

Chapter 1

Creating Spaces for Teaching and Learning

It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate instructional activity from the physical environmental setting within which it occurs.

—Lackney & Jacobs (2005, p. 1)

An aesthetically pleasing and fully functional classroom is your secret weapon in the ongoing battle to both close the achievement gap and raise overall student achievement. In fact, a current early childhood perspective based on the internationally acclaimed preschools in the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy, considers the environment to be “another teacher” (New, 2000).

No matter how old your students are, the physical environment of your classroom impacts their behavior and attitudes (Gump, 1987; McGuffey, 1982). In fact, most teachers believe that the cleanliness, orderliness, and character of their campuses influence not only their students’ behavior (Lackney, 1996) but also their ability to teach.

The first step in developing your 3 + 3 = 33 plan is to visualize the physical layout in which you will teach and then design the optimum teaching and learning environment. (The 3 + 3 = 33 plan is described in complete detail in Chapter 7 if you are the kind of reader who needs to know how the book ends before you can start Chapter 1.) If you don’t yet have your own classroom, let your imagination soar. However, once you are hired, be prepared to face reality. If you are currently teaching in a classroom that is hindering your ability to be

a with-it teacher (WIT), think about what you have the power to change that will improve it.

This concept of the environment as a second teacher isn't applicable just to preschool classrooms in Italy. In an ideal world, all teachers would have state-of-the-art "second teacher" classrooms with functional furniture, ample storage, and wireless technology (Zernike, 2001). But in the real world, the responsibility for creating an inviting and workable learning space usually falls on *your* shoulders. In many instances, your mission may seem to be an impossible one. Even if you are faced with space more suited to storage than study, paint that is older than your great-grandmother, and furniture that is nailed to the floor, change the things you *can* change and cope with the things you can't. It's the first step in your journey toward becoming a WIT.

This chapter discusses two aspects of the classroom environment: (1) how to allocate and create classroom space that supports teaching and learning and (2) how, where, and with whom to seat students. But first, let's look at some of the challenges you will face.

The Challenges of Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

Regrettably, many aspects of your classroom environment are fixed. For example, the floor space and windows (or lack of) in your classroom can't be changed. Oh, new furniture *can* be purchased or requisitioned from a distant warehouse, and the thermostat *might* be able to be adjusted a degree or two. But those of us who have taught in aging and overcrowded buildings located in underfunded school districts can tell you: "What you see is usually what you get—at least for your foreseeable future."

High school teacher Marjorie Wood knows the feeling. She teaches Resource English on a campus with six buildings of varying vintages. Marjorie's building has been around for more than 100 years. She is realistic but not pessimistic about the drawbacks of her classroom. In a former incarnation, it was a science lab: Three gas jets still jut out of the floor as a reminder. With the typical can-do spirit of a WIT, Marjorie moved her desk over two of the jets and pushed a file cabinet over the third. "The pipes aren't that bad," she says. She does chuckle, however, when she reads books that recommend where to position the teacher's desk to maximize learning (Keller, 2004, p. 14).

Marjorie describes her classroom this way: "I have no control over the furniture in my classroom, and the placement of outlets and equipment for technology may have made sense to the electricians, but it's incomprehensible to me." Forget smart screens and whiteboards. Marjorie has a six-part slate board that opens like the pages of a book. It's a fabulous classroom for an antique lover,

but how does a 21st-century teacher cope? With a healthy sense of humor and instructional tenacity!

Marjorie doesn't worry about the things she *can't* change. She's done the best she can with her environment, and as a "trucker teacher" (see the Introduction if you've forgotten the definition), she is focused on teaching her students how to apply learning strategies to mastering the challenging content of their academic classes (University of Kansas, 2005). Marjorie views these strategies as learning tools, and in keeping with that theme, she has placed an actual toolbox on the counter from which she frequently pulls out a tool to make a point. Posters containing prompts (questions or acronyms) cover her walls to remind students how to apply the strategies in various contexts. Marjorie is a WIT.

It's up to you to make your space work, even with all of its limitations! In Marjorie's case, it was as simple as buying the toolbox, hanging up a few posters, pushing the desks into groups of four, and planning her lessons. Of course there are those teachers whose classrooms are more spacious and well appointed. Their options for beautification seem endless, and they decorate and furnish with a passion. Primary teacher Carol Howell falls into that category:

I enjoy making my classroom comfortable with potted plants, lamps, and an old rocking chair. I have the good fortune of having wonderful windows with high ceilings. I put up the blinds and leave the windows unobscured. Natural light is refreshing. My classroom is filled with children's art—both framed and unframed. Even our agreed-upon classroom rules are illustrated by students.

The extent to which Carol goes in her quest to create a warm and inviting classroom is rarely possible at the middle or high school levels where classrooms are smaller and students are bigger. But that doesn't let secondary teachers off the hook completely.

Middle school teacher Val Bresnahan is fascinated with the Chinese art of feng shui and for good reasons. Special education teachers often get the leftovers when it comes to classroom assignments, and they need all the help they can get. [Note: Feng shui is pronounced *fung shway* and is the art of positioning objects (e.g., furniture, plants, pictures) in one's surroundings to enhance the flow of energy in a space or in one's life.]

