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Introducing Flexible Seating in a First-Grade Classroom

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INTRODUCING FLEXIBLE SEATING IN A FIRST-GRADE CLASSROOM

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE	4
Background	4
Introduction	4
Context	4
Standard Seating Background	6
Flexible Seating Background	8
Project	11
Summary	12
CHAPTER TWO	14
Review of Literature	14
The Purpose	14
Overview	14
Conventional Seating	15
Flexible Seating	19
Student-Centered Learning	23
First-Grade Education	26
The Need for a Unit Plan	31
Summary	32
CHAPTER THREE	34
Project Description	34
Introduction	34
Overview	35
Framework	36
Choice of Method	38
Setting and Audience	38
Project Description	39
Summary	41
CHAPTER FOUR	42
Reflection	42
Introduction	42
Project Reflection	43
Revisiting the Literature Review	44

	3
Limitations	45
Communicating the Results	46
Benefits to the Profession	47
Final Conclusion	48
References	49

CHAPTER ONE

Background

Introduction

Flexible seating has an impact on elementary students' work habits, but the success of flexible seating is reliant on the educator's implementation of the flexible seating. Research has shown that seating, in general, has an impact on student academic participation and success. Classrooms in the district I currently work in are being given flexible seating funds to outfit their classrooms with the latest in innovative work spaces for students. Educators are getting all of this furniture, but this furniture comes with little training, both for educators and students. It is a lot to expect of educators to integrate the flexible seating without being given any guidelines for implementation. This capstone will address the need of these teachers implementing flexible seating into their classrooms and address the research question: *If elementary school classrooms are provided environmental flexibility, how can teachers effectively implement the flexibility to enhance student attention and work habits?*

In Chapter One, I describe how I became interested in flexible seating, including my experience with standard seating, flexible seating, and creating a flexible space in my first-grade classroom. This will be followed by a summary and an outline for the remainder of the chapters in this capstone.

Context

Teachers throughout my district are being asked to switch from a traditional seating classroom to classrooms with flexible seating; many have begun the change. With

this new undertaking there are many district requirements for ordering this furniture and, in addition, it is an expensive undertaking — \$11,000 is allotted per classroom. One belief is that having flexible seating in classrooms, with a student-centered focus, provides students and educators with a more flexible and hands-on learning environment (Dillon, 2018). Yes, the district is already investing in this, but how will the actual implementation of flexible seating in the classroom impact the learning environment for the students? A traditional seating setup has been found to be supportive of student individual work time, and specific seat location within the rows of desks has been found to impact learning as well (Woolner, Hall, Higgins, McCaughey, & Wall, 2007). If environmental flexibility (easy movement of work spaces from individual workspaces into groupings for a change in work activities) makes a positive difference for students' learning, how can our district and teachers best implement the flexibility in the most supportive and effective ways, and how can teachers and support staff teach best practices for student use of flexible seating?

Flexible seating, or environmental flexibility, can include many things. For the purpose of this study, when referring to flexible seating, or environmental flexibility, I am focusing on seating options (cushions, stools, floor, wobble stools, traditional chairs, benches, or couches) for students to choose a space that best supports their learning, and flexibility with those options (i.e. ease of rearrangement). Going forward, please refer back to this explanation for clarification on flexible seating. Placement of students within a classroom can be used to support the benefits of flexible seating. Teachers reported in an interview style survey that the most significant consideration when placing students in

specific seating locations is student academic performance (Gremmen, van den Berg, Segers, & Cillessen, 2016). Other considerations that came up when looking at the use of flexible seating were classroom management and student preference (Gremmen et al., 2016).

In this capstone project, I will be referring to student-centered learning. Student-centered learning can be hard to define, specifically because it can mean different things to different people in education. O'Neill and McMahon (as cited in Eronen & Karna, 2018) said that some define student-centered learning as student choice, or active learning, or even saying that there is a shift in the power in the classroom from teacher to student. While discussing student-centered learning, one will also need to be familiar with a teacher-centered classroom. For the purpose of this research, we are talking about active learning as opposed to a teacher-centered classroom where the classroom runs on a lecture style of teaching.

