

Educator Study Guide

CLASSROOM DESIGN for STUDENT AGENCY

Digital
Spaces as
Extended
Wall Space

Working with
the Space You Have!

The Power of
Baskets for
Organizing
Books

Curating
a Quality
Classroom
Library



**Create Spaces to Empower
Young Readers and Writers!**

Lynsey Burkins & Franki Sibberson

Foreword by Carla Shalaby and Afterword by Detra Price-Dennis



Welcome! In *Classroom Design for Student Agency: Create Spaces to Empower Young Readers and Writers*, authors Lynsey Burkins and Franki Sibberson invite us to envision our classroom design. The authors remind us that every student in every school is in a classroom, and we have the privilege and joy of designing this space to empower them.

In this book, design is not about the final product. Design is presented as an ongoing, dynamic process co-constructed alongside students. The authors' design vision is rooted in Reggio Emilia's work: "There are three teachers of children: adults, other children, and their physical environment, and the design should align with and amplify our pedagogy." Throughout the book, Lynsey and Franki share their experiences with creating spaces to empower students, provide questions to guide us, and encourage us to begin our journey by reflecting on our vision, beliefs, and pedagogy.

This study guide highlights and is organized around four elements discussed in the book:

Layout
Learning Spaces
Tools
Displays

The guide invites you to learn about each element with suggested excerpts from the book, ask questions, take note of ideas, try some things, and continually reassess and revise with your students! Please remember that these suggestions are meant to be scaffolds, not prescriptions. Use them to help you start the process, then allow your needs and priorities to lead the way.

This study guide is designed for you to work in community with your colleagues—near and far. Depending on your schedule and learning community, you may use grade-level, school, or district planning time. You may also consider organizing a study group to read, reflect, and share what you are trying with your space. The possibilities are endless!

Here are some ways educators are using the guide:

- Choose one of the elements (Layout, Learning Spaces, Tools, or Displays) to study each quarter or term.
- Start with focusing on either your classroom or your classroom library.
- Start with learning about all the elements by engaging in the suggested reading, exploring ideas, and reflecting with colleagues. Once you have a big-picture vision, choose how to start creating your spaces.
- Combine virtual and in-person meetings to provide more flexibility.
- Organize a book club (during the year or over the summer) to read and discuss the book. Then, follow up with intermittent in-person meetings throughout the year to share what you are trying with each other.
- Work with colleagues from other schools or districts by meeting virtually.

Your purpose, priorities, and learning style should direct where you will begin and how you will keep the process ongoing for you and your students each year. Let's get started!

Begin by Reflecting on Vision, Beliefs, and Pedagogy

Read:

Introduction: pp. 1–13

Classroom Design: pp. 96–98

Classroom Library: pp. 100–111

Reflect:

- How does our space scaffold agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual community?
- How can we revise this space to be responsive to our students' needs?
- How will the classroom and classroom library design help students learn something about themselves and/or about others?
- How will the classroom environment build students' skills for content areas?
- How will the classroom and classroom library design build students' knowledge and mental powers?
- How will the classroom and classroom library design engage students' thinking about power and equity and the disruption of oppression?

Share:

Find time, virtually or in person, to share questions, reflections, and ideas with your colleagues. Depending on your schedule, you may need to connect asynchronously. Learn

about—and try out—some of the digital tools shared in the book (pp. 76–80). What better way to learn how to use digital tools to support student agency than trying them out in your own learning?

CHOOSE YOUR PURPOSE, PRIORITIES, AND SCHEDULE

This is where it gets DIY! You will need to break up the work differently depending on your schedule and how you study this work together. For each highlighted element, the guide will suggest ways to engage in learning and trying.

One suggestion is to immerse yourself in classroom spaces to see the varied ways to design layouts, learning spaces, tools, and displays. You may do this by touring classrooms with colleagues before or after school, rotating the classroom that hosts planning or faculty meetings so you can see more spaces, displaying photos and videos of your classroom on a shared virtual space, asking colleagues in your extended learning communities to share photos and videos virtually, and checking out photos in this and other professional books. Immersing in many classroom environments will give you lots of craft moves to help you maximize your space.

LAYOUT

Classroom Layout

Read: pp. 85–95

Immerse:

Observing while students actively engage in the space is ideal. Find a time when you can step back and observe your students or ask a colleague to observe you with your students. This will help you consider how the layout scaffolds agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual community.

Reflect:

- How will you arrange your room? How will you work to make the most of the space you have?
- What opportunities do you see here? How can you design the space to create a variety of spaces for learning?
- How can you make the space flexible so students can cocreate with you?
- What feedback and ideas did your students provide?

Tip: Design the spaces you think are most important first!

Try: Choose an idea and give it a go! Plan to reflect and share with your students and colleagues so you can continually revise to be responsive to your students.

Classroom Library Layout

Read: pp. 47–56

Immerse:

In addition to the ideas previously shared, consider observing the space during literacy instruction, content area instruction, or a time when you would like to amplify the effectiveness of the classroom library. You could set up a video to record the space during this time or have some students observe throughout the week.

Reflect:

- How is your classroom library intentionally woven into the design of your entire classroom?
- How does the design of your classroom library support the agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual freedom of your students?
- What changes can you make with your students?
- How can the design be flexible so you can be responsive to your students' needs and wants?
- What suggestions and ideas do your students want to try?

Tip: Lynsey and Franki remind us that a classroom library is not a location. “We don’t think of the classroom library as a separate area of the classroom. Instead, it should be spread out throughout the space and intentionally woven into the design of the entire classroom” (p. 101).