Val explains her educational approach to feng shui:

Before school starts, I spend time in my classroom envisioning the teaching I will be doing and the students with whom I will be working. I arrange the room so it is not only visually appealing and balanced but works well for instruction. Sometimes, once the actual students arrive, what I planned

doesn't work, so I have to rethink my vision. The classroom has to be balanced, though.

For 7 years of my teaching career, I shared a classroom with another special ed teacher *and* a music teacher. There were four pianos in the room (two in the middle) and a set of three-tiered risers adjacent to my desk. There were 32 desks that had to be positioned just the way the music teacher wanted them. This just did not work for me. I was not as effective as I could have been because I couldn't design space that met the learning needs of my students. I did not realize what a powerful effect the environment had on me until this year, when I have my own, albeit much smaller, classroom.

Even though Val's new classroom *was* formerly known as the broom closet, it belongs to her, and she has been able to add plants, arrange the furniture, *and* use the walls to meet both her and her students' needs.

Val isn't the only WIT who is fascinated by feng shui. Third-grade teacher Michelle O'Laughlin became interested in this ancient art after she had her home rearranged by a feng shui consultant. She immediately applied one of the principles at school by positioning her desk diagonally facing the door, in what is called a "Welcoming Position." She draped it in colorful fabric, placed a plant on the corner closest to the door, and waited for reactions. "You wouldn't believe how many comments I've received," she reports. Although feng shui is one of the more unusual approaches to arranging classroom space, its principles frequently have some basis in common sense or accepted principles of design. But if the concept is a little too far out for you, don't worry. It isn't the only way to think about arranging your classroom.

How to Allocate, Arrange, and Use Classroom Space

School architects and designers call the creation and re-creation of classroom space by teachers *placemaking*. You are a *placemaker*, an individual who creates a place that supports teaching and learning to the greatest extent possible. There are two approaches to designing and utilizing space in schools: (1) territorial and (2) functional (Lackney & Jacobs, 2005).

The territorial approach, as its name implies, is based on "individual ownership" of space and furniture. Students *and* teachers have desks in which to store their materials, and if students move around in the classroom, they take their desks or chairs with them. In contrast, functional arrangements partition the physical space into interest areas or learning centers available to all students

such as would be found in the typical early childhood classroom or a school with open classrooms where students move freely from place to place. For example, in a functional classroom, the activities in which students are engaged dictate their physical location. During small-group instruction, they may move to a table at the back of the room. During a read-aloud, they sit on a carpeted area. In a territorial setting, students engage in the same kinds of activities but remain with their desks.

The pendulum has swung back and forth over the years regarding the preferred way to design space. My take on this issue is this, after watching an entire district tear down walls in several buildings (including a high school) and then rebuild them several years later after teacher and parent complaints overwhelmed the administration: It's not an either-or decision. All classrooms (and schools) need *both* territorial (private) *and* functional (group) spaces for teachers *and* students.

Q and A



Kelly Neumeister (E): How can I create a more spacious feeling in my small classroom?



Jill Yates (E): In order to use space efficiently and accommodate the frequent changes of pace in my instructional day (from independent to partner to small-group to large-group activities), I prefer the fewest possible pieces of furniture in the classroom. I have a desk for each student, three tables for small-group activities, art and computer centers, one small couch, and a large number of low bookcases. I learned during my first 2 years that my "teacher" desk and the extra tables in the room only collected piles of paper. In addition, they impeded the flow of traffic as we moved our desks around. So I got rid of them. My priority space is a large carpeted gathering area on the floor, and we spend a lot of time there. If you have too many cubbies, corners, and tables, it creates a cramped and cluttered atmosphere.

Elementary teachers generally have more flexibility to create both kinds of space and to do it on a more permanent basis. Their classrooms are larger, often lending themselves to the creation of homey, family-like atmospheres. In addition, elementary teachers usually work with one group of children all day, allowing more opportunities for using a variety of functional spaces. In contrast, secondary students travel to and from various functional centers

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(e.g., band room, technology center, science and computer labs), so their specialist teachers can enjoy territorial spaces especially designed for their content areas.

If you are feeling a bit confused about how teachers in self-contained classrooms create both territorial and functional spaces for their students, let's visit a classroom to see how it's done. Second-grade teacher Catherine Clausen handles multiple territorial and functional spaces with an ease that belies the complexity of its design. Her classroom floor plan is shown in Figure 1.1.

Student desks are grouped in fours (called *table groups* because the four desks form a flat table surface when pushed together), but there is also a mini-U of eight desks at the front of the room, where students who need extra help or supervision during direct instruction can be close to the teacher's watchful eyes. Students seated in the U face the least distracting area of the classroom for independent work. Students do have their own *personal* desks (i.e., they are in charge of their own books and supplies) but also enjoy the flexibility of moving to other places and working with students other than their tablemates throughout the school day.

