

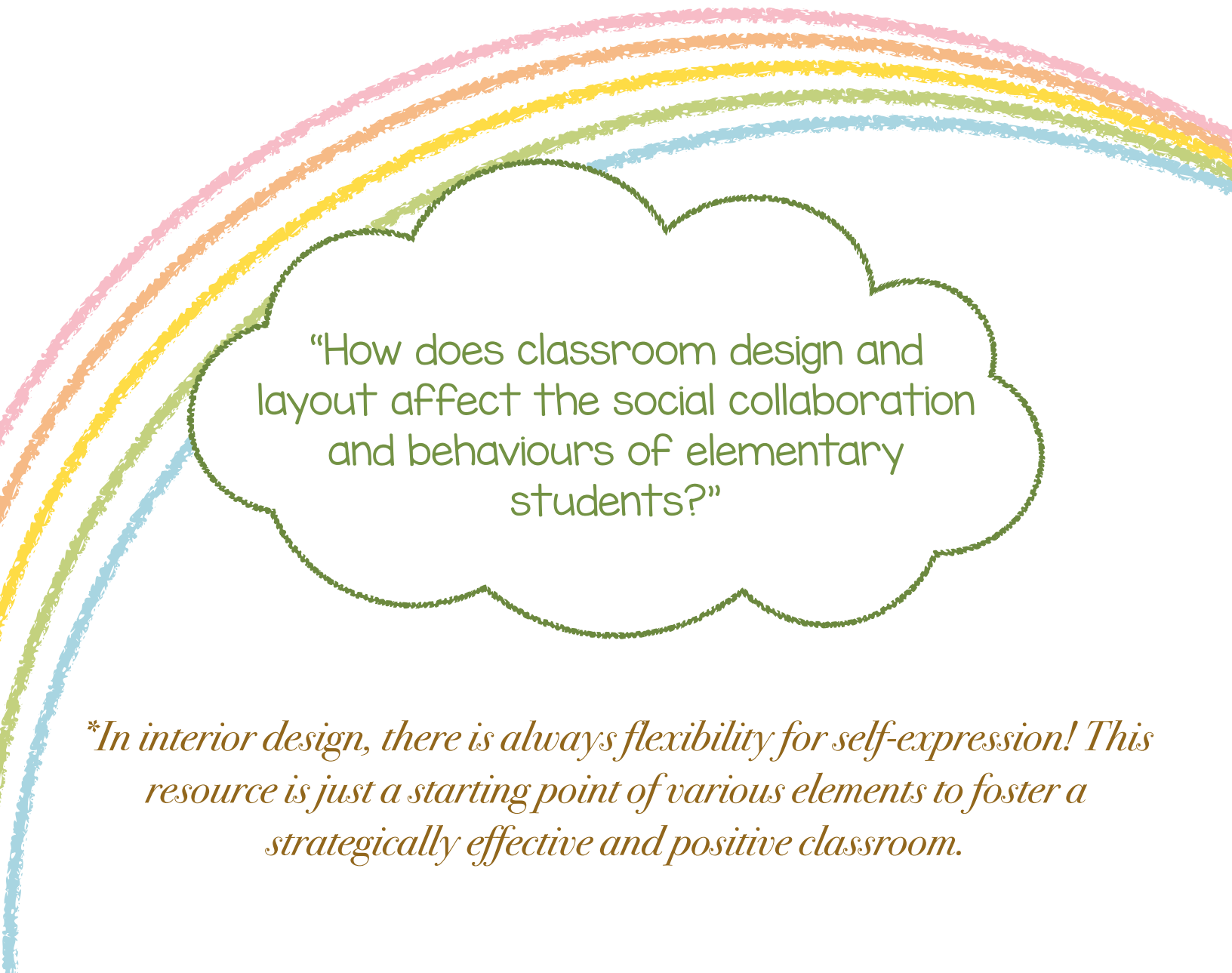


design

guidebook

This is a mock guidebook* for elementary teachers who aim to create a welcoming, safe, student-centred learning environment. The following concepts include various optimal classroom design elements with an emphasis on student social and emotional development.

This resource is based on the initial question below, in connection to the Teacher Education Competency: *“Develop an understanding of how learners learn in order to cultivate effective learning environments.”*



“How does classroom design and layout affect the social collaboration and behaviours of elementary students?”

**In interior design, there is always flexibility for self-expression! This resource is just a starting point of various elements to foster a strategically effective and positive classroom.*

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Kaia Falcon

**EDCI 250
2023**

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sunlight

the importance of natural lighting

Sunlight is an essential element in creating an environment that encourages learning. Exposure to daylight has a direct effect on biological processes within the body, like synchronizing our circadian rhythms (Shishegar & Boubekri, 2016). According to a study, “Circadian rhythmicity... is responsible for many cognitive processes such as attention, executive functions and also memory” (Shishegar & Boubekri, 2016). The same study goes on to say that “daylighting enhances mental performance and decreases aggressive behaviour as well as depression (Shishegar & Boubekri, 2016).