Try: Include your students in the process—their involvement will increase their agency and use of the library.

LEARNING SPACES

Learning Spaces throughout the Classroom

Read: pp. 24–46

Immerse:

Go for a walk with your team. Visit some classrooms and discuss what you notice. Think about how the learning spaces scaffold agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual community.

Reflect:

- How will you design your room to support your learning model?



- How will the spaces support your teaching practices and your students' agency in the learning process?
- When do students have opportunities to talk to each other?
- When do students have opportunities to engage in discourse with more than one other person?
- When do students have time to listen to one another?
- When do students gather in a space to practice speaking and listening?
- Do you have spaces that allow for speaking, listening, and learning/unlearning from other students?

Tip: Think about one learning configuration you want to improve and start there!

Try: Once you choose your goal, give it a few weeks and make adjustments along the way. It takes time to adjust to changes.

Learning Spaces in the Classroom Library

Read: pp. 116–121

Immerse:

Visit some classroom libraries, physically or virtually. Think about how the classroom libraries work as a learning space within the larger classroom.

Reflect:

- How have you woven the classroom library throughout your classroom?
- How might the learning look in this space?
- Is the classroom library inclusive of all physical abilities, learning needs, sensory needs, and emotional needs?
- Can students spread out and gather around a variety of texts?
- Can students find solitude?
- Can students gather with a partner or small group?
- How can you make the design flexible?
- Are all students represented in the books on display?

Tip: Book carts with wheels allow spaces to be flexible and give students agency in creating the spaces they need.

Try: Choose an idea or section of your library and give it a go! Think about how you can transfer what you learn to other ideas and sections.

TOOLS

Tools Used in the Classroom

Read: pp. 66–80; 81–82; 112–115

Immerse:

Send your students on a scavenger hunt for tools in your classroom. Think about what they consider to be tools and how their definition impacts yours.

Reflect:

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- What are your must-have tools?
- How do tools in your classroom support a “YES environment”?
- How do you organize your tools to maximize student agency?
- How are your tools scaffolding the practice of intellectual thinking?
- How does access to tools in your classroom send the message “I trust you” to your students?
- Are students making suggestions about how to better use a digital tool or ways other digital tools could work for what they are doing?
- How often are students creating versus consuming?
- Are students able to choose to use a digital tool for learning when they see it is the best tool for the purpose?
- Do students interact with each other in the digital space?

Tip: Make sure you include digital tools in the conversation and check out our must-have tools on page 68.

Try: Use a tool your students suggested. It may provide insight into how they want to be empowered.

Tools Used in the Classroom Library

Read: pp. 116–121

Immerse:

Confer with students to hear how they view books as a tool for their learning.

Reflect:

- How have you woven the classroom library throughout your classroom?
- How might the learning look in this space?
- Is the classroom library inclusive of all physical abilities, learning needs, sensory needs, and emotional needs?
- Can students spread out and gather around a variety of texts?
- Can students find solitude?
- Can students gather with a partner or in a small group?
- How can you make the design flexible?

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- Are all students represented in the books on display?

Tip: Broaden your definition of reading and texts when considering tools used in the classroom library.

Try Organize opportunities for students to visit other classroom libraries in your school to see how tools are used in those communities of learners.

Displays

Displays throughout the Classroom

Read: pp. 16–23; 61–65

Immerse:

Create a ritual of having colleagues bring a display or photo of a display to grade-level or faculty meetings. You could even have teachers display examples in the faculty room.

Reflect:

- Whose work/thinking takes up space on the walls of the classroom?
- How do you ensure student learning, thinking, and reflecting are visible, and that the reflection of learning is valued by students?
- How are students cocreating displays?
- How is the wall space positioned as a learning tool?
- What is visually privileged on the walls, in book displays, and throughout the classroom?
- How can you extend your wall space?
- How are displays inclusive of students' identities?
- How is the digital space cocurated with your students?

Tip: Think about opportunities for students to display learning, thinking, and reflecting in the digital environment.



Try: Choose an idea shared by a colleague and invite them to see how the display is used in your classroom.

Displays in the Classroom Library

Read: pp. 144–151

Immerse:

Visit your school and public libraries. Notice how these libraries use displays to scaffold agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual community.

Reflect:

- How are texts organized and arranged to maximize access and be responsive to your readers?
- How are digital texts displayed to send the message that these texts count as reading?
- How are you auditing your classroom library with your students?
- How are you displaying books you read together?
- How do you amplify books in which students see themselves?
- How do your displays invite readers to try something new as they grow and change?
- How do your displays highlight new authors, characters, or series?
- How do you display books throughout your classroom?
- How do you display books by genre

Share, Collaborate, and Revise

The process of responsive teaching is never finished. Include your students in noticing what is working, deciding what could be more effective, and trying new emerging ideas. Consider ongoing rituals and create digital learning spaces that embed classroom design within planning, assessment, and curriculum meetings. To do this work in ways that reflect a commitment to student choice, agency, and shared decision-making, continually share new resources, tips, ideas, and questions with colleagues so your classroom can catalyze change for your students

and format?

- How do you give your students agency in organizing and displaying texts?

Tip: Make refreshing displays a regular part of classroom library maintenance.

Try: Try an idea used in the school or public library. Tell your students about your inspiration so they start to notice displays in these libraries as well.

Creators' Note

Classroom design is much more than creating a cute space; it's about creating a space that encourages freedom, choice, and growth. Teachers and students should work together to create an environment that meets the needs of their learning community. Whether you are a new classroom teacher or a veteran educator, we hope the ideas presented in this book spark lots of ideas for you and your students.

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