

A Blueprint for a Middle School Classroom

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Classrooms must run like a well-oiled machine, built with strategic hardware and functional software. In building a classroom conducive to learning and teaching, effective teachers have to anticipate the needs, wants, and even the unexpected from students in order for things to operate without interruption. In my classroom, my goal is to structure my classroom space and resources so that students are able to manage themselves and have everything available for their success.

Student Supplies and Resources

- Every classroom and subject area has things that students need to be successful. In math, it may be pencils and graph paper. In a foreign language class, it may be translation dictionaries. Whatever the resources, teachers must anticipate that students will need these items regularly and create a plan for students to access these materials with minimal impact on instruction.
- Place items for hygiene and personal use in multiple locations. In various places within the classroom, make available facial tissues, bandaids, trashcans, and even a mirror for the new contacts that will not stay put. When students have a need, simply have a procedure for students to take care of their needs without calling attention to themselves.
- Provide a central area for school supplies such as paper, pencils, glue, and scissors. Have items clearly labeled so that students can discern what they need before they potentially waste time fumbling and searching for a nameless need.
- Designate a specific place for extra handouts and assignments. When students are absent, or even when they lose a handout for which they were present, accessing necessary instructional materials takes time. Plan ahead by creating files for these events. One idea for students who are absent is to have a folder with each student's name and when he is absent, place any materials in his folder. It is then that student's responsibility to get the missing work and turn it in to a clearly labeled location in the room. It is the same with students who have lost their handouts. Simply have a filing system of extra handouts that students can access until the extra copies are depleted.

Boards

Writing space in the classroom should be legible, organized, and predictable.

- Instructional Information: Have clearly labeled and consistent areas of the board where students know where to read important information like the date, objectives, an agenda, and homework.
- Student Information: Neatly post current information that is vital for student success like the grading scale, a school calendar, and even social information like community service opportunities and rosters for school sports teams.

With information, students will only read it and read it habitually if they know it is important and current. Outdated information detracts from the credibility of all the postings.

Student Jobs

Elementary schools often employ the strategy of giving students jobs that rotate classroom responsibilities amongst students. Middle school teachers often do not use their human resources as efficiently. Assigning students duties like sharpening pencils and washing boards after class, straightening desks, watering plants, and even filing papers in

the absentee file help the classroom to function efficiently while empowering students to serve and contribute to the classroom community.

Visuals and Posters

Middle school classrooms differ in terms of decorations because they often reflect the personality of the instructor. Some key points to remember is that students thrive in an environment that is clean, purposeful, and clutter-free. Students need to clearly understand procedures and expectations and clear postings of those ideals will prevent and minimize behavior problems. Also, visuals and posters related to content should be legible, applicable, and preferably student-made. Rather than investing in manufactured posters of facts and procedures, hang student-generated products that reflect facts and procedures as well as celebrates their handiwork.

Solitude Nook

Sometimes students just need a break! When the need arises for a student to be separated from the class for any reason, a desk apart from the class and other distractions is ideal. Oftentimes a bookcase can serve as a divider to minimize distractions for this student and provide some much-needed alone-time.

Print Rich Environment

Middle school classrooms should have plenty of opportunities for students to read from a variety of mediums and genres. Teachers must stock their classrooms with current newspapers, appropriate and high-interest magazines, community booklets and brochures, classic and high-interest novels, comic books, poems, charts, and any other engaging literary material with a simple procedure for students to check these materials out for home use. Beyond making the literature available, also have a method for students to share recommendations and reviews of reading materials with their peers like an index card in each book with space for commentary or a top ten list of popular reads.

Classrooms are constantly evolving, from year to year, and even from week to week. Just like a real machine, it works sometimes and needs frequent tweaking to attain optimal output. But, the most important thing is that effective and efficient classrooms are deliberate places. Nothing is left to chance, and the oiling can always needs to be filled.