In aiming to foster positive behaviours in our students, providing natural sunlight in the classroom is significant for well-being and balanced moods throughout the day! All classrooms have different doors, windows, and walls, so how can we add more natural light to the classroom with these architectural limitations?

Focus on removing obstructions to the light that your room already has access to! Opt for sheer curtains, “Adding [sheer curtains] that are a slightly lighter hue than your walls can imbue a dark space” (Moore 2023), open blinds, and lower horizontal shelves to not block any existing windows. Implementing lighter wall colours allow more light to reflect off the walls, resulting in a brighter classroom overall: “Light hues on the walls and ceiling can really help lighten a naturally dark space” (Mulvey & Curkin 2023). Ideally, encourage more outside instruction or free time as a routine for students to experience unfiltered sunlight as much as possible.



overhead *fluorescent-free!*

Overhead lights in educational environments are often a series of fluorescent tube lights. Just as daylight has positive effects on students in the classroom, these bright lights can have negative effects. To put it simply, all fluorescent lights flicker as part of the way they cast light, and the rate of that flicker is, on average, 100 times a second.

As stated by Winterbottom and Wilkins, this flicker modulation “can adversely affect search performance... even though subjects do not consciously experience it as flicker,” and even more significantly for an elementary setting, “younger individuals demonstrated relatively high sensitivity” to this flicker which “may impair performance and promote discomfort” (Winterbottom & Wilkins, 2009).

Choosing suitable artificial lighting can be daunting, especially when confined by overbearing fluorescent fixtures. Reducing glare is the best form of creating a softer atmosphere in the classroom. Of course, we cannot easily remove these large light fixtures altogether. However, we can cover them! There are fluorescent light diffusers/covers that come in various colours and patterns to provide a shield from these harmful overhead lights. Opting for a warm colour would be the best solution to combat the cold temperature of the tube lights. In order to implement an entirely new, warm set of overhead lights, plug-in paper lanterns are best. These affordable fixtures come in various sizes, do not require hard-wiring, and provide friendly light without glare or eye-straining effects!



indirect *softer artificial lighting*

One of the greatest sources of discomfort in an overly lit classroom is glare. As one study explains: “Glare happens when one part of the visual scene is much brighter than the general brightness of the rest of the field of view.”

There are two types of glare, **disability** glare, and **discomfort** glare, both of which negatively impact learning. Disability glare causes a decrease in visual performance due to “light scattered within the eye... when a bright source is close to the direction of the gaze”. Discomfort glare, while avoiding the reduction in visual performance, causes (as its name may suggest) discomfort “with symptoms including eyestrain and headaches” (Winterbottom & Wilkins, 2009).

Indirect, diffused lighting is the optimal solution to glare. There are endless forms of indirect lighting. One idea would be to set up a strip of warm-toned LED lights around your direct instruction board, facing away from learners.

These string lights would illuminate the teaching area while preventing discomfort glare.

Whether the added light sources come from paper pendants or a simple lamp—incorporating soft, warm lighting whenever possible is essential in creating a comfortable environment for your students to learn to their full potential!



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group seating *for social collaboration*

The most common seating arrangement in elementary classrooms is row seating (Simmons et al. 2015). This layout is common as it allows students to stay on-task and work individually. However, a study by Simmons et al. demonstrates that there are more effective seating arrangements for student engagement and collaboration in the classroom, stating “If teachers wanted to increase interaction among teacher and students ... row seating was not the arrangement to accommodate students’ needs.” The authors emphasize “when students are placed in rows it is conveyed that students should be passive learners and are **only meant to be seen and not heard** in the classroom.”

A widely popular arrangement is group seating! “[Group] seating has found to be effective in student collaborative learning...a positive effect on social interaction and that more students were actively participating during class discussions” (Simmons et al. 2015).

In a conversation with a handful of educators, there was a general preference for group seating to promote an engaged, collaborative learning environment for students of any grade. Peer socialization is significant in primary grades as we are all learning and growing in the classroom. Fostering support systems and creating a safe space in your classroom provides smoother routines, teaching, and class discussions. Setting boundaries at the beginning of the school year is critical to keep students on-task when needed. Once learners respect these guidelines, social interaction should be encouraged to enrich their learning processes.



flexibility

adapting for student choice

Offering personalized seating for students to have the opportunity to choose how they sit safely is imperative in nurturing the different learning styles. Providing the choice for flexible seating arrangements can be implemented through various classroom design elements. Flexible bookshelves are a beneficial option, as “[they] can be moved so that the room can be totally opened up...and we can participate as a community.” (Minero 2015)

The ability to adapt your classroom seating arrangement for student needs and preferences does not need to look like a chaotic assortment of bean bags and exercise balls. Allowing for flexibility can look like some students lying on the classroom rug during silent reading, or sitting at their desk while writing. One Kindergarten student, when asked, confidently declared herself to be a “belly reader.” She explained that she loved reading on the floor, so when it was time to read in class, that was exactly how she’d read. (Minero 2015) “Not only can flexible seating help students concentrate, but it also gives them more power over their learning environment. They’re able to listen to their body and choose a method of sitting that helps them learn best” (Prieur 2022).

