


The background image shows a well-lit elementary art room. In the foreground, a light-colored wooden table sits on a blue and white patterned rug, with two green exercise balls tucked underneath. On the table are several small plastic bins filled with art supplies like markers and crayons. In the background, there are more tables, some with orange chairs, and others with green exercise balls. The walls are decorated with colorful posters and artwork. A large window on the right side of the room allows natural light to fill the space.

Environment Matters

Flexible Seating and Choice Making
in an Elementary Art Room

Flexible Seating



Since being exposed to DBAE through my childhood art education and college courses, new trends in choice and alternative seating inspired me.

Working in Title I schools, I noticed a need for more movement in class to create more focused learners.

“Engaging Learners Through Artmaking” by Katherine M. Douglas and Diane B. Jaquith helped me make the transition to a flexible learning environment three years ago.



Flexible Seating

Providing choice seating turns a traditional classroom environment into one that promotes movement and personal decision making.



History of Classroom Environment



Students, society, and technology have changed rapidly in the last century. Only in the last 5-10 years have we seen classrooms changing their design and physical layout.



“The lack of choices students experience throughout the day is not in alignment with the types of independent adults they will need to become.” Creating a classroom that is aware of students current lifestyle is an important consideration.



Seating Options

Making the choice “Where will I work today?” gives students immediate ownership of how they will find a comfortable work space for the hour.



Apple-y
Ever After



Encouraging Movement



When students have the option to relocate during class, get their own supplies, or change activities, they are practicing being problem solvers and decision makers.



If educators are truly creating a student-centered environment that promotes independence, they must be comfortable with more student movement.



Concerns

Teachers who are interested in making this shift but concerned about the time it may take to create, may transition slowly, beginning with students choosing where they physically work in the classroom and whether they are standing, sitting, or lying down.



Concerns



Teachers may also be concerned about losing control of the classroom. Again, baby steps can be made to create a more student centered classroom by slowly introducing them to students. The following slide shows a progression of options.



Becoming Independent Learners



Choices students can make after they choose a location and seat are:

- What to do when they have completed a project early
- Materials
- Subject matter
- Techniques



Advantages



Students become peer mentors



English Language Learners can observe and practice freely



Schools with high mobility can support new students by letting them jump right into art making



Seating Examples



- Lawn chairs
- Beach chairs
- Stability cushions
- Roll out rugs
- Cushions
- Standing tables



Personal Implementation



This library cart contains books organized by topic, color matching games, magnetic building shapes, and memory cards.

Students may use this cart for inspiration or as an activity when their main class project is finished.



Personal Implementation



← iPad counter
away from wet
materials

Color mixing →
resource station



Positive Outcomes



- Decreased negative or off-task behavior



- Increased on-task actions



- Intrinsic motivation and feelings of ownership have grown



Conclusion



Students need more movement throughout their day.



Art class can be one more place where they can make a choice about finding a comfortable position to create.



Little effort is needed from the teacher, just positive relationships to let the power be in the hands of the students.