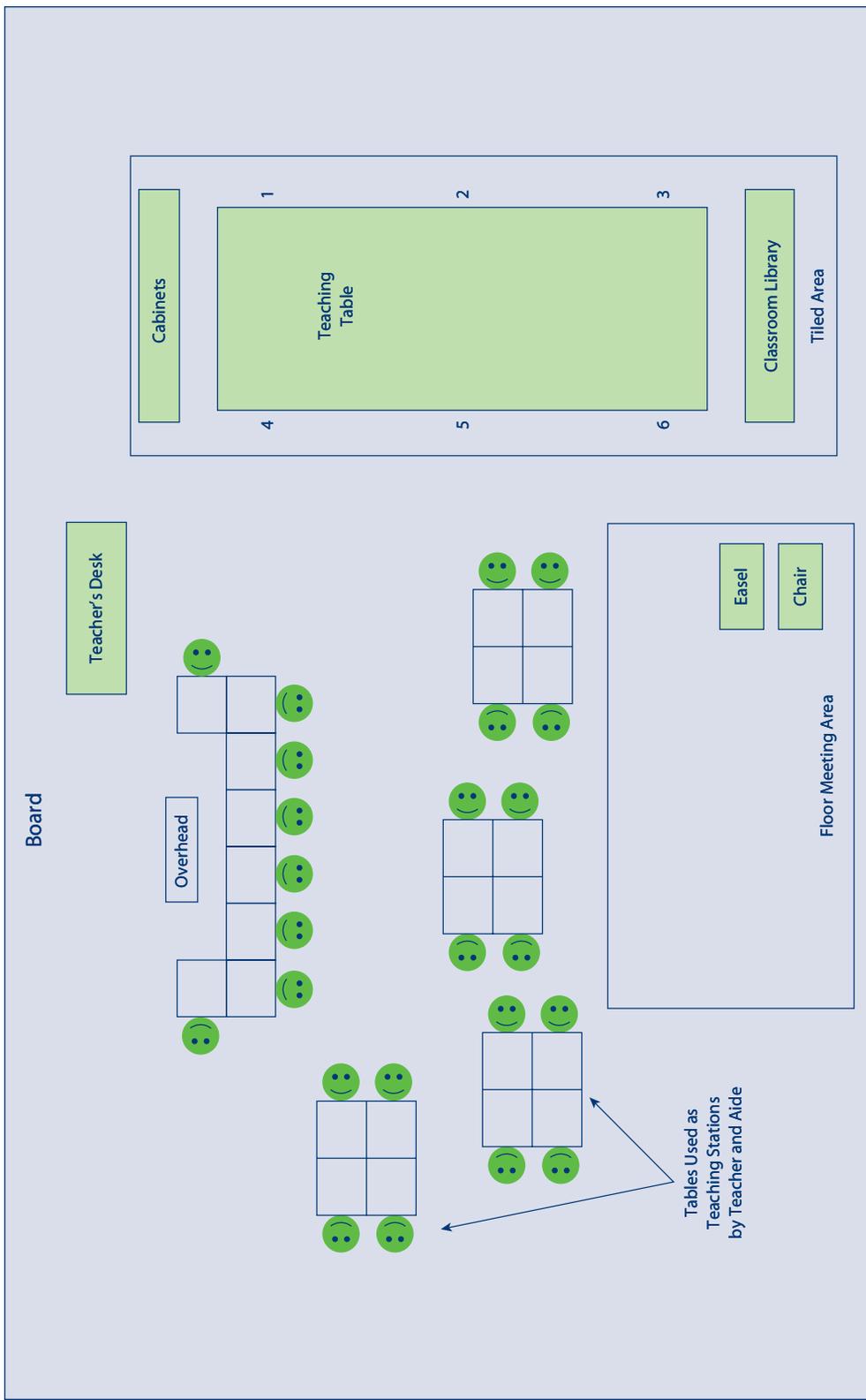
During reading and math, one of the table groups is turned into a teaching station for Catherine or a volunteer. The students who are seated there know that from time to time, they will have to find an empty desk or workspace in the classroom. These shifts in seating during the day give students opportunities to practice making wise choices. Developing students' decision-making skills is one of Catherine's goals, and she and her class often reflect on what has gone well during independent work periods as well as what needs improvement.

"If I were to have a group that for some reason couldn't learn to make wise choices about where to sit," Catherine says, "I would have assigned seating all day long. But I let the tether out as far as I can and still maintain a climate of focused thinking and learning." Lest you get the impression that Catherine's space-shifting routines somehow magically happen, she hastens to explain, "I teach all of my procedures [routines] *explicitly* at the beginning of the year and we practice, practice, and practice some more." Additional information about Catherine's routines will be found later in the book.

Although secondary WITs have fewer options when it comes to designing their environments, they manage to be every bit as creative as Catherine is in second grade. Middle school social studies teacher Jay Pilkington arranges his classroom in five rows of four to six desks, an ostensibly "old-fashioned" seating plan. But Jay's utilization of this plan is flexible and functional.

Each row has a designated leader (the student in the first seat) and a caboose (the student in the last seat) who perform certain duties. Jay uses the five-row format (with an even number of students in each row) to support

Figure 1.1 Catherine's Floor Plan



SOURCE: Reprinted by permission of Catherine Clausen.

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a variety of unique instructional activities, all designed to ensure that his students are actively involved and processing the content and “big ideas” of his subject.

Sometimes the rows break up into pairs. At other times the rows become cooperative learning teams that compete against other rows in a unique version of the game show *Family Feud*, titled “Row Feud” by Jay. During this unusual cooperative-competitive exercise, students can be observed furiously taking notes, finding answers to questions, and ultimately sharing and comparing their findings. On another day each row becomes a piece of a cooperative “jigsaw” as students prepare group presentations on an assigned section of a textbook unit. Still another small-group activity, also designed by Jay, is called “Read, Revel, and Reveal.” More details about these intriguing activities can be found in Chapter 4.