Standard Seating Background

I have been working in schools since the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. Prior to that, I was a regular volunteer in my own children's elementary classrooms. Most of my experiences in education have been in classrooms that have what many would describe as a traditional classroom setup. In these classrooms, the teacher stands or sits at the front of the room and lectures to the students, or verbally delivers learning points to the students. These classrooms have matching desks or tables with one seating option, a chair. In the primary grades, there is often a rug near the active-board or teaching area, where students usually have assigned spots. My impression is that in this type of

classroom setting the expectation is for students to work independently and quietly unless the teacher is delivering learning points, and in those situations, the students are still expected to be quiet and still. I saw students completing work, and there was always a system or routine to the teaching time and work time.

I did notice the students who struggled within these traditional classroom settings, including my own son. I was invited into his first-grade classroom to observe him. I entered during a read-aloud that led the students into independent work time. During the read-aloud I saw about four students, along with my son, rolling around on the floor, getting up and walking around the room, crawling around, and talking to other students. The teacher was understandably frustrated. I held back from intervening as I did not feel like that was my place as an observer in the classroom. The focus during this read-aloud was to get the students to identify the main character and the problem the character faced. Once the teacher finished the book and began asking questions, not only did the students who were sitting and listening in the expected way answer many of the questions correctly, but so did most of the students who were out of their learning spaces. My son in particular answered all of the questions correctly. This was when I began looking into and thinking a lot more about what we expect of our students in the classroom in regards to where teachers have them sit, how they should be sitting, and how long they are being expected to do this. Why do we not let students move when they are listening and learning?

The expectations that traditional seating puts on students who do not thrive in that traditional environment seems to be detrimental to students' learning (Daniels, 1998). As

a teacher, it is my job to get to know each of my students and identify what would be best for them in the learning environment. Because of this experience, and my continued work in education, I have been intrigued with flexible seating and the potential it has to support the variety of students in each classroom.

Flexible Seating Background

My experience with flexible seating began during my work as a paraprofessional. Twice a week I worked in a second-grade classroom for push-in help in math where I would support specific students with math lessons. This particular classroom was equipped with flexible seating provided both by the teacher and the district. These flexible seating options included low shelving units with cushions to sit on, rug squares on the floor, wobble chairs, tall stools with high top tables, couches, the floor with low tables, and high tables for standing. In this classroom, I saw a teacher who had very clear boundaries around the use of the flexible seating, and I saw students choosing to use the type of seating that worked for them. Rarely did I see the teacher having to ask a student to make a different choice, or the teacher having to choose for a student who was struggling. I was not in this classroom when the flexible seating rules were introduced, so I did not see how establishing the expectations supported this success.

Later, as a long-term substitute in a second-grade classroom, I was able to explore having my own classroom with flexible seating. Again, before I began, the flexible seating rules were established by the teacher for whom I was subbing. Students were given the choice to use the seating they were the most comfortable with throughout most of the day. During this seven-week period, I saw students making positive and

appropriate choices in the learning environment that worked for their own learning needs. This particular group of students could be considered high-energy, and I think providing these students with the power of choice had a positive impact on their learning, and on them getting to know themselves as learners. The flexible seating in this classroom allowed me to focus more on student-centered learning instead of rigid rules and low-level activity learning. During this time, I saw so many benefits of flexible seating that it created the desire to incorporate a flexible seating model in my own classroom.

Moving forward, teaching in my own second-grade classroom, I was able to learn a lot about implementing my own environmental flexibility. I was in a school where funding was limited; I was responsible for getting any extras for my classroom beyond student desks, chairs, a rug, and a teacher desk. I brought in an extra rug, some big floor pillows, and a few stools. These were limited options, but I was still excited with the results I saw when students were given choices and could decide on their own where they wanted to work. Some students enjoyed working on the floor while playing math games, while other students preferred to work at a specific desk in the room for most work activities. During this time, I saw students getting to know themselves and see that I trusted them to make a choice that was beneficial for their learning. This particular group of students had a lot of trauma in their lives and it was powerful to see many students thriving in this environment because they were not always being told where and how to sit. I had a scholar coach that was in my room every day, and I also co-taught math with another teacher. Having these other adults support me in having flexible seating afforded

me the ability to be successful at that time as a new teacher. With their help, I was able to provide this minimal amount of flexibility in a high needs classroom with some success.