This holistic approach is comparable to the Montessori method, as it values independence and encourages a student-centred learning experience. Elements of this intuitive method can be implemented into a traditional elementary classroom using “[colour and] natural materials and carefully chosen props (such as open-ended, handmade toys and dolls with minimal detail to encourage the imagination) are intrinsic to the uncluttered, warm and homelike, aesthetically pleasing Waldorf environments” (Edwards 2002).



floor seating

comfortable connections

A conversation with a primary teacher revealed that she prefers to conduct her direct instruction on a small bench in front of the classroom rug. This way, she is at a lowered level, closer to her split grade 2/3 students. The students on the carpet can also sit however they like, whether that be cross-legged or lying down, as long as they are actively engaged in the lesson.

There are many themes, shapes, colours, and sizes of rugs, each suitable for a different classroom theme and layout! Incorporating an area rug into the learning environment not only adds comfort, but also encourages more authentic and engaged discussions, as “sitting together on a rug feels more personal, connected. It’s a smaller space, so everyone can hear each other, and speak their minds.” (Quality Classrooms, 2023)

Providing this emotional and physical space for student participation during a lesson is beneficial in fostering social collaboration between learners, but also between the educator and student. Large area rugs are beneficial in dampening overbearing noises in the classroom “as they can help to reduce sounds and ground level vibration [which] helps to create a calm learning environment where students can focus with less distraction.” (Quality Classrooms, 2023)

Ensure that you select a rug that fits your classroom in a muted colour so as to not overestimate or distract your students. A rug that fits in your colour scheme (discussed as a future classroom design element) is optimal as this provides seamless incorporation of this sizeable fabric floor covering into the classroom.



layout

the “perfect” layout

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the “perfect” layout

While there is not a *perfect* layout for all classrooms, every classroom has an optimal floor plan: “There is no perfect classroom design... [but] providing a variety of spaces within a classroom supports student-teacher relationships” (Barrett & Zhang 2009).

To strategically create a meaningful, student-centred layout, there are valuable elements to include within the space, as “the amount of space a child will need varies with the activity...Therefore, the plan has to accommodate instruction, experimentation, or group related activities” (Barrett & Zhang 2009). A dynamic criterion that fosters support, positive student behaviour, and creativity include desks arranged for collaboration and flexibility, interactive learning spaces, and clear zones for various activities. These components utilize the room for the learner’s benefit, while also keeping the space visually organized for the educator. You can implement this criteria by drawing a simple sketch of the classroom from a bird’s-eye view, mapping the windows, doors, closets, and any significant or immovable objects. This way, you can begin to analyze the different zones for teaching and learning.

Effective classroom design is not about creating the “perfect” space but rather designing the classroom to “create an ideal environment by considering aspects...from storage and accessibility to ergonomics” (Gante 2023). Holding space for learning and adaptability of student choice is significant in fostering the many learning styles and abilities that children possess.





flow

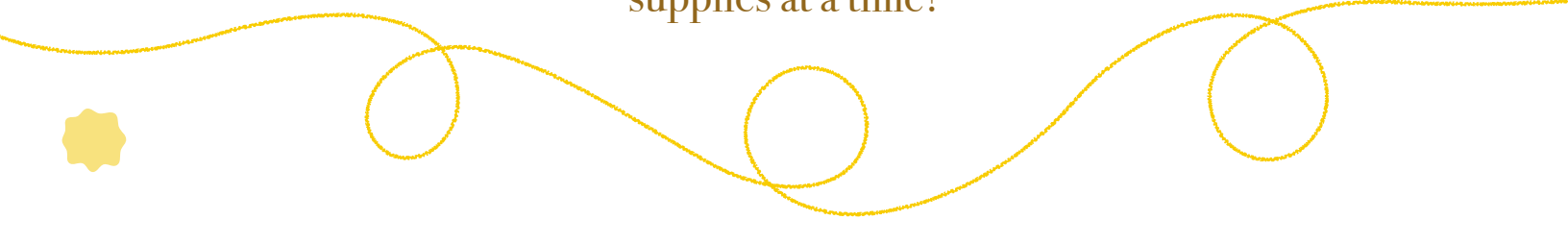
The “flow” of a classroom is vital in effectively structuring your room for learning and collaboration. This element is the absence of obstacles in the room, so students can move freely and respectfully when completing tasks or gathering shared supplies. Organized flow is often established over time through setting boundaries and routines with students. “Classroom flow influences a learner’s comfort level and how they engage within the space...[if the classroom is] a clean, open, and organized environment, they are more likely to feel calm and ready to learn” (Springer 2021).

Create open-plan stations throughout the room with paths to avoid crowding or traffic when students are entering and exiting an area and doorways should be clear of any obstructions. “Clearly marked pathways to activity areas improve the utilization spaces...[which] help keep the children-oriented and stimulate their imaginations...for extra learning and positive social interaction” (Barrett & Zhang 2009).

The flow of your classroom can be found through experimenting with the layout.

