EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT

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EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT
LEVEL A • CASE 1

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 else he is completing it haphazardly. Edward’s IEP suggested he be seated near the chalkboard 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

![Classroom Arrangement Diagram]

- Increase the number of assignments completed

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

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

ASSIGNMENT

- Read the STAR sheets on each of the three possible strategies.
- Given what you’ve learned from the STAR sheets, look back at the scenario. Identify three issues (one related to each strategy) that may be distracting Edward.
**BACKGROUND**

Student: Cheri  
Age: 7.1  
Grade: 1st

**SCENARIO**

Cheri is a repeating first grader who missed much of her initial first-grade year due to medical reasons. She has been diagnosed with a syndrome that is characterized by fragile bones. For Cheri, simple jostling or bumps can result in broken bones. She walks with leg braces and uses a walker. Cheri is protectively seated beside the teacher’s desk, separate from the other students. At this location, Cheri has a place to put her walker for easy access. Her academic work demonstrates that she is progressing with her peers; however, her social interaction skills are below grade level. With this information in mind, Cheri’s 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
- Movement with ease

**ASSIGNMENT**

- Read the STAR sheets on each possible strategy.
- Select one seating location (A, B, or C) for Cheri. Explain why this location is or is not suitable to help Cheri meet her goals based on the strategies of maximizing access and movement with ease.
BACKGROUND

Student: Marcus  
Age: 7.5  
Grade: 2nd

SCENARIO

Marcus is an active second grader. Whether tapping his pencil, adjusting his seat, sharpening his pencil, “shooting baskets” with his trash, or walking through the room, Marcus seems to be in constant motion. During independent work, Marcus’s constant motion is often evidence that he is off-task. This is particularly the case when his teacher is working with a small group at the group table. The teacher interrupts the small group on a regular basis to try to get Marcus refocused on his independent work. Marcus’s teacher made a sketch (below) of the classroom and recognized that there were several distractions that might encourage Marcus to be off-task. The teacher is planning to rearrange the classroom and/or Marcus’s seating position (starred) to help him meet the following goals in four weeks:

- Increase the quantity of time on-task during independent work
- Increase the number of independent assignments completed
- Decrease the number of interruptions to the small group instruction

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

- Minimizing distractions
- Maximizing access
- Matching arrangement to lesson purpose
- Movement with ease
Assignment

• Review the STAR sheets on each possible strategy.
• Identify three things to move (items, equipment, individuals) in the classroom sketch above that are possible distractions for Marcus.
• Explain: 1) what three things you would move in this classroom; 2) why you would move them (including which strategy or strategies you are using); and 3) how will your three changes to the classroom help Marcus meet his goals?
EFFECTIVE ROOM ARRANGEMENT
LEVEL B • CASE 2

BACKGROUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students:</th>
<th>Robert</th>
<th>Latisha</th>
<th>Helen</th>
<th>Paulo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages:</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade:</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCENARIO

Robert, Latisha, Helen, and Paulo are fourth graders who join their fourth-grade class in the science lab for science instruction following their special education math class. The special education teacher has requested that the science teacher place these fourth graders at seating locations separate from one another. This would allow the students to interact with other fourth graders during science. The special education teacher provided the following information to the science teacher to help in assigning seating locations:

Robert
- Needs to be near the chalkboard 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 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
- Movement with ease
Assignment

- Review the STAR sheets on each possible strategy.
- Place the four students at a seating location in the classroom arrangement sketch above. For each student, write the name of the student and the letter of the assigned seat.
- For each student, explain why you selected the specific seating location you did and include which strategies you used in making your decisions.
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 her standard classroom to two hours. During this block of time, the class is working for 45 minutes on math, one hour on social studies or science (alternating each week), and 15 minutes in sustained silent reading. Math instruction in Donna’s classroom is typically conducted with pair interactions. Social studies and science instruction varies in format from paired to small group to whole group based 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. Donna has progressed this semester to reading on the second-grade level, but is still a shy, reluctant reader.

AREAS OF STRENGTH
• Participates well in group activities
• Has a strong interest in science and social studies
• Follows oral directions well

ASSIGNMENT
• Develop two goals for Donna.
• Complete the room arrangement below by sketching the furniture (e.g., 22 student desks) to meet the class’s instructional needs and support Donna in meeting her goals. Designate Donna’s specific seating location (desk) with a star.
• Explain your rationale for both the sketched classroom arrangement and Donna’s seating location. Identify which strategies you used in making your decisions. (You may review the STAR sheets if necessary.) Indicate how your decisions support Donna in meeting the two goals.
What a STAR Sheet is...

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

What it is...

The strategy of minimizing distractions is arranging the physical space around a student so that this student has minimal distractions from items, equipment, or other individuals. Minimizing distractions works in tandem with maximizing access (see adjacent fact sheet) to support student learning.

What the research and resources say...

- Items (windows, doors, aquariums, etc.), equipment (computers, overhead projectors, etc.), and individuals (reading groups, adjacent peers, etc.) can be distracting (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- Preventing distractions helps to decrease misbehavior, but is even more effective when replaced by positive teacher statements (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993).
- High traffic areas (water fountain, pencil sharpener, trash can, teacher’s desk, etc.) need to be arranged to avoid congestion and to minimize the distraction their use causes (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).