Although Jay’s students are older than Catherine’s, they need the same kind of intense explaining, modeling, and practice to help them master the various nuances of their seating plan as well as the rules that govern the learning games they play. An avid baseball fan, Jay views the first few weeks of school as the fall version of spring training. He teaches his students everything they need to know during the first 3 weeks to have a winning season during the remaining 33. Jay explains that at some point during every week, the students will be able to work in pairs and small groups, *and* play Row Feud—a competitive activity that is one third note taking, one third pop quiz (everyone has to answer at least one question), and one third just plain fun! To keep his lineups fresh, Jay changes his seating assignments each quarter with a Seating Chart Lottery.

Although Jay’s students definitely have assigned seats, the physical space in which those seats reside is constantly changing. It’s a unique way to create functional space within a highly territorial seating plan.

Sixth-grade teacher Judith Cimmiyotti creates space for teaching and learning and also for discipline. In addition to space around the overhead, which she calls her “teaching circle,” an area just outside the door is designated as a “discipline circle.” “I don’t intermingle teaching and discipline,” she explains, “especially in a whole-group setting. If I have students who are being disruptive, I speak to them in the discipline circle because I don’t want anyone but the student to hear what I am saying. I believe it creates a feeling of security, not only for the student being disciplined in private but also for the rest of the class, since they don’t have to be emotionally drawn into the disciplinary action of another student. Many students, particularly adolescents, are very sensitive to what is happening to others, often internalizing what the teacher says or does as if it has actually happened to them. Taking a student to the discipline circle removes the stress from the rest of the class and enables them to focus on their learning.”

In addition to allocating, arranging, and utilizing classroom space, WITs must also determine how, where, and with whom their students will sit.

How, Where, and With Whom Your Students Sit

The First Decision: Arranging Your Furniture

In the ideal school, you would be able to request tables (some round and some rectangular) and chairs for cooperative work, a half dozen study carrels for the increasing numbers of students who need their own “office space” in which to work, and enough desks for all students to have individual seating during direct instruction and test taking.

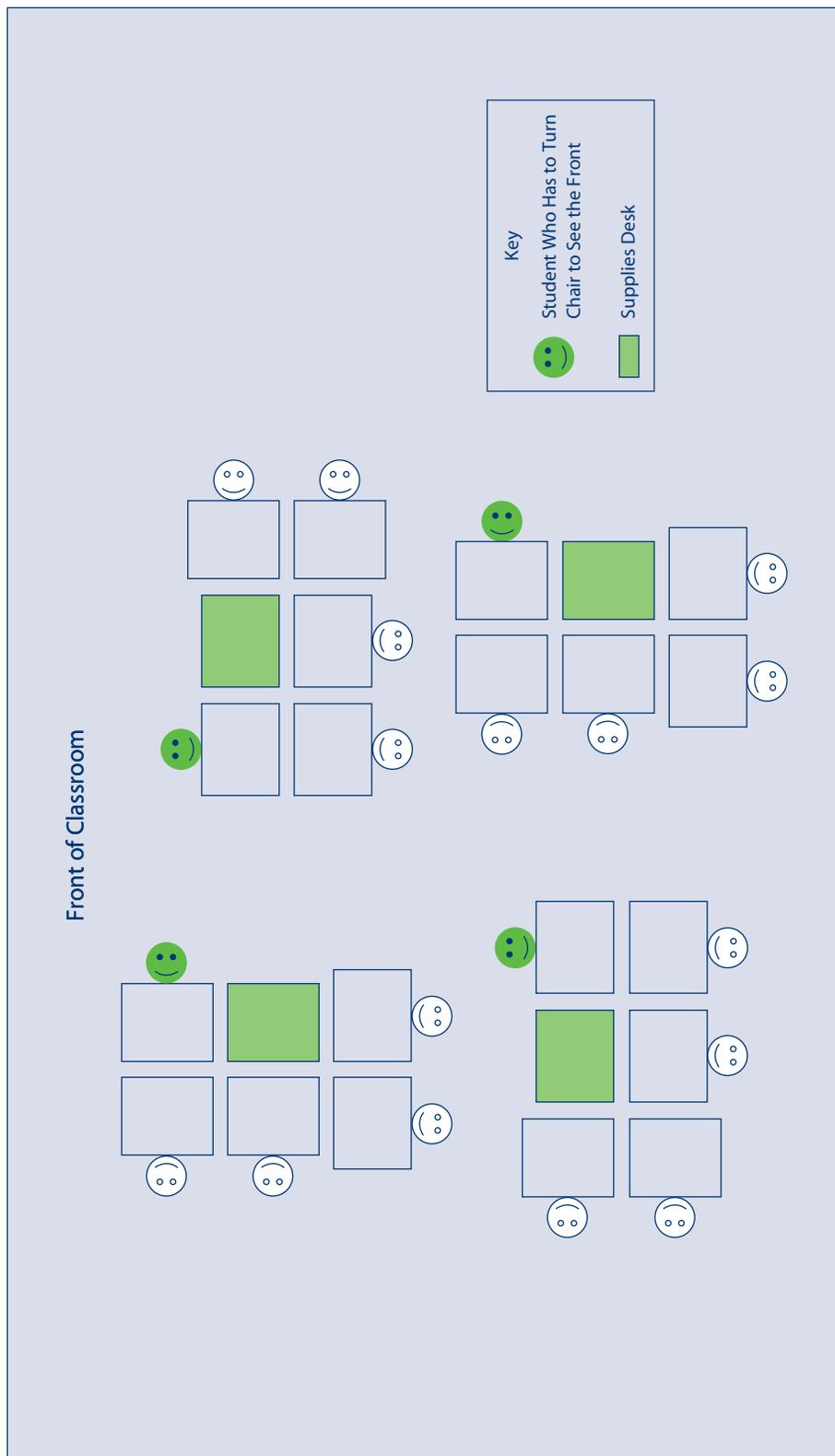
JoAnne Deshon’s third-grade classroom has the right kind of furniture and enough space to make any teacher happy. She has arranged the room in territorial pods of six desks (for five students, with the extra desk holding supplies, book tubs, and the ever-present box of tissues). See her seating plan in Figure 1.2. There is also ample room for functional space: a table for quiet work behind a bookshelf, a table near the writing area for peer conferences, a large rug for read-alouds, and three computers, with two chairs at every computer. At test-taking time, students move their desks into rows. [Note: While this arrangement requires one student in each pod to turn his or her chair to see the teacher, whiteboard, or screen, JoAnne notes that she chooses the students who sit in these seats carefully and is sensitive about where she stands during direct instruction. When she has more than 20 students, some of the supply desks become seats for students, or she forms a smaller pod of three students.] JoAnne is fortunate. She has the space and the furniture she requires to implement the seating arrangement that works best for her teaching and the learning needs of her students.