Take a walk around the room, identifying the designated areas and supply stations. Seating arrangements are significant in promoting smooth transitions. So, try sitting at a desk and walking to the main door. *Are the students able to line up quickly and efficiently? If students need to use shared art supplies, will a crowd form around the supply bins?*

Implement routines and structures in your teaching approach as to minimize these traffic jams. For example, allowing one group or table to gather their supplies at a time!



safe centres

creating a “calm corner”

The goal of any educator is to have a harmonious classroom with as few negative behaviours as possible. While we cannot entirely eliminate disruption and emotional discomfort, these common issues can be reduced by introducing a “calm corner” into the classroom. This separate space may be described as “a place in the classroom for students to go when they are feeling distraught or agitated.” It is recommended to have “comfortable options for seating, sensory calming tools, and activities” (Thompson, 2021).

“The school day can be exhausting for students in elementary schools, which can cause their nervous systems to go into overdrive.” Incorporating a zone for emotional regulation provides an opportunity for students to “[become] self-aware of when they are...dysregulated, and then make the choice to go self-regulate in the [calm] corner” (Thompson, 2021).

Cultivating productive communication on mental health is significant in primary grades, as young students may not possess the necessary vocabulary to articulate how they may be feeling, or make sense of their negative behaviours in the classroom. “The [calm] corner provides students with a social-emotional strategy to practice mindfulness... [and can] help encourage positive behaviours and strategies to self-regulate long term” (Thompson, 2021).

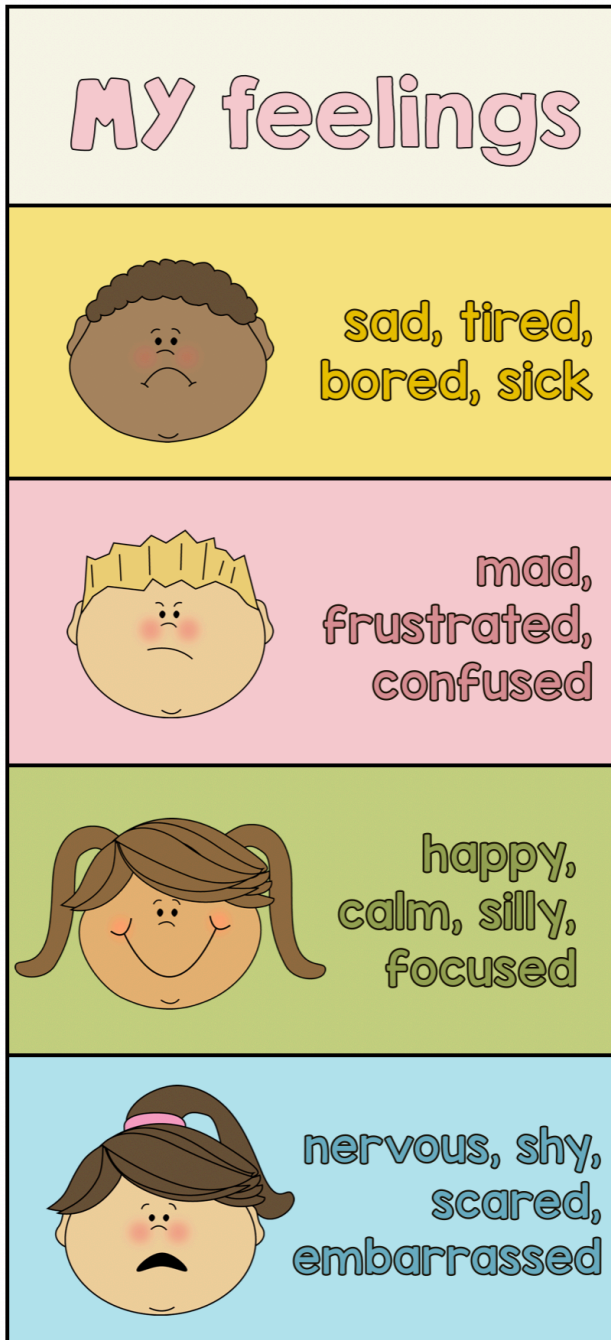
A “calm corner” may consist of a comfortable seat with a mounted feelings chart, a guided breathing poster, relevant mental health books, and shared sensory toys or manipulatives, all inside a semi-enclosed area under a canopy! Using these guidelines, you can create an inclusive and secure area for any elementary classroom.



“calm corner” ideas!

a feelings chart

mental health books





colour



colour psychology

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cohesion

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cohesion cont'd

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colour psychology

Multicoloured elementary classrooms are beneficial for a vibrant, fulfilling atmosphere, “colour psychologists have linked colour with brain development and the human transition from child to adult” (Barrett & Zhang 2009). Colours have a significant impact on student behaviours and learning in the classroom. The exploration of colour in educational environments is the most complex element of this guidebook and could fill numerous volumes of discussion!

In briefly connecting colour psychology and classroom design, a study states that “colour stimulation in the learning environment improves attention and motor processes, resulting in better academic performance...[and impacts student] behaviour, and achievement.” This same study revealed that “colourless interior spaces can be stressful and nonproductive” (Gaines & Curry 2011).