Teaching in first grade these past two years was a growth experience for me. I started out the first school year with desks and a gathering rug space. I had some options in this new position to order some different types of seating. The options overwhelmed me because I did not have background information on what could best support my students. I did not want to order something just because I could; I wanted to be mindful when ordering. I wanted to order things that would actually benefit teaching and learning. I slowly began adding seating options. I started with stability balls that we already had in our building that I did not need to order. I also added a reading library rug, some floor seats and carpet squares, pillows, chair cushions, and a cushioned bench. I did not start out giving students full choice. I drew names for certain seating, and students could say if they wanted to use that choice or not. If they did not want to use the particular seating option, they still had their desk and chair. At the start of my second year, my classroom was preparing to receive a full setup of flexible seating. The flexible seating trickled in throughout the school year. As new items arrived, I continued the practice of drawing names and giving all students a chance to try out each flexible seating option. The students loved the flexible seating, and I can see probable long-term benefits if it is implemented and used effectively. I ended the school year wanting more guidance on how to use flexible seating; how do elementary school teachers implement flexible seating at the beginning of the school year to help mitigate seating issues throughout the school year?

Overall, I am still nervous about adding a variety of seating choice at such a young age. I do not think students can regularly make good seating choices for their learning without one-on-one guidance. They need clear direction, consistency, and practice. Because of what I have experienced with flexible seating, I see that the implementation of a flexible environment and the freedom of choice in this environment need to be taught, and boundaries need to be expressed. Success is possible, but specific guidelines and teacher supports should be in place to optimize success.

Project

Through my experience as an educator, I have discovered the need for some sort of teaching guide for the effective implementation of flexible seating in the classroom. The purpose of this project is to increase the effectiveness of flexible seating within first-grade classrooms by providing a two-week flexible seating unit plan for teaching students how to use this new seating. The unit plan will be used to support teachers as they begin to use flexible seating in their classrooms. This could be at the start of the school year, or anytime in between, essentially whenever the flexible seating will be introduced. The final project will be used to support first-grade teachers to feel confident in the implementation and use of flexible seating in their classrooms. This unit plan will benefit teachers, students, and the level of positive results seen with the use of flexible seating.

I am pursuing this topic because each quarter that passes, more and more teachers in our district are being provided with \$11,000 to supply their classrooms with flexible seating. Teachers and support staff need guidance when receiving the new furniture. I

have personally seen many positives from implementing environmental flexibility into classrooms, but there is a noticeable difference when teachers know how to implement the flexibility effectively. This project will be useful for classrooms, schools, and districts to have a tool in effectively implementing flexible seating which has the potential to impact learning and attention during instruction and work time in a first-grade classroom.

Summary

The purpose of this capstone project is to review the research that shows the positive impact flexible seating has on student learning and to use that research to create a two-week flexible seating unit plan that focuses on first grade. The unit plan is to be used by teachers to effectively implement the use of flexible seating within the classroom. Traditional seating in the classroom is being replaced with flexible environments, and flexible seating has the potential to provide students with the seating they need for active learning. As a first-grade educator, it would be beneficial to have a teaching guide for implementing flexible seating. This would bring improvements to the use of flexible seating in classrooms, especially during classroom instruction and student work time. I would like to highlight the practices that could be used to begin using flexible seating in the classroom, and how environmental flexibility can be used to impact students' attention and work habits during student learning.

I have introduced my topic and discussed how my personal and professional experiences have led me to this point. In Chapter Two, I will provide an overview of the research that supports flexible seating as well as research that highlights the how and why

of educators needing flexible seating teaching support. I will connect flexible seating to the student-centered classroom, and how this teaching style pairs well with a flexible learning environment. In addition, I provide information on important things to consider during instruction and the unique needs of first graders. In Chapter Three, I lay out in detail, the project I have created to support the implementation of flexible seating in first-grade classrooms. I include information on the project overview, theories, choice of method, setting and audience, project description and the timeline. The wrap up and reflection are included in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The Purpose

