a good student can vary. Research shows that seating locations (1) are related to academic achievement and classroom participation (Budge, 2000; Marx, Fuhrer, & Hartig, 2000; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008; Weinstein, 1979). Seating locations concern how students are seated within the classroom environment. They can vary in size and formation; however, they affect students' learning conditions, and learning conditions impact their engagement and participation in the classroom (Budge, 2000; Marx, Fuhrer, & Hartig, 2000; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008).

Research has begun to show that active engagement and participation in the learning experience positively affects students' learning (Flynn, Vermette, Mesibov, & Smith, 2009; Stronge, 2007). Classroom participation is associated with the generation and promotion of higher order thinking skills, and this cognitive stimulation provides students with a different environment which promotes positive and effective learning experiences (McKeachie, 1990).

Further, a pleasant classroom learning environment helps students learn better, and different seating locations provide students with access to learning resources, such as the teacher and clear lines of sight to the board (Douglas & Gifford, 2001; Jamieson, 2003; Szejnberg & Finch, 2006). Classroom seating arrangements (2) also have the ability to affect the communal environment within the room (Jamieson, 2003; Szejnberg & Finch, 2006). Due to the large amount of time students and teachers spend in the classroom; overall comfort level of the environment is a factor that impacts student achievement and success. Students who find their classroom to be pleasant and comfortable generally demonstrate an increase in participation leading to higher achievement (Douglas & Gifford, 2001). Therefore, the examination of the impact of seating locations on student classroom learning has important educational implications.

This paper examines the impact of seating locations on student classroom learning. Specifically, it examines the impact of seating locations on a) student learning motivation, b) student-student and teacher-student relationships, c) the nature of different tasks and activities performed, and d) student classroom participation. Its impact on classroom participation is carefully discussed because active engagement and participation in the learning experience positively affects students' learning and promotes students' use of higher order thinking skills (Flynn, Vermette, Mesibov & Smith, 2009; McKeachie, 1990; Stronge, 2007). Student control, along with the implications related to seating locations in the classroom is also explained and discussed. Research gaps in this area are further identified.

Impact of Seating Locations on Student Learning Motivation

Although the access to different resources and increased monitoring provided by sitting at the front of the class pose students with a different environment than those sitting near the back of the class, student learning motivation and personalities traits play a big role in achievement and involvement in the learning experience (Burda & Brooks, 1996; Edwards, 2000). ...

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