Teachers may have little to no control over the paint colour of their classroom walls, floors, or built-in furniture. To implement these essential hues, you can create a cohesive, warm variety of colours displayed through the resources in the classroom. These colours could be shown in educational posters adorning the walls, decorations, and movable furniture.



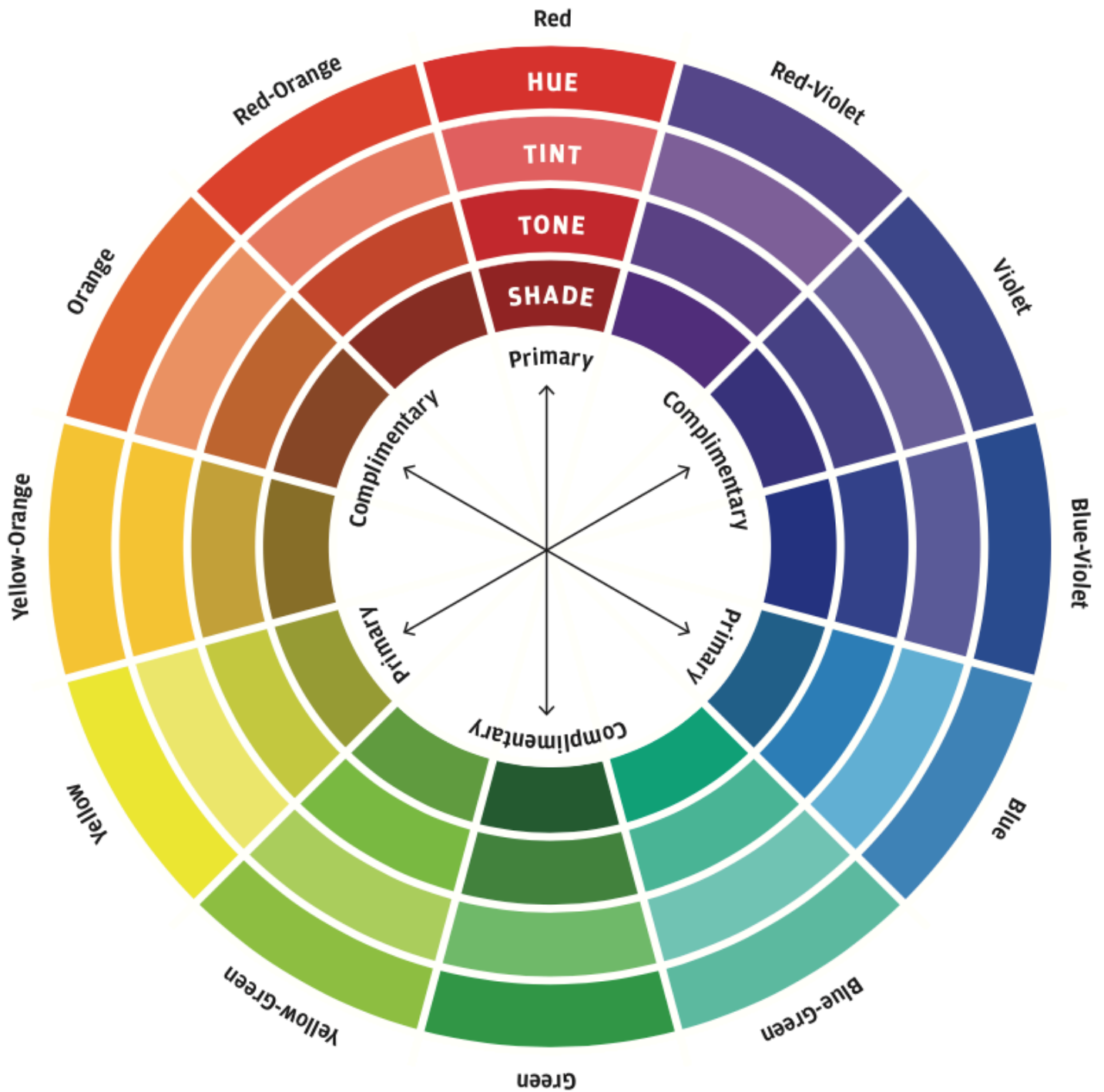
cohesive palette

In designing with meaningful colours in an elementary classroom, aim to encourage a cohesive, warm, welcoming environment without distracting learners with over-stimulating design elements. We want to implement a cohesive variety of colours, as “monotone environments create restlessness, excessive emotional response, difficulty in concentration, and irritation” (Gaines & Curry 2011). A monotone or monochromatic colour palette would utilize tints, shades, or tones of the same colour. If we do not want to stay monochromatic (using only one colour) in our design, *how can we create a beneficial, cohesive colour palette to incorporate into the elements of classroom design?*

Begin by viewing a standard colour wheel to identify a small group of colours you are drawn to. Inspiration may come from one hue, a painting, or your favourite colour. From here, you can create a compatible set of colours to implement in the classroom. There are various terms for these palettes inside the colour wheel, using the base colour as a starting point: **complementary** (“the base colour and its opposite”), **split-complementary** (“the colours adjacent to its opposite”), **analogous**, **triadic** (“three colours spaced equally around the colour wheel”), **tetradic/rectangle** (“four colours arranged around the colour wheel in two complementary colour pairs”), and **square** (“four colours spaced equally around the colour wheel”) (Khareghat 2022). Analogous colours, adjacent colours on the wheel, are beneficial for creating a warm-toned palette.



colour wheel



("The basics of colour theory," 2023)



cohesive palette

can a rainbow theme work?