I have researched the impact flexible seating has on elementary students' attention and work habits during instruction and hands-on learning and how the implementation of the flexible seating is just as important as having the flexible seating itself. This research was used to guide the creation of a unit plan. I created a two-week flexible seating unit plan to support the environmental flexibility in first-grade classrooms to make the flexible seating investment worth the money. My specific research question is: *If elementary school classrooms are provided environmental flexibility, how can teachers effectively implement the flexibility to enhance student attention and work habits?*

Overview

The learning environment, seating choice and arrangement, and student-centered learning will be focus areas in this project for the purpose of creating a flexible seating plan for highly effective implementation of flexible seating in a first-grade classroom. Research on conventional seating, flexible seating, student-centered learning, the first-grade student-level needs will be explored, and the need for flexible seating teaching tools for the purpose of giving background information and support for this capstone project. Flexible seating can be used successfully in the classroom and research shows that implementation is a big part of its effectiveness in the classroom. Using the comparison of conventional seating to flexible seating, and student-centered learning to a teacher-centered classroom will show that students who are used to using conventional

seating in their classrooms will be more successful in a flexible seating environment when they are taught the flexible seating guidelines and expectations.

In what follows, conventional seating will be defined and analyzed first. Flexible seating will be defined and analyzed second, which will then be connected to student-centered learning. Student-centered learning will include how flexible seating relates to the classroom environment and culture. It will consider the setting for the proposed research being conducted in a student-centered learning environment. Finally, first-grade structure, function, and needs will be explored for the purpose of understanding the specific grade level targeted by the unit plan.

Conventional Seating

Conventional or traditional seating includes desks or tables positioned in rows (Gremmen et al., 2016). This model is related to what is known as the “factory model” in education which was popularly used in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Leland & Kasten, 2002). These setups are not rearranged easily, usually fixed, and create space between students with their bodies faced toward the teacher, not each other (Classroom Seating Arrangements, 2019). Seating is usually assigned by the teacher, especially in primary grade levels (Gremmen et al., 2016). The decisions and details for seating charts is usually dependent on the teacher, and using seating charts provides students with a sense of ease and comfort (Kriegel, 2013). Seating charts can be used for any duration of time before a new one is created, and can be changed if there are any issues (Kriegel, 2013). Kriegel (2013) suggested seating assignments to be changed every three to six weeks even if there are no issues. Conventional seating has been the known seating

arrangement in the United States in elementary level classrooms throughout the country's history in education.

Having students sit at desks, positioned in rows, is a typical historical vision (the factory model) of education in the United States (Leland & Kasten, 2002). Even though the classroom environment was dependent upon the type of schoolhouse in which it was situated, students were seated in desks where they would complete written work and reading assignments (Park, 1937). This classroom environment model was most commonly seen with rote memorization and usually managed by an adult (Park, 1937). The adults in the classrooms were mostly present to monitor the students. When teachers became staples in each classroom and students were not left on their own with each other and a monitor, classrooms took on a teacher-centered model where traditional seating continued to be useful and appropriate (Park, 1937). Education has changed and some teaching styles have moved away from rote memorization. However, seating has mostly remained fixed.

There are benefits and downfalls to conventional seating in elementary schools. Conventional seating in different learning environments is supportive of independent work, teacher directed learning, and student engagement. Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) found that student on-task behavior during independent work time is supported by rows of seating in the learning environment. Students know and understand the expectations in a classroom with conventional seating. Also, if teachers prefer a teacher-directed classroom with hand raising, asking for permission to be out of their seats, and a no talking to peers rule during work time, then rows would be most supportive of this type

of classroom environment. Rows of seating were also found to positively impact behavior, specifically of disruptive students (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008).

The traditional seating arrangement supports classroom management which is a vital component to learning and teaching (Gremmen et al., 2016). Wheldall et al. (1981) (as cited in Woolner et al., 2007) found the students who already struggle with attention and on task behavior are more likely to be impacted by their seating arrangement and that their attention improves when placed in rows instead of tables. Within a traditional seating classroom, McCord (1998) found that student placement within the rows matters in terms of behavior. Seating disruptive students in the middle seats of the rows has a significantly positive impact on the behaviors of these students. The behavior issues were much lower than those students in the front and the back of the classroom rows (McCord, 1998). This is supported by Woolner et al. (2007), as they found students to be less disruptive when the students are placed in specific areas in a traditional seating setup. In addition, Benedict and Hoag (2004) found that students who were seated in the front of the classroom received better grades than those students placed in the back. Students are expected to learn from different parts of the room and educators should understand that where students are placed has an impact on student grades.

