

5 IDEAS FOR REINVENTING YOUR CLASSROOM LIBRARY

1. Integrate your book collection and displays throughout the classroom.

Books are not just for a library, they inform many parts of our lives. Make your classroom representative of real life and place engaging books throughout your room along all different subject areas. Find books with topics that weave into everything your students do in and out of the classroom. As author and educator Debbie Miller states, **“when children are surrounded by books, we’re showing them that reading is important throughout the day; reading is infused into almost everything we do.”**¹ This will show them that we don’t just read in school, we read for information to help us in our life and having an ability to do that is powerful. The earlier they understand this, the more successful they can be.

2. Make your library look inviting.

Author Pernille Ripp quotes a seventh grader in her book, *Passionate Readers: The Art of Reaching and Engaging Every Child* that illustrates this point well. Student Emma H. states:

A warm, cozy place will make kids feel more welcome. A few pillows, some comfortable chairs or bean bags will interest students in having a good book to read. A class library will be an excellent choice because then one good book and a comfy seat will inspire them to read.²

Recently, more research has come out on the effect our surroundings have on mental health and productivity. Studies have found that the environment we live in and surround ourselves with can have an impact. This research applies to our students as well. When creating a space for your readers, think about how the organization makes you feel.³ Would you be able to be productive and focused in the environment you have created for your students? Additionally, think about the elements that make up the space where you read the most in your daily life. Often times these places are comfortable areas that don’t typically include a desk and a hard chair. Making a few changes to your classroom can help significantly. For example, according to a study published in 2015, simply giving students choice on where they sit (cushions, chairs, standing desks, tables, etc.) “gives them a feeling of ownership and creates a sense of community in the classroom.”⁴

References

¹ Debbie Miller, *Teaching with Intention: Defining Beliefs, Aligning Practice, Taking Action* (Portsmouth: Stenhouse Publishers, 2008), 34.

² Pernille Ripp, *Passionate Readers: The Art of Reaching and Engaging Every Child* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

³ Jared Green, “The Psychology of Interior Design,” *American Society of Landscape Architects*, entry posted May 18, 2012, <https://dirt.asla.org/2012/05/18/the-psychology-of-interior-design/> (accessed June 25, 2018).

⁴ “How Classroom Design Affects Learning,” *Connecting Elements*, Blog entry posted November 2, 2016,

<http://www.connectingelements.com/our-blog/how-classroom-design-affects-learning> (accessed June 25, 2018).

3. Organize it in a way that makes sense for your students.

Choose a way of organizing that works the best for you and your students. Create a classroom that is true to life and instead of organizing by level, allow students to discover authentic ways of finding good fit books. How would they find books in a library or bookstore? Give them opportunities to practice and learn how to successfully accomplish this task. Additionally, put books in bins that allow the covers to be seen instead of the spines. **Book covers are meant to entice students, so allow them to do what they were meant for.**

4. Include some “featured rotations” in your collection.

Keep things interesting and fresh for your students by circulating some books with other classrooms or by utilizing the school library. We know that access to a wide variety of books contributes to students being strong readers, so use creative ways to get new books into the classroom. Sharing with other classroom teachers may even connect students with their peers who have different homeroom teachers. How powerful would that be? Ripp writes three questions that are important to contemplate:

How can we create passionate reading communities with what we have? How can we create an inviting space for all without a budget to fuel our design changes? How can we create a space where students feel they are connected to their own reading exploration, as well as that of their peers?⁵

Reading is not only about independent learning and understanding, it is also about making connections to the universe around you. The perspectives and knowledge a good book can give us are significant and can be unique. How will you help your students see this?

5. Have students help you organize.

Allowing students to organize will give them ownership of the books in your classroom. It lets them spend time with the titles that they are able to read throughout the school year. It also helps build a positive culture in your room. As Miller wrote, **“It sends the message that we believe in kids and value their opinions; that the books and materials are ours; that this year their role in the classroom is going to be an active, participatory one.”⁶** Kids will be using the books the most (we hope), so why not let them come up with themes and placement of particular bins? Let students create book displays such as “Love and War” or “Go ahead! Judge a Book by its Cover!”

References

⁵ Pernille Ripp, *Passionate Readers*.

⁶ Debbie Miller, *Teaching with Intention*, 41.

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