Incorporating a rainbow colour theme must be done strategically, as these different, vibrant hues can quickly become overstimulating for primary students. Rainbow-coloured objects should be applied as accents with a neutral colour palette—a room focusing on natural warm tones and wooden furniture, with neutral walls. There are an extensive array of colours available to display in the classroom, from paint to decorations. However, “too much colour, motion, or pattern [is distracting]...A stressful learning environment will result from excessive use of colour...In other words, an under-stimulating environment may be as harmful as one that is over-stimulating” (Gaines & Curry 2011).

As a future educator with a love for all colours, I have concluded that in order to incorporate the colours of the rainbow, you must reduce the saturation of the hues to avoid overstimulation. An array of these colours could be visually categorized using a colour-coding method for organizing classroom materials. Using paler tints of the rainbow, as well as a more limited palette (pink, orange, yellow, green, blue—as demonstrated in this guidebook’s design) is much more functional in the overall design of the room, as to not oversaturate the environment.

These muted colours should be integrated alongside natural, warm tones with wood and green elements to ground the overall design of the room. Grounding your colour palette with naturally occurring tones will provide visual relief while working and learning in the space. Through the incorporation of these grounding tones, you “can create a relaxing atmosphere that brings the outdoors inside and fosters a sense of harmony” (Zanne, 2023). This harmonious effect is beneficial in encouraging a sense of community and positive social collaboration in the classroom.



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bulletin boards

Bulletin boards can be found in almost every elementary classroom as they are a significant source of valuable information. These displays can be used to incentivize student thinking and capture concepts and ideas to reference throughout the school year. As bulletin boards often reflect a classroom's identity, the majority should demonstrate core educational concepts, and foster a sense of classroom community by exhibiting student artwork or an interactive birthday display!

The four main kinds of classroom bulletin boards display various useful illustrations: **informative** (“designed to illustrate concepts [being taught,]...visual representation helps students to understand the concept more fully”), **interactive** (“designed to get the children involved [and] made of materials that are moveable/hands-on”), **student-created** (“display of student's work...[for example,] art projects [or] writing prompts”), and **decorative** boards (“[adds colour] and aesthetics to the classroom... themed boards, following the seasons, holidays, or other areas of interest”) (Supply 2023).

Though they may sound superfluous, decorative bulletin boards are necessary to illustrate relevant concepts of the curriculum through engaging visuals. Creating a visual reinforcement of learning in the classroom is beneficial for all learners, as those who may require illustrations are provided with continuous access while in the learning environment. This is essential for mathematical concepts in particular, as visual representations of equations “have the potential to assist learners [in comprehending] mathematical concepts and processes, thus enhanc[ing] their understanding and learning” (Quinell 2022).

Create a balance of informative, decorative, interactive, and student-created bulletin boards throughout your classroom to foster meaningful collaboration with learners!



engagement

show off student artwork!

Children's artwork is undeniably adorable. These imaginative pieces are incredibly valuable in encouraging self-expression and positive behaviours in the classroom. The process of creating art is beneficial in child development, including "fine motor control and dexterity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, visual-spatial abilities, cultural appreciation, [and] confidence" (Wiley 2018).

Expanding on the creation process, "art is vital to a young brain's cognitive, psychomotor, social and emotional development...children who engage in the arts regularly do better in school...are more attentive in their classes and tend to be more innovative in their learning [and] more tolerant of differences in a classroom" (Wiley 2018).

Displaying student art in the classroom engages the learners in the material, and allows them to effectively recall their learning experience and the knowledge obtained from completing the project. Fostering this positive connection to arts and providing a creative outlet is beneficial for social and emotional growth in the educational environment. "In addition to bringing color and beauty to our learning spaces, it shows children that their contributions are an important and necessary part of the learning process" (Haynes 2023).

Implementing these purposeful displays to enhance learning can be done by "intentionally [displaying] most artwork at the **eye level of students**...[this] allows them to see, share, and take pride in the work they and their peers have created [which] encourages children to keep learning and growing through new projects." (Haynes 2023).



purposeful posters

Decorating your classroom with educational and visually appealing posters is more beneficial than just incorporating accent colours and cute illustrations. “Posters create a more stimulating and interesting environment for learning[, making] classes more dynamic and positive.” (Şener & Bostan 2017)

There are an endless number of posters you can create or source for your classroom, and they can be personalized to your liking. These instructional artworks provide a multitude of uses for learners, and one possible use is “to simply provide an illustration of something. For example, a poster showing a volcano could be used in an earth science unit. A biology unit on biomes would benefit from pictures of deserts and rainforests.” Other educational posters effectively illustrate certain processes: “Examples include posters showing the water cycle from rainfall to rivers to oceans to clouds, or posters showing how food gets from the producer to the table” (Osa & Musser 2017).