An actual “action zone” has been identified. This “action zone” refers to seating areas where an increase of questioning and attentiveness by the students is seen (Moore, Dennis, & Glynn, 1984). It was found that students are likely to be more academically successful, in terms of on-task time, when placed in the “action zone” of the classroom as opposed to the back of the classroom (Woolner et al., 2007). The “action zone” is known

as a 'T' or a triangle shape with the wider space being at the front of the room (Woolner et al., 2007). It was also shown that student engagement and involvement were best when students were placed in a 'horseshoe' formation (Woolner et al., 2007). These types of seating arrangements do not support a student-centered classroom but they are supportive of a teacher-centered or teacher-dominated classroom (Woolner et al., 2007). When educators know their students, conventional seating arrangements can be used to support learning within classrooms; however, there are some negatives when it comes to conventional seating.

When educators design their classrooms with the students' needs at the forefront of the planning, classrooms have flexibility and variety. Traditional desks in rows are not easy to move and do not support student collaboration (Espey, 2008). Stevens-Smith (2004) expressed how important movement is for learning, stating that when movement is increased so is the capacity to learn. Conventional seating within a classroom is more supportive of sitting and listening, and when furniture cannot be easily moved to accommodate movement during lessons, students' capacity to learn is decreased. Educators who focus on student-centered learning can also be faced with difficulties. Student-centered learning requires an environment supportive of movement and flexibility.

Overall, Parker, Hoopes, and Eggett (2011) found that the impacts of seat location may not be that clear. Students may acclimate to seat location, but student personality plays a role in student participation and success, regardless of seat location (Parker et al., 2011). When looking at classroom seating, taking the teaching style into consideration is

an important influential environmental factor. Horne-Martin (2002) found that the teacher's teaching style is connected to room organization. Within the conventional classroom, it is standard practice for the teacher to ask the questions and not the students (Park, 1937). This type of teaching style is not used by all teachers, so an alternative seating setup should be considered. An option for educators who cultivate a more active classroom and are more focused on student involvement could see benefits when using flexible seating arrangements, especially if these arrangements were well thought out and implemented effectively with the students.

Flexible Seating

What is flexible seating, or a flexible seating classroom? Flexible seating has been defined as seating that supports movement within a classroom and allows for student choice (Kennedy, 2017). Learning spaces that provide a flexible design and a variety of seating are considered flexible seating classrooms (Dillon, 2018). In flexible seating classrooms, there are still table and chair options along with a variety of other seating choices. There might be standing tables, couches, or floor cushions with low tables to sit at or clipboards to use. The setup supports quick furniture movement and rearrangement (tables usually on casters) for the variety of learning activities that happen throughout the day, including student collaboration and independent work time (O'Donnell, 2018). Some highlights related to flexible seating include student ability to sit in a space that supports their learning style, and meeting individual and group needs during the variety of classroom activities that happen each day. In this sense, flexible seating is often

associated with student-centered learning, or a combination of student-centered and teacher-directed learning (Espey, 2008).

The seating setup within each classroom has the ability to impact student behavior, and flexible seating can be supportive of positive behaviors in lessons with high student interaction. Daniels (1998) shared how the classroom arrangement has a connection with student behaviors when used effectively. Seating is not the single factor when it comes to student behavior, but it is one factor that educators have control over (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Educators who strive to know their students can use the flexibility of the classroom to support the needs of their students and active lessons, influencing positive behaviors in the classroom (Wannarka & Ruhl 2008). Flexible seating can be used to support underserved students as well, by looking at Culturally Responsive Teaching and the connection it has to our classroom environments.

When educators are responsive to who students are, relationships between student and teacher grow and this has an impact on classroom culture. The physical space within a classroom has a profound impact on students (O'Donnell, 2018). Classroom environments can affirm who students are, and the setup and use of classroom space sends the message to students that their needs are understood (Hollie, 2012). Providing a variety of seating options within a classroom, or options that are suitable to the student group, sends a message to the students that the teacher knows that not all students are the same. Having a classroom environment that is responsive to the students in the classroom validates and affirms the students (Hollie, 2012). Identifying the needs of the students in the classroom builds stronger relationships and creates a positive classroom community.

