

“No Tables! No Desks!”

When we think of the traditional elementary school we all went to, those four words do *not* come to mind. As a kindergartener I remember being instructed to sit up tall with my back straight, feet on the floor, and eyes on the teacher. In other words, my teacher expected her entire room of five and six year olds to sit in a chair for over six hours a day, five days a week to learn.

I recognize that the learners in my classroom are unique in that they learn best in different ways. Some students learn best through song while others learn best visually. I also have observed that my students learn best in different environments. This year I have allowed students for 20 minutes a day to choose the way that they learn best for one lesson. On average, 5 students choose to be at a table. At the tables, some students stand and some sit. The rest of my students choose to be on the floor. Some students sit close in proximity to me while others sit further back. Approximately one-third of students on the carpet lay on their stomachs while two-thirds sit “criss-cross applesauce” or with their legs stretched out. While all of this is going on, for these 20 minutes my students are more engaged than they have been all day. During this time, I see some of the students’ best work. I also hear a great deal of collaboration going on during this time through questioning and asking opinions of one another.

This had me thinking about my personal mission statement: I will focus on an active and positive approach to teaching and learning. All students are capable of learning when they are engaged with the curriculum and learning as well as feel accepted within the classroom. Being engaged through multi-modal means also allows students to make connections within the world today and to apply knowledge learned in the classroom to real-life situations. This can help to foster life-long learning. Students should be encouraged to collaborate while learning as well as think, create, and problem-solve.

Can my students accomplish this from their tables and desks? Can I expect them to collaborate, be engaged, and make connections from their tables and desks? The answer is no. No tables! No desks! By eliminating assigned seats at desks, I am able to allow students to feel comfortable in *their* learning space. My job as an educator is to make sure that students can

function and learn to the best of their abilities. This means that I cannot expect *all* of my students to sit on a chair for over six hours a day.

While some students do learn best sitting at a table or desk, this is not the case for all. So what do we do for the students who do not learn best at a table or desk? Flexible seating! Flexible seating is a student-centered approach to learning. Students have a variety of options on where and how they sit in order to learn the best that they can. According to elementary educator Kayla Delzer, she has found in her classroom that “some of the immediate benefits of flexible seating include burning more calories, using up excess energy, improving metabolism, increased motivation and engagement, creating a better oxygen flow to the brain, and improving core strength and overall posture.” (Delzer, 2016). In talking with colleagues who are currently using flexible seating they have stated that there has been definite improvement in academics, social skills and behavior. In regards to writing, colleagues have stated that the more comfortable students are, the more they will write and be engaged with writing. I have observed colleagues using flexible seating and can see the increased engagement and collaboration of students along with increased self-awareness.

If I had alternative forms of seating for my students, I would be able to foster collaboration, promote a higher level of learning and self-awareness, and engage my students throughout the day.

I would like to thank you for giving this opportunity to teachers. Opportunities like these allow teachers to enhance student learning, promote student growth, and more importantly cultivate future leaders.

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Delzer, K. (2016, April 22). Flexible Seating and Student-Centered Classroom Redesign. Retrieved January 31, 2017, from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/flexible-seating-student-centered-classroom-kayla-delzer>