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers when it comes to choosing furniture. The success of *what* you do ultimately depends upon *how* you do it. The next section addresses some critical issues to consider when it comes to choosing a seating plan for your students.

The Second Decision: Developing Your Default Seating Plan

The secret to becoming a WIT is to find the optimum way to work with the furniture that’s been supplied in the room to which you’ve been assigned. The second decision to make is how you will arrange the desks or tables to begin the school year. This seating arrangement becomes your *default* seating

Figure 1.2 JoAnne's Seating Plan



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plan, the one to which your students will ultimately return at the end of the day or period or after you have completed a specific instructional activity. If you plan to have a seating chart (and it is a good way to learn students' names unless you label their desks or give them name tags on the first day), the default seating plan is the one to which their names will be assigned. For example, Catherine's default plan is the four-desk table group shown in Figure 1.1 while Jay's default plan is the five-row configuration described earlier.

Consider the following questions as you think about what will work best for you and a typical class of students. Choose a seating plan that builds on your strengths as a teacher.

1. What teaching methodologies do you plan to use (direct instruction, group discussion, centers, cooperative learning, paired discussion)?
2. What types of assignments and tasks do you expect students to do (individual, group, partner, written, spoken)?
3. Are your learning outcomes more process or product oriented? Or both?
4. Are you trained to teach your students the routines they need to be successful in a cooperative seating plan?
5. What is the optimum placement of seating for students to see the screen, board, TV, or teacher without having to move their heads or their bodies?
6. Do you expect students to move their desks into different configurations based on specific activities you will use on a regular basis?
7. Do you have a lesson plan for teaching your students *how* to move their desks and then how to put them back in their original spots?
8. What kinds of materials are needed to support your seating arrangement and will they be community or personal materials?
9. Have you been trained in how to use cooperative learning techniques so that you can model and explain to your students the skills they require to be successful interdependent learners?
10. Do most of your students have the maturity levels and social skills to handle a default cooperative seating arrangement?
11. How many students in your classroom need some type of preferential seating to meet special learning needs (e.g., ELL, learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities, or ADHD)?
12. How many students will have the services of a full-time instructional aide? Where will you seat that individual to maximize learning for everyone?
13. How many students are struggling academically and require ongoing one-to-one attention?

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14. What are the major sources of ambient noise in your classroom (e.g., heating or cooling fan, lavatory, door to the hallway, an open classroom or team-teaching setting)? Have you sat in every seat to see if students' ability to hear will be compromised in any particular location? Are there students with hearing impairments that may need a classroom amplification system?
15. How much flexibility do you have for the creation of permanent functional spaces (e.g., comfortable reading nook with rug for stories, several study carrels for private "office space" for students, kidney-shaped table for small-group instruction, technology area for computers)?
16. Are there any safety hazards that must be considered when placing the furniture (e.g., cords, plugs, pipes, doorways)? Are all room exits clear in case of emergencies?
17. Is there plenty of space for you and your students to move about the room without bumping into each other or furniture?
18. Is there enough room for students to move their desks into various configurations throughout the day?
19. How quickly can you move to each of your students to answer questions or give individual help?
20. Is there enough room for privacy during test-taking situations?
21. Can you see everything that is happening from every vantage point in your classroom? (These questions were developed with advice and input from Jill Yates.)

Even after you have painstakingly prepared a seating chart for the first day of school based on your answers to the preceding questions, you may have to change it. What works for someone else, what you were told in your education classes, or even what has worked for you in the past may not work at all with a particular group of students.

Third-grade teacher Julie Elting says, "Until this school year, I've had tables with four students sharing a table. I began the year in clustered groups, but I have a very chatty class, and a lot of my students have focusing issues. I've had to change to rows with all of the desks facing the front whiteboard area. Although it seems rather old-fashioned, it works for this particular class."

