

Teacher Educator 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 reenvision 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.

Teacher education programs and the professional standards for teachers focus on the importance of creating a welcoming and supportive classroom environment. Most teacher education programs have a course specifically devoted to creating supportive, culturally responsive classrooms. In addition, practicums, supervised instructional experiences, and student teaching semesters focus on management, engagement, and instructional strategies to teach diverse learning styles, needs, interests, and levels of readiness.

This study guide will provide suggested reading excerpts, reflection questions, and ideas for including this text in your syllabus. We suggest you assign reading the entire text and incorporate sections of the text in discussions throughout the course. This study guide highlights the following indicators of pedagogical knowledge and skills that are related to classroom design to support you in including this text in your syllabus:

- Create and maintain a safe and collaborative learning environment that values diversity and motivates students to take academic risks, challenge themselves, and claim ownership of their learning.
- Actively create and maintain an environment where students' diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges are respected.
- Employ various classroom management strategies, and establish and maintain effective

routines and procedures that promote positive student behavior.

- Promote the learning and growth of all students through instructional practices that establish high expectations, create a safe and effective classroom environment, and demonstrate cultural proficiency.
- Use instructional practices that reflect high expectations regarding content and quality of effort and work, engage all students, and are personalized to accommodate diverse learning styles, needs, interests, and levels of readiness.
- Employ various strategies to assist students in developing social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

## Reflecting on Pedagogy

### Read:

Introduction: pp. 1–13  
 Classroom Design: pp. 96–98  
 Classroom Library: pp. 100–111

### Reflect:

Encourage your student educators to observe, discuss, and journal on these readings throughout your course. Here are some suggested questions when thinking about elementary students:

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

### Share:

Find time to share questions, reflections, and ideas. 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 elementary student agency than trying them out in your own learning?

## Choose Your Purpose and Priorities Based on Your Syllabus

This is where it gets DIY! Depending on your course objectives, you will need to break up the work differently. For each highlighted element, the guide will suggest ways for the student educators in your course to engage in learning about designing classrooms for agency.

One suggestion is to immerse your student educators in classroom spaces to see the varied ways to design layouts, learning spaces, tools, and displays. You may do this by touring cooperating teachers' classrooms, organizing a guided observation of classrooms, displaying photos and videos of past and current cooperating teachers' classrooms, asking colleagues in your extended learning communities to share photos and videos virtually, and checking out photos in this and other professional books. Immersing themselves in many classroom environments will give students a range of ideas to maximize space.

## Layout

### Classroom Layout

**Read:** pp. 85–95

**Immerse:**

Observing while elementary students actively engage in the classroom space is ideal. Find a time when your student educators can observe cooperating teachers. This will help them consider how the layout scaffolds agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual community.

**Reflect:**

- What did you notice about the room arrangement? How does the teacher make the most of the space they have?
- How is the space designed to create a variety of spaces for learning?
- How is the space flexible so elementary students can cocreate with the teacher?
- What feedback and ideas did students provide?
- What opportunities do you see?

**Try:** Have your student educators choose an idea and try it in one of their practical experiences. Plan to reflect and share in class or in a reflection journal.

### Classroom Library Layout

**Read:** pp. 47–56

**Immerse:**

Observe classroom libraries during literacy instruction and content area instruction.

**Reflect:**

- How is the classroom library intentionally woven into the design of the entire classroom?
- How does the classroom library's design support the elementary students' agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual freedom?
- How is the design flexible, allowing it to be responsive to the students' needs and wants?
- What suggestions and ideas do you want to try?

**Try:** 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).

## Learning Spaces

### Learning Spaces throughout the Classroom

**Read:** pp. 24–46

**Immerse:**

Visit some classrooms and discuss what you notice. Think about how the learning spaces scaffold agency, freedom, identity building, and intellectual community.

**Reflect:**

- How is the room designed to support the learning model?
- How do the spaces support instructional practices and elementary 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?

**Try:** Think about one learning configuration you want to try, give it a few weeks, and make adjustments along the way. Plan to reflect and share in class or in your journal.



### 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 is the classroom library woven 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 is the design flexible?

- Are all students represented in the books on display?
- Try:** Choose an idea or section of the library and give it a go!

## TOOLS

### Tools Used in the Classroom

**Read:** pp. 66–80; 81–82; 112–115

**Immerse:**

Have the student educators in your course reflect on how they use tools as learners and how they might use tools in their classroom.

**Reflect:**

- How do tools in the classroom support a “YES environment”?
- How are tools organized to maximize elementary student agency?
- How do tools scaffold the practice of intellectual thinking?
- How does access to tools send the message “I trust you” to 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?

**Try:** Use a tool that is in the classroom. It may provide insight into how it empowers elementary students.

### Tools Used in the Classroom Library

**Read:** pp. 116–121

**Immerse:**

Arrange for your student educators to confer in classrooms to hear how kids view books as a tool for their learning.

**Reflect:**

- How is the classroom library woven throughout the classroom?
- How does 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 is the design flexible?
- Are all students represented in the books on display?

**Try:** Organize opportunities for your student educators to visit classroom libraries to see how tools are used in those communities of elementary students.

## DISPLAYS

### Displays throughout the Classroom

**Read:** pp. 16–23; 61–65

**Immerse:**

Create a ritual of having your student educators bring a display or photo of a display to class. You could even use displays in your meetings with student educators.

**Reflect:**

- Whose work/thinking takes up space on the walls of the classroom?
- How is elementary student learning, thinking, and reflecting made visible?
- 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 is wall space extended?
- How are displays inclusive of students’ identities?
- How is the digital space cocurated with learners?

**Try:** Invite your student educators to choose an idea observed in a classroom and try it in their practicum classroom.

### Displays in the Classroom Library

**Read:** pp. 144–151

**Immerse:**

Visit 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 readers?
- How are digital texts displayed to send the message that these texts count as reading?
- How do displays invite readers to try something new as they grow and change?
- How do displays highlight new authors, characters, or series?
- How are books displayed throughout your classroom?
- How are elementary students given agency in organizing and displaying texts?

**Try:** Try an idea used in the school or public library in your student teaching practicum.

## 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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