Utilizing posters for classroom management provides learners with visual reminders of what is expected of them. An example of this would be a series of small posters illustrating the appropriate noise level in the classroom at any given time, or general classroom rules. In continuing to encourage student-centred classroom design, inspirational posters serve a more abstract purpose, often providing words of affirmation and encouragement to learners. “The primary purpose...is to inspire rather than to educate” (Osa & Musser 2017). These assuring words could be placed around a mirror to instil confidence in your students, strengthening their social and emotional development.

When designing your own classroom posters, keep the following criteria in mind to ensure the graphic promotes effective learning and teaching: “[the poster must] motivate and inspire students to learn, stimulate interest in the topic, effectively illustrate a concept or skill, provide reproducibles for student use, provide directions for hands-on activities, provide suggestions for additional instructional activities...[and be] well-organized [and] legible” (Osa & Musser 2017).



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forming groups!

In sourcing furniture made specifically for educational settings, there proved to be a variety of pieces available to effectively integrate a group seating arrangement in your classroom. From round tables to combining a set of four standard desks, there are plausible options for nearly any floor plan.

Begin by creating your preferred seating arrangement on paper by mapping your classroom layout and permanent fixtures. Then, rearrange your movable furniture in your physical space! Experimentation is essential in learning what arrangement will work best for your classroom. Continue this process until you are happy with the approximate flow of the room and the arrangement of the furniture.

The following furniture pieces are a few recommendations of many options for facilitating a **group seating arrangement** in your classroom:



(more information in references!)



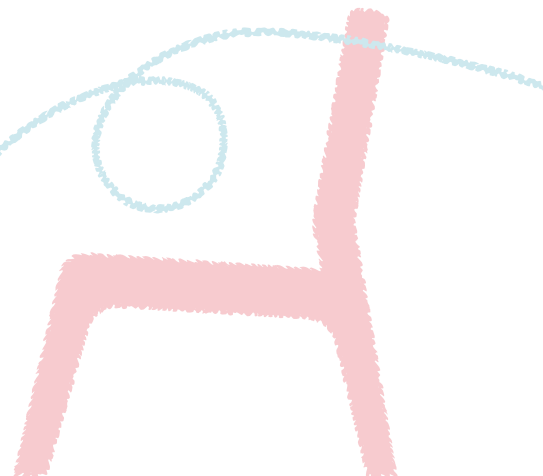
dynamic furniture

Educators and learners alike understand the prevalence of fidgeting in the classroom. *Becoming more easily distracted while attempting individual work and longing for a brain-break is a commonly understood aspect of being a primary student.* This is due in no small part to the length of time children are expected to remain seated and still. As one study states “students now sit for some six hours during the school day, which heightens the importance of correctly fitting desks and chairs and the need for dynamic seating” (Ivory 2011).

Movement is important to learning, as “researchers speculate that a decrease in movement opportunities at school will result in lower academic gains” and that “increased attention and work completion is associated with the use of controlled movement or dynamic seating options” (Ivory 2011).

This study used standing desks, ball chairs, and a flexible rocking chair, but the options for dynamic seating are incredibly varied (Ivory 2011). One teacher, an advocate of dynamic seating options, claimed that they use crates, pillows, couches, chairs, canoes, and even bunk beds! (Minero 2015)

While you do not need to offer an assortment of small boats for your students, giving learners the option to utilize dynamic seating products such as seat cushions is beneficial in promoting positive moods and behaviours in your classroom!



♥ comfort ♥

implementing homelike qualities

Creating a *safe* learning environment can be done through the implementation of homelike furniture and accents throughout the classroom. “A soothing school environment makes the transition from home to school easier and reduces tension in small children” (Kolpek 2021). A student’s home is often their safe space, so it makes sense for educators to incorporate some coziness into a space they spend hours per day in. “The best way to facilitate learning is to create a space where children feel relaxed and have a sense of belonging.” (Fischli 2011)

The term homelike refers to classroom design elements with similar comfort, organization, and warmth to a home. “[Learning] in a group setting for eight to ten hours a day creates inevitable tensions and stresses...a homelike environment can ease the stress” (Bergman & Gainer 2011).

The details within beneficial elements throughout a homelike classroom include the texture of objects and furniture: “Texture can be introduced in the classroom by [incorporating] rugs made of materials that are more coarse; choosing tables and chairs constructed of smooth, natural woods or grainy, [coloured] plastics.”

Furthermore, “the room can include many soft elements such as rugs, mats, blankets, quilts, throws, and floor pillows. The younger the child, the more essential softness is in his surroundings” (Fischli 2011). Integrate soft textiles and furniture to provide comfort for learners throughout the day.

A behavioural aspect of creating a homelike classroom is to “[have] a designated place for collaborative work [that] builds connections and a sense of belonging in the classroom community” (Fischli 2011)



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shared supplies

Efficient organizational strategies play a pivotal role in shaping a classroom's layout, flow, and design, creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. "It is important to identify the proposed activities that are likely to take place and provide a well-defined area that offers resources that can be shared by students" (Barrett & Zhang 2009).