Overall, the environment does not have to be extravagant, it needs to be welcoming and supportive of the students' lives (Hollie, 2012). When educators have flexible environments where furniture can be rearranged based on student need, students are supported. Flexible seating is not just about choice and options, it is also about classroom culture.

Flexible seating offers students movement throughout the day as needed. Some flexible seating options even allow for movement while in use. Stevens-Smith (2013) expressed that when students cross the midline while learning (use both the right and left side of the brain) students' level of learning was improved. Crossing the midline is more likely to happen when students are moving while learning. As activity is increased, so is the potentiality to learn (Stevens-Smith, 2013). Providing a flexible environment not only affords students the ability to move more throughout the day, but it also allows them to connect more with their peers, all while learning on a deeper level.

In addition to having a variety of seating options, educators need to think about spacing between the seating options. Proximity has been shown to increase likability among peers (van den Berg, Segers, & Cillessen, 2012). When students are able to work in closer proximity to each other a positive classroom community is built. Educators provide relationship building among the peers in a classroom when there is less physical distance between students and interaction with each other is supported (Gremmen et al., 2016). The relationship building is supported by regular interaction. There tends to be less bullying behaviors, and fewer students left out (van den Berg et al., 2012). Overall, when students are placed closer together with students they may not initially know well,

the student relationships in a classroom are built and strengthened. Flexible environments create a more cohesive space for close group work to support relationship building in the classroom.

Classroom management is an important area that comes into play when we look at flexible seating as well. The teacher is the leader in how the classroom will function, and the physical make up of the classroom will impact the management systems put into place. This is often overlooked when talking about classroom management (Gremmen et al., 2016). As stated before, Gremmen et al. (2016) pointed out that having students placed in rows versus groups impacts on-task behaviors. So, classroom management issues could increase within a flexible environment if students are kept in groups during independent work time. When students are seated in rows, they tend to be more on task during independent work time, and when students are seated in groups, they tend to be more on task during peer work time (Gremmen et al., 2016). Taking advantage of the movability within a flexible classroom to move tables, desks, chairs, and workspaces to support the task at hand would then seem to be more supportive of student on-task behaviors.

Along with new spaces and flexible arrangements often comes the assumption that students know how to behave in these flexible environments (Dillon, 2018). The need to teach the appropriate use of flexible seating could easily be overlooked. Students need time to learn and understand how flexible seating and learning spaces should be used (Dillon, 2018). Dillon (2018) pointed out that there are intentional and effective ways to do this, but it is about teaching the expectations. In addition to teaching,

educators provide and set guidelines for spaces with flexibility for student learning. Flexible seating, when introduced and used effectively, has the potential to build student relationships and engagement in group work but could have the opposite effect if not taught effectively from the start. Tapping into the benefits of a flexible classroom has the capacity to increase students' positive learning experiences, especially when guidelines are set and students know what the flexible seating expectations are.

Seeing how flexible seating offers greater benefits in a student-centered learning environment, student-centered learning will be defined and explored. Student-centered learning is a common teaching practice used with flexible seating, and taking the teaching style of the educator into consideration is important when exploring implementation guidelines and expectations. Having environmental flexibility in a student-centered learning classroom has the potential to create a successful learning space, especially if there are clear and supportive boundaries.

Student-Centered Learning

For the purposes of this capstone, student-centered learning, or student-directed learning, refers to classrooms that focus on giving students time to collaborate with other classmates on their thinking and to participate in active learning. Students teach each other what they have learned and more time is focused on student activity, group work, and hands-on learning (Morgan, Farkas, & Maczuga, 2015). This also means that there is less time spent focused on the teacher; the instruction and classroom activities are less teacher-directed and more teacher-supported (Rao, Slovin, Zenigami, & Black, 2017). Morgan et al. (2015) pointed out that teacher-directed instruction follows the method of

the teacher transferring or delivering information to the students. This is different from student-directed learning because in student-directed learning, the students are actively involved in the learning process, not just the receivers of information (Morgan et al., 2015). Student-centered learning involves student shared responsibility (Rao et al., 2017). Rao et al. (2017) went on to explain what student-centered learning looks like: students are actively engaged, asking questions in a positive way to both their peers and their teachers, and students are learning by being reflective and applying their new understandings to the learning process. The classroom environment of a student-centered classroom should be taken into consideration for the purposes of this project.