Even students who will eventually be able to handle the distractions of sitting close to other classmates may need a full series of modeled lessons and lots of practice before their cooperative efforts will be productive. Many WITs begin the year with desks in rows, and some have found that for certain subjects and certain groups of students, learning is maximized when their desks remain that way for the entire year *unless* specific cooperative learning activities are planned.

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Diane Pope teaches high school math in a small classroom. She likes the pod arrangement but finds that it limits her ability to move quickly to students who need help, a high priority in her algebra, honors math analysis, and AP calculus classes. Also, because she gives so many short quizzes, she is sensitive to her students' almost daily need for privacy.

The current conventional wisdom regarding how students *should* be seated in all classrooms clearly favors the pod arrangement (i.e., a small cluster of from two to four desks) or five to six students at a table in both elementary (Patton, Snell, Knight, & Gerken, 2001) and secondary schools (McFadyen, 2005). Furthermore, there is a large body of research showing the academic benefits of cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994).

However, when students are working on independent assignments rather than true collaborative projects, group seating can have its downsides. Table 1.1 summarizes a body of research in which comparisons were made between the time on task and engagement of students (ranging in age from 7–14 years) sitting in rows (or pairs in which no student sat opposite another working on the same surface, and the teacher could have eye contact with every student without any having to turn more than 90 degrees) and students sitting in pods or at tables facing each other.

First-grade teacher Jill Yates speaks for many of her colleagues when reflecting about seating arrangements: “When I graduated from college, I believed that a classroom with traditional rows rather than cooperative groups was an indicator of inferior teaching and classroom management. I had the false impression from my teacher training that all students did better in a maximum cooperative state. This mistaken idea did not take into account factors like the learning and behavioral characteristics of students with special needs. Now I teach to a variety of different learning styles during every day, and I am very comfortable using not only the two extremes (students at individual desks in rows and students in groups of six at tables) but also everything in between. What’s important is the freedom to be flexible enough so that I can reach all of my students in a given school year.”

All of the WITs use cooperative learning in their classrooms as one of a repertoire of instructional models, but they also use a variety of seating plans throughout the school day. They readily move or ask students to move desks into various arrangements depending on how they are teaching, what kinds of processing activities are planned following direct instruction, and the types of instructional tasks that will be assigned to students.

WITs maintain multiple places in their classrooms for students who need their own space, either temporarily or permanently. They often begin the year in rows with assigned seats, move to pairs, and then move to cooperative groups *after* they have *taught* their students the routines, rubrics, and rules of cooperative learning. They never assume that their students will intuit how to learn cooperatively with classmates. They teach them how to do it.

Table 1.1 Research on Task Engagement of Students in Two Different Seating Arrangements

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Findings</i>
<p>Single Research Studies</p> <p>Axelrod, Hall, and Tamms (1979) Wheldall, Morris, Vaughan, and Ng (1981) Wheldall and Lamm (1987) Yeomans (1989) Hastings and Schwieso (1995)</p>	<p>Single research studies were conducted with students between the ages of 7 and 14 years in schools located in England. In all of the studies, time-on-task data were collected during two different 2-week periods in which the seating arrangements were alternated between two designs at various times of the day.</p>	<p>The studies show that the classroom practice of sitting students in groups to undertake individual tasks makes work difficult for most of them and especially difficult for the most distractible. The studies also show that alternative arrangements result in substantial improvements in students' engagement with their work. Matching the seating arrangement to the task is critical.</p>
<p>Reviews of Research</p> <p>Merrett (1994) Hastings, Schwieso, and Wheldall (1996)</p>	<p>The first design had students seated in groups around flat-topped tables or desks drawn together to form working surfaces. The second arrangement had students seated in rows of desks (i.e., any arrangement that did not require students to sit opposite one another, work on the same surface, or have to turn their heads more than 90 degrees to make eye contact with the teacher during direct instruction).</p>	<p>"All too often there may be a mismatch between the collaborative setting of the group and the individual learning tasks given to pupils. The result is that the setting may distract pupils from their work" (Alexander, Rose, & Woodhead, 1992, para. 96).</p>

Q and A



Judith Cimmiyotti (S): What are the important things to keep in mind when seating students who are hyperactive and distractible?



Elaine: Figuring out where to seat distractible students requires creativity and flexibility. What works for one student may fail with another and what works today with a child may not tomorrow. But there are some standard accommodations that all teachers can employ (McEwan, 1998, pp. 115–131).

- Seat students where most visual distractions are behind them (e.g., in front row with back to rest of class). Remember, however, this seating arrangement could have its disadvantages because students will lose the opportunity to pick up visual cues from classmates regarding appropriate attending behaviors and what books and materials are being used. Consider a seat near the front rather than in the front row as an alternative option.
- Seat students away from potential distractions, such as heaters, air conditioners, high traffic areas, pencil sharpeners, windows, water coolers, noisy classmates, and doorways.
- Seat students near the teacher as well as appropriate role models. Avoid isolating students unless they self-select this option.
- Post classroom expectations and rules in highly visible places, and if necessary, post more specific expectations or to-do lists on students' desks.
- Create a stimuli-reduced area that all students may use (e.g., study carrels in a corner of the room). Encourage students to self-select this environment as they feel the need.
- Permit students to stand, move between two desks, or sit at a round table and move from chair to chair while working.
- Provide task-oriented breaks for selected students (e.g., to run errands, water plants, or distribute materials).
- Provide exercise breaks to relieve the “wiggles.” Encourage students to use seat isometrics, such as pushing feet down on floor or pulling up on the bottom of the chair.
- Don't place distractible students face-to-face and elbow-to-elbow with classmates during independent study periods. Even responsible adults find it hard to resist off-task behavior in close quarters.
- Permit students to use earplugs or headphones to block auditory distractions during tests or independent seatwork.