Tips for implementation...

- Identify potential distractions in the classroom.
- Arrange student seating to avoid these distractions.
- Move items, equipment, and/or individuals as needed to minimize distractions.

Keep in mind...

- An easy way to anticipate potential distractions is to sit in each of the student seating locations prior to making seating assignments.
- Different students find different items, equipment, and individuals distracting.
- When distractions cannot be moved, they can be minimized through other means. For example, if a computer is distracting, but the only electrical/Internet connections are in that specific location, turn down the screen resolution when not in use to minimize the distraction.

Resources...


What a STAR Sheet is...

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

What it is...

Maximizing access is a strategy for arranging the physical space around a student so that the student has maximized access to instruction, materials, and demonstrations and the teacher has maximized access to the student. Maximizing access works in tandem with minimizing distractions (see adjacent fact sheet) to support student learning.

What the research and resources say...

- Many studies have identified teacher interaction with students is connected to student seating location (Good & Brophy, 2000; Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003; Lambert, 1995; Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993). Those students seated at the front of the room and down its center (the “action zone”) are more likely to receive attention from the teacher.
- Students facing an instructional area have easier access to it; those with their backs to instruction can avoid participation (Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Effective teacher monitoring of a class requires frequent movement throughout the classroom and constant lines of sight to each student (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- The arrangement of the classroom should allow teachers access to interact with every student (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993).
- Frequently used materials and equipment (pencil sharpener, texts, etc.) should be stored in easily accessible locations (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).

Tips for implementation...

- Provide a clear line of sight for students to instruction (chalkboard, overhead projector screen, demonstration table, you).
- Create a clear line of sight for you to the students.
- Arrange seating to allow you and the students to move through the classroom with ease.

Keep in mind...

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


What a STAR Sheet is...

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

What it is...

Matching the room arrangement with lesson purpose is a strategy for arranging the classroom in a manner to support the purpose of the lesson. Lessons designed for independent work (seatwork, tests, etc.) are supported by an arrangement in rows or paired rows. Lessons designed for group work (centers, teams, etc.) are supported by an arrangement in groups.

What the research says...

- Seating arrangements should match lesson purpose (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003; Lambert, 1995; Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Grouped seating arrangements can increase student social interaction; seating in rows can increase the quantity of independent student work completed (Lambert, 1995; Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Flexibility in room arrangement enables a variety of instructional formats to be used (whole group, small group, student pairs, individual) (Lambert, 1995; Wong & Wong, 1998).
- Room arrangements that do not match lesson purposes can be distracting to students (Lambert, 1995).

Tips for implementation...

- Select the lesson purpose and format.
- Select a room arrangement that supports the lesson purpose. Consider the different arrangements below.
- Adapt your present arrangement to support the lesson purpose, or
- Arrange the room accordingly, or
- Teach students to arrange the classroom for specific lesson formats and assign the task of arranging the room to the class based on your direction. Successful student rearrangement requires practice.

Keep in mind...

1. Effective lesson planning and teaching procedures for a given lesson format work in combination with matching arrangement to lesson purpose to achieve successful lesson implementation.
2. Continuous rearrangement of the classroom can be as disruptive as a mismatch of arrangement to lesson purpose. Plan your room arrangement to fit the majority of your day’s instruction and find ways to adjust this arrangement to meet other lesson purposes.
Possible arrangements for independent work/tests/beginning of the year/lecture:

Possible arrangements for group work/stations:

Possible arrangements for demonstration/discussion:

Resources...


**What a STAR Sheet is...**

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

**What it is...**

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

**What the research and resources say...**

- Effective teacher monitoring of a class requires frequent movement throughout the classroom and constant lines of sight to each student (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- The arrangement of the classroom should allow teachers to be able to move to interact with every student (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993).
- Students need easy access to needed supplies, equipment, and materials (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003).
- Constrained spaces increase the physical contact between individuals and the likelihood of tension (Hall, 1966/1982).
- In a study focused on classrooms with low-income African American students, researchers found that the students required movement as a part of their learning process (Ellison, Boykin, Towns, & Stokes, 2000).

**Tips for implementation...**

- Arrange the furniture and equipment in the classroom to create walking space between and around these items as needed.
- Anticipate special circumstances that may require additional space (e.g., wheelchair use).
- Place frequently utilized supplies, equipment, and materials in easy-to-reach locations.
- Remove unused or unnecessary equipment and furniture from the classroom.

**Keep in mind...**

- A simple way to anticipate movement with ease through 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 make a good classroom arrangement successful.
- Blocked walkways can serve as emergency exit hazards.
Resources...


The cases provided with this set offer opportunities for your students to explore many of the issues associated with arranging a classroom. The case study set is designed to suit your class’s needs. You can adapt or supplement the activities as seems appropriate. For example, you might ask those students with Level A, Case #2 to respond to all three of Cheri’s possible seating placements rather than selecting one. Several assignment supplements to this set are offered at the conclusion of this Instructor’s Guide.