The most apparent method of organization is utilizing bins, containers, and caddies, as well as individual labels for each of these vessels. These labels could be as broad as "scissors, pencil crayons, markers" or as specific as a rolling cart stamped with a day of the week on each drawer to optimize paperwork. Creating an environment with labeled, organized materials for the whole class may foster social collaboration, as "sharing glue sticks, pencils, and scissors teaches children valuable lessons in cooperation" (TeacherLists 2022).

Utilize organizational furniture (*rolling carts, cubbies, bookshelves, cabinets, etc.*) to categorize these shared supplies, keeping resources in the same area so as to not confuse students. For example, creating designated areas to house educational games, math manipulatives, whiteboards with their erasers and pens, glue sticks, and toys for free play. *Glue sticks may be organized near art supplies, while math manipulatives may be placed near educational games!*

Sharing certain school supplies and manipulatives also provides accessible resources and "equal access to supplies." However, "children can express individuality with supplies they've chosen themselves" (TeacherLists 2022) if given the opportunity to select individual materials.



student materials

The personal supplies of each student may be kept in their desks, however, this can become a continual inconvenience if they begin to lose worksheets and materials. A primary grade teacher provided practical advice on this topic: “Children should only keep two pencils, their own colouring supplies (markers, crayons, pencil crayons) inside their desks, as they tend to play with everything otherwise!”

A remedy to this issue would be to provide each student with their own neutrally-coloured book bin in a designated area, containing colour-coded folders for each subject. Colour-coding is a beneficial strategy in organizing a chaotic classroom if meaningful colour associations are established, as students will begin to associate certain hues with various subjects, improving the flow of the classroom during transitions. “If a student has different notebooks or folders for different subjects...they might remember that their reading folder is red and their science folder is green” (Curletto 2023).

The organization of student materials entirely depends on the seating arrangement in your classroom. If the layout includes row seating, students are more likely to need additional supplies from the classroom. If learners are positioned in groups, you may supply a caddy filled with colour-coded supplies for the table to share!



classroom library

building a collection

As the classroom environment heavily emphasizes literacy and fosters reading comprehension, you should strive to instil a long-term love and appreciation of reading. The best way to do so is by creating a well-organized, high-quality, levelled classroom library, because, as one study says “research shows that students in classrooms with high-quality classroom libraries read 50% more than students who do not have access to a library in the classroom” (Catapano, Fleming & Elias 2009).

The first step in creating a classroom library is, of course, to begin building your collection of books. It’s widely recommended to begin acquiring the books for your library as soon as possible, and “most teacher candidates start collecting books for their classroom libraries long before they finish their teacher preparation programs.” In terms of content, it is important to “**[build] a varied collection so students can develop their reading skills as well as expand their world**” (Catapano, Fleming & Elia 2009).

There are plenty of places where one can find more affordable books to fill their library without purchasing brand new copies of admired children’s books, such as thrift shops, secondhand bookstores, or online outlet bookstores such as *thriftbooks.com!*

Once you have built your collection, it’s time to **organize!** How you do so depends on the reading level of your students, such as “where book exploration is the overall goal, [so you can group] books by topics (bugs, animals, and families)... [or] in primary grade classrooms... [you can] introduce the concept of genre [and create] separate bins for realistic fiction, fantasy, fairy tales, poetry, or informational texts” (Catapano, Fleming & 2009).



classroom library

organizing your shelves

To further facilitate student-centred, comprehensive organization, you should “be sure to mark every book in the same place... so students know quickly where to look to find [labels].” These labels can be used to “indicate topic or genre and level... [like] red stickers may indicate fiction...[and] if you want to level books within categories...the level number...can be written on the [labels]” (Catapano, Fleming & Elia 2009).

The books in your classroom library may be organized “with their covers visible for easy selection.” This will facilitate greater interest in the students when selecting a book to read, and if “a book does not have an inviting cover but offers colorful illustrations and/or a great story, display it with the cover open in a manner that will entice students to explore the book” (Catapano, Fleming & Elia 2009).

Either way, aim to categorize the books clearly and strategically, using colour-coded labels for learners to find the books that they will inevitably love. Foster literary discussions and prioritize organization for the students to find enjoyment in reading individually or with a friend!

The extensive article sourced throughout this classroom design element (*classroom library*) has been invaluable in providing a detailed, practical guide to creating a classroom library, including charts and various organizational ideas. *I highly recommend reading this resource in your own time to prepare for building your classroom library!*



A green apple with a stem and leaf is the central focus. The word "references" is written in white on the apple. The background is white with colorful swirling lines in pink, yellow, and green.

references

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Group seating arrangement furniture:

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(2) <https://jmc furniture.com>

(3) <https://www.wayfair.ca/MooreCo>

(4) <https://virco.com/4000-series-table-48-round?sku=TABLE-4848R-MHG586GRN12-CHRM>

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Books:

Ruby Finds a Worry, by Tom Percival

I'm Happy-Sad Today, by Lori Britain

The Way I Feel, by Janan Cain

The Color Monster, by Anna Llenas

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