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- Allow for a higher level of restlessness and movement on the part of hyperactive students during your lessons than would normally be acceptable to you. If you are personally sensitive to distractions and movements, associate stillness with attentiveness, or believe that students are purposely annoying you, discipline yourself to focus your attention in another direction (unless students are distracting other students).
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The Third Decision: The Placement of Individual Students

In addition to selecting or eliminating furniture *and* deciding on an overall seating plan, you must also consider the needs of the students who don't readily fit into your preferred seating plan. Your ultimate goal is to have every student engaged, on task, and learning. Sonia Brettman frequently has numerous students with special needs included in her middle school classes. "Recently I had 10 students in my class with special needs," she related. "Two of them had full-time aides and required seating on the outside edge of the tables of four so their aides could sit, stand, or kneel next to them and not be in the sightlines of other students. Two students were autistic and needed placement near the door so they had less distance to travel and fewer distractions on the way to their desks. In my cooperative groups of four, I try to balance ability and needs, but that year I had more than one low student per group (there was a severely dyslexic student reading at the second-grade level and two students with Asperger's syndrome). So I placed a second child in each of the two groups that had an aide, and the aide worked with the whole group as appropriate."

With-It Teachers' Roundtable

CLASSROOM SEATING

Elaine: Let's talk about the first day of school. Do your students have a choice of where to sit?

Bobbie Oosterbaan (E): I assign my kindergarten students to a table on the first day. They need the security of "their place" to work. Then I adjust assigned seating throughout the year to help students build cooperative learning skills with their classmates.

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Jean Piazza (S): My students are free to choose where they want to sit. We discuss the importance of students managing themselves, knowing what works for them as well as what distracts them, and I encourage them to make wise choices so they can be successful.

Julie Elting (E): I ask my students for input about seating. In fact, some of them came up with the idea to have all of the students' desks face the board rather than facing each other.

Laurie Anstatt (E): I begin the year with rows of single desks in order to reinforce the expectation that students are responsible for their own learning. Once they learn our routines, I group them with partners.

Elaine: How do you rearrange your seating for all of the different things that go on in your classrooms?

Jill Aspegren (E): I move desks all the time. The arrangement of the desks coordinates with the rhythm of my teaching. My students know what kind of lesson is coming up based on the way I ask them to position their desks.

Elaine: What's the most important thing about a seating arrangement to you?

Paula Hoffman (S): Seeing my students' eyes. When I see their eyes, I can tell whether or not they're "getting" it. If they aren't, I can easily walk into the center of the group to help individual students, answer questions, or clarify confusion.

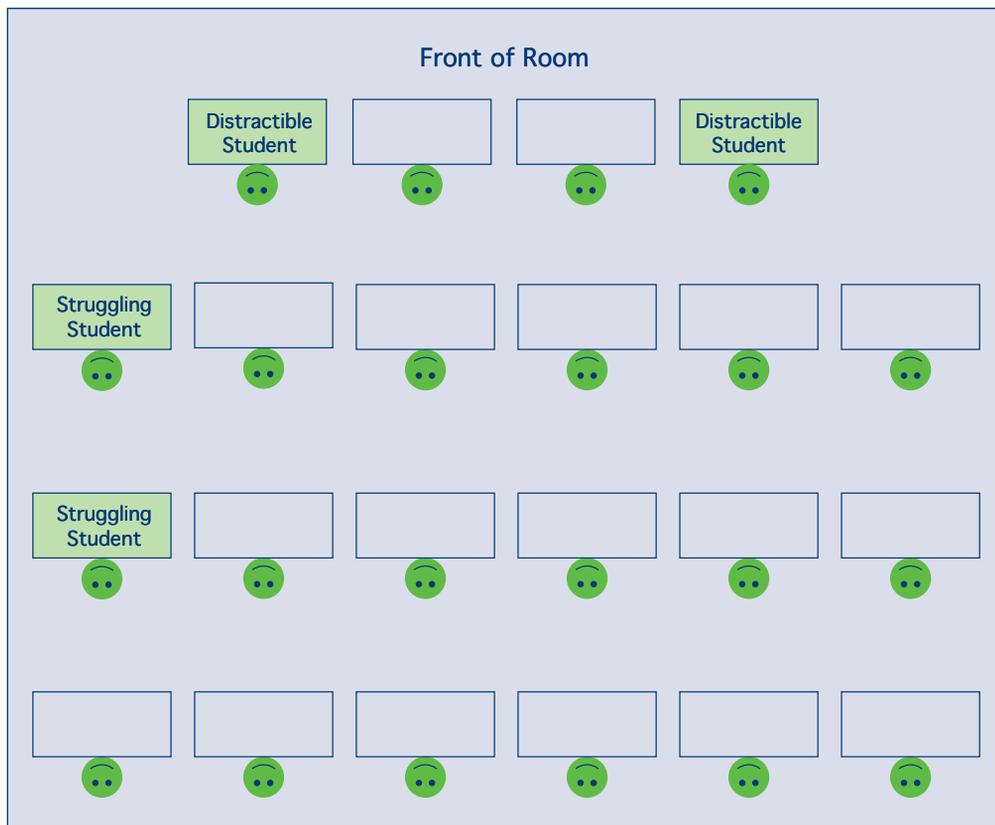
Catherine Clausen (E): Getting to my students quickly is the most important thing to me. With a U-shape, I can get to them quickly as well as foster whole-class discussion *and* focus during direct instruction.

