Organise your classroom environment

Summary

Structuring a classroom so that it is well organised and easy to move around creates a productive learning environment, encourages student independence, and helps with efficient transitions. An organised classroom supports all students, including those on the autism spectrum, to make sense of what is happening around them.

An organised classroom environment promotes:

- student learning
- social interaction.

An accessible environment fosters:

- engagement
- independence
- positive peer-to-peer interactions among students.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 1.6 - strategies to support the full participation of students with disability
- 4.1 - support student participation
- 4.2 - manage classroom activities

For further information, see Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page

Preparing to Teach

Classroom organisation may involve:

- structuring the physical elements of the classroom, including arranging furniture to create walkways so that students can access materials without disturbing others
- strategically placing and labelling materials and resources, encouraging students to be responsible for putting away materials and maintaining a tidy classroom.

Structuring the classroom environment includes:

- creation of clearly defined learning spaces
- logical organisation of materials
- reduction of auditory and visual distractions
- selection and implementation of appropriate environmental supports to facilitate student engagement, independence, and confidence.

Environmental considerations

A structured and predictable learning environment enables all students to:

- know what is happening
- predict what will happen next
- anticipate what is expected of them when they use each learning space.

You will need to look at the different classroom spaces in your classroom layout and consider:

- is it accessible – does this space function as required for all activities?
- where will the whole of class visual schedule be situated?
- where will individualised visual schedules be placed?
- how can I set up an area in the classroom to promote student concentration when other classroom activities may be distracting?
- how can I organise the space and materials to encourage positive peer interactions?
- are there clear lines of sight between all spaces within the learning environment? (to facilitate teacher supervision)
- how can I help students differentiate the function of a classroom space when different activities take place in the same space at different times of the day?
- how can I improve the flow of students around the room?

Once you have considered these needs, you can identify a clear layout, including seating, where materials will be housed, and what labelling and storage will be used. You can then organise resources and materials, e.g. colour coding for subjects or units, storing items in labelled boxes, preparing labelled baskets or trays for completed work.

It works better if:

- a quiet safe space is provided for students on the spectrum to support self-regulation
- the classroom is organised in a simple, streamlined, and consistent way, avoiding clutter
- the arrangement of spaces for selected activities is pre-planned and students are prepared for any changes (what and when) in the physical layout/use of spaces
- you have pre-organised and pre-labelled the areas
- students are reminded about where to access and put away resources and materials
- students who find and return resources and materials independently are acknowledged or rewarded.

It doesn't work if:

- classroom organisation is constantly changing
- spaces are used for purposes other than those for which they are routinely used
- there are too many visual or auditory distractions
- trays, boxes, and shelves are not labelled with appropriate visuals to support all students.

In the classroom

Introduce students to your classroom's organisation

Explain your classroom's organisation routines to students, letting them know where they can find resources and materials and how to put them back.

- Use colour codes, labels and other signs to clearly indicate where resources and materials are located
- Let students know if locations have been changed
- Use consistent prompts to remind students where to return items
- Allow time at the end of the lesson to enable students to put resources away promptly

Give students reminders

Remind students of your classroom's organisation and check for understanding.

Materials informing this practice

- Excerpt from Strong JH, Tucker PD and Hindman JL (2004) *Handbook for Qualities of Effective Teachers*, Chapter 3 Classroom Management and Organization.

- Back to School: Organizing A Classroom Youtube video by Some Like It Organized

- Indiana Resource Center for Autism: "Clean Up Your Act! Creating an Organized Classroom Environment for Students on the Spectrum" https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/clean-up-your-act-creating-an-organized-classroom-environment-for-students-on-the-spectrum

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