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Modified Flexible Seating and its Impact on Student Autonomy

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Research Question

- How does flexible seating impact student behavior and choice in the classroom?

Literature Review

- Harvey and Kenyon (2013) concluded that students benefit both academically and behaviorally when given a variety of seating options.
- Schwebel and Cherlin (1972), Daly and Suite (1981), and Levi (2006) suggest that the traditional classroom layout can damage student-teacher relationships with negative perceptions and biases.
- Neill and Etheridge (2015) and Rands and Gansemer-Toft (2017) support flexible seating because it can increase student engagement, independence, and motivation, while creating a positive classroom community.

Methodology

- 23 first-grade students in a central Illinois public school.
- Modified flexible seating arrangements were implemented throughout the day.
- Data collected during student teaching from anecdotal records, student work, and field notes.
- The principles from the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1997) were used to analyze the student's motivation and growth.

Flexible Seating Classroom Layout



Figure 1. Students have the option to choose from floor cushions, wobble stools, regular stools, regular chairs, plastic recliner chairs, lawn chairs, scoop rockers, yoga mats, floor tables, and carpet spots with the integration of modified flexible seating. During all individual work time, students were allowed to choose any of the seating options as long as it was a smart spot for them. A smart spot consists of a seating option that allows each student to do their best work and learn in a way that is conducive to their individual learning style.

Results and Data Analysis

- Findings suggest that with the implementation of flexible seating (*Figure 1*), students have become more self-accommodating, self-realizing, and self-regulating of their own behavior and choice.
- Data from anecdotal records provides an insight into each student's behavior and choice as well as recording each student's progress during the implementation of flexible seating.
- Student work demonstrates each student's thinking process when picking a smart spot to work and how each student is engaging in self-reflection of their own learning needs.
- Field notes offer a whole class perspective of the integration and impact of flexible seating.

Conclusion

- Teachers should implement flexible seating as a way to teach students responsibility and self-reflection skills.
- Researchers should collect additional data from various classroom grade levels and schools.
- Teacher education programs should incorporate more opportunities for choice-based activities to increase student and teacher engagement.