Elaine: What options do you have available for those students who need alternative seating?

Larry Snyder (S): I have a study carrel in the back of the room for students that need to get away from classroom distractions. And I also have tables across the back of the room for students to go to if they need a change of scenery. Plus I have a music stand in the back of the room for students who can't sit still for an entire class period.

Michelle O'Laughlin (E): I have a designated quiet work corner, which is simply a student desk near mine that faces the wall. Students know that this is a place they can go if they are feeling distracted by their neighbors.

Elaine: How do your seating arrangements meet the needs of students who require individualized help?

Figure 1.3 Darlene's Seating Plan

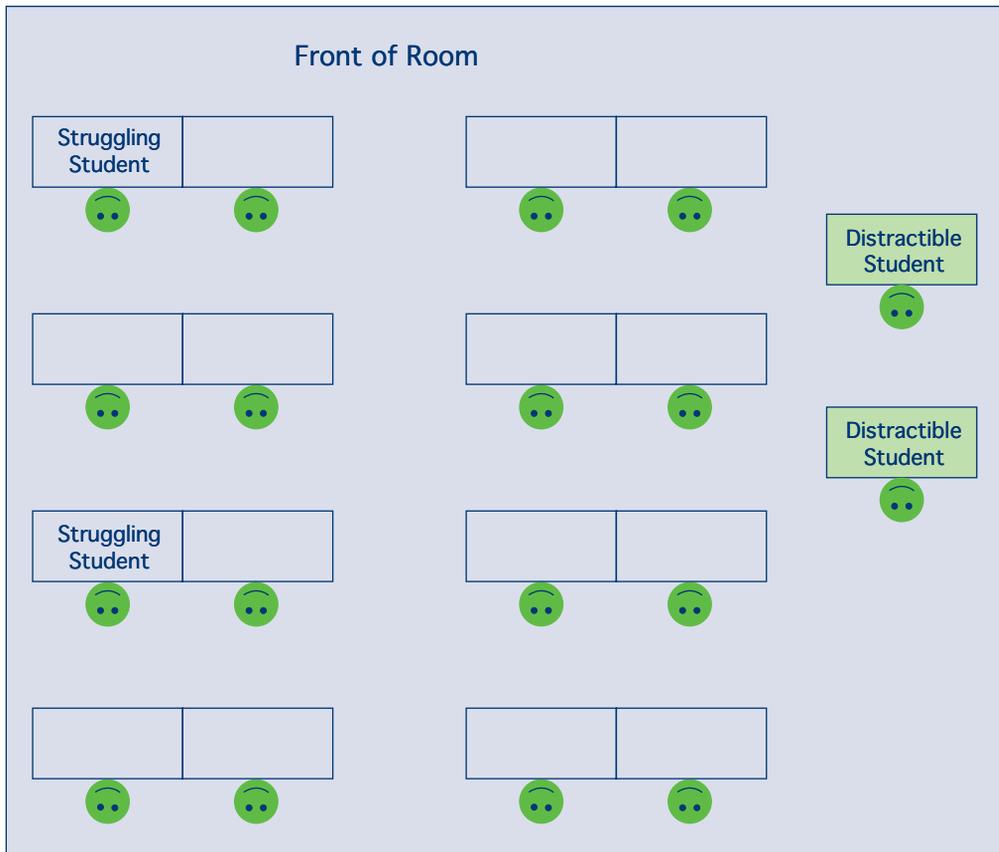
SOURCE: Reprinted by permission of Darlene Carino.

Darlene Carino (E): My students are seated in four horizontal rows facing forward toward the whiteboard. Students who require preferential seating are seated in the front row. I place the students who need constant attention from me on the ends of the rows. Within the rows, I seat students next to someone of a differing ability so they can help each other. (Darlene's seating plan is shown in Figure 1.3.)

Candace Darling (E): I arrange the desks in pairs facing the front of the room. There is an aisle in the middle for easy access to all of the students, and everyone has a partner to help if needed. (Candace's seating plan is displayed in Figure 1.4.)

Elaine: What about the students who are chatty when they're sitting close to others?

Bobbie Oosterbaan (E): I place the responsibility for creating a quiet workroom on the individual student. If a particular student's enthusiasm is *verbally overflowing*, I ask, "Is this a quiet place to work?" The student in

Figure 1.4 Candace's Seating Plan

SOURCE: Reprinted by permission of Candace Darling.

question generally regains their composure quickly. However, if a student needs more than two reminders, I simply say, "Please find a quieter place to work."

Elaine: Thank you for your insights and proactive responses. Being a WIT means thinking ahead so you can help your students think ahead.



What's Ahead?

In addition to creating spaces for teaching and learning, WITs also design walls and bulletin boards that support instruction. Just ahead, we'll explore the various ways that WITs make their walls work for them as "second teachers."