**Level A, Case 1**

Responses to this assignment should include at least one arrangement issue from each strategy category.

Minimizing Distractions:
Possible arrangement issues include:
Trash Can, Reading Group Table, Windows, Computer
Any other justifiable distracting item, equipment, or individual

Maximizing Access:
Possible arrangement issues include:
Edward’s back is to most of the chalkboard.
Any other justifiable access limitation

Matching Arrangement to Lesson Purpose:
Possible arrangement issues include:
The lesson purpose is independent work; however, Edward is seated at a group table.
Any other justifiable mismatch of arrangement with lesson purpose

You may wish to have additional discussion on IEPs with preferential seating after this assignment.

**Level A, Case 2**

Responses to this assignment should discuss one of the following seating locations as suitable or not suitable for Cheri to meet her goals. Explanations may include the following statements or other reasons to justify the seating location as suitable or not suitable.

Seating location A:

Seating location A does involve Cheri in a group, but places her at the greatest distance from the reading group table and the classroom door. She would have to negotiate across the entire classroom to move to either the reading group table or the door. She would have peers moving into and out of the seating locations on both sides of her, increasing the likelihood of being bumped. In addition, she would have no place to put her walker for easy access from this seating location. Both her access and her movement are limited at this location. Therefore, this is not a suitable seating location for Cheri.

Seating location B:

Seating location B does involve Cheri in a group, but places her in the midst of the classroom. From this seating location, Cheri would have to negotiate around other students and furniture to move to the reading group table or to the door. Though she is somewhat protected from bumping other students by being at the front of the room, she will have to travel around peers and
furniture to get there. Cheri might not have a place to put her walker for easy access at the center of the room. Both her access and her movement are limited at this location. Therefore, this is not a suitable seating location for Cheri.

Seating location C:
Seating location C does involve Cheri in a group. She could easily travel to and from this seating location to the reading group table or the door. Cheri’s walker could be stored for easy access beside her desk. Cheri’s access is maximized at this location; her movement can occur with ease. Therefore, this is a suitable seating location for Cheri.

You may wish to have additional discussion concerning class-wide procedures after this assignment. Procedures for moving in and out of the classroom and for moving to and from the reading group table would need to be in place to protect Cheri and to make transitions efficient. For example, Cheri might be the first or last person to move to the reading group table. She might have an assigned seat at that table. Procedures for walking carefully to line up at the door would need to be in place.

**Level B, Case 1**

Responses to this assignment should include three things to move in the classroom with an explanation for each. The explanations should include:

- Item/ furniture/ individual to be moved
- Rationale for the move
  - Strategy(ies) used in making this decision
- Statement of how this move will help Marcus meet his goal(s)

You may wish to have additional discussion concerning the timing and pacing of lessons, particularly those with a small group, to meet Marcus and other students’ need for movement.

**Level B, Case #2**

Responses to this assignment should include a labeled classroom arrangement sketch with the four students’ names. The labeling should place the four focus students at desks separated from one another. The explanation accompanying this labeled sketch should include:
Rationale for assigning the specific seating location for Robert
Strategy(ies) used in making this decision
Rationale for assigning the specific seating location for Latisha
Strategy(ies) used in making this decision
Rationale for assigning the specific seating location for Helen
Strategy(ies) used in making this decision
Rationale for assigning the specific seating location for Paulo
Strategy(ies) used in making this decision

After completing this assignment, you may wish to discuss in class the student-oriented issues that also affect room arrangements.

Level C (In-Depth)
Responses to this assignment should include the following information (must include items with *):

* Classroom arrangement sketch (within provided skeleton classroom)
* 22 student desks
  * One student desk designated with a star
  * 1 teacher desk
  * 1 group table
  * 1 trash can
* Explanation of classroom arrangement
  * Justify arrangement’s match with lesson purposes
  * Minimizing distractions
  * Maximizing access
  * Movement with ease
* Explanation of Donna’s seating location (desk) assignment
  * Justify minimized distractions
  * Justify maximized access
  * Movement with ease
* Two goals for Donna
  * Explanation of how room arrangement and seating assignment support Donna to achieve these goals

Supplementary Assignment Ideas
In addition to the case assignments provided, you may want your students to learn about effective room arrangements through the following types of activities:

Interview a classroom teacher about his or her classroom arrangement. Write a summary of your interview that identifies how this teacher is using the effective room arrangement strategies you have read about. With your summary include a sketch of the teacher’s classroom arrangement.

Write an analysis of our class’s room arrangement based on the strategies you have read concerning effective room arrangements.
In your small group, plan a simple lesson for our class. On the day assigned for your group to present this lesson, arrange our classroom to match your lesson purpose.

Observe three classrooms with different room arrangements. Sketch each arrangement. Explain what is effective with these observed arrangements. Select one arrangement and identify a room arrangement issue that you would address if this were your classroom. Explain how you would address the issue and which strategy(ies) support your actions.

Adapt one of the provided case studies (ex. Level A, Case #1) to present a version for the middle school, junior high, or high school level. Include an answer key with your adaptation.