Flexible seating is a great option for educators who teach using a lot of group work and student-centered learning. Espey (2008) focused on team-based learning, which is similar to student-based/centered learning, because of the use of student small groups and cooperative learning environments. Espey (2008) found that when the learning environment was flexible, including large tables, small tables, tables on casters, and a few desks, that students' learning attitudes were positively impacted. Students, when given the choice, will often choose seating that best fits the learning purpose at the time, so in a cooperative learning environment flexible seating options should be offered to support the variety of learning activities (Espey, 2008).

Teamwork and collaboration are two major components of student-centered learning. There are many ways to implement student-centered learning, but overall it includes the students being active participants most often with other students (Eronen & Karna, 2018). Educators expect students to problem solve together during activities

taking place in a student-centered learning environment and the belief is that this is when the learning happens (Eronen & Karna, 2018). A flexible environment works to support collaboration among students by providing movement and proximity (Espey, 2008).

Flexible seating is a great addition to this collaboration. Educators need to have strong classroom management skills to keep students on task during group activities, thus acting as a guide in student-centered learning.

Classroom management in a student-centered learning environment presents some differences compared to a teacher-centered learning environment. The typical classroom management issues that come up frequently in any classroom are “talking out of turn, making noise, disturbing others, engaging in irrelevant activities, hyperactivity, making fun of other children, inattentiveness, attention deficiency, lack of motivation, chatting, daydreaming, and not following instructions, complaining about classmates, nicknaming, and misusing the materials” (Akin, Yildirim, & Goodwin, 2016, p. 774). These off-task behaviors tend to be the same in any classroom, but the main classroom management problems present in student-centered classrooms with flexible seating arise because of the flexibility itself (Dillon, 2018). Schools and classrooms tend to have a norm that many students learn and understand early in their education, and a student-centered classroom with flexible seating has a new set of behavior norms (Dillon, 2018). These different norms tend to be more flexible than teacher-centered classrooms, classrooms with traditional seating, and educators need to be sure to provide clear education around the new set of expectations (Dillon, 2018). The expectation of student participation within whole group instruction in a student-centered classroom leads to less off-track behavior

because of the dialogue (Rao et al., 2017). Redirection often happens with quiet explanations and adjustments where necessary (Rao et al., 2017). This redirection tends to be received by students in a more positive way.

Student-centered learning creates a safe space for students to talk and explore learning concepts together. Giving students more freedom and flexibility to participate verbally and physically in the learning process increases student discussion, and students should be doing the majority of the talking in a student-centered learning environment (Eronen & Karna, 2018). Educators show up as guides in the learning process as opposed to facilitators. Flexible seating supports student-centered learning environments by providing movable spaces that align with group work and whole group activities. However, as Dillon (2018) shared, without clear set expectations, the learning environment may not be as supportive and could even suffer.

Flexible seating and student-centered learning work together and benefit each other, and to work successfully the use of flexible seating needs educators to have clear expectations in place. Now we will look at how the age level of students needs to be taken into consideration to support a successful flexible learning environment. First grade is the focused grade level for the flexible seating unit plan. Educators who are not familiar with first-grade students should be familiar with some of the basic developmental characteristics of this age.

First-Grade Education

After looking at the research on flexible seating and student-centered classrooms, it is also important to look at the specific age level of the students this capstone is

focusing on. First grade has a unique set of learning characteristics, and teaches specific subject areas. I am focusing on first grade for this project as that is the grade level I work with and the grade level I will be highlighting when writing the unit plan. It is important to lay out first-grade characteristics, needs, and development, as these points will be used to create an effective unit plan for first-graders' learning to use flexible seating.

When thinking about typical first graders, the phrases high energy, silly, expressive, highly social, and maybe even bossy may come to mind (Berry Wilson, 2011). These behaviors and attitudes do not necessarily describe all six to seven year olds, but at this age, children are learning who they are and these characteristics are typical in first grade. The developmental path is not completely linear, and it is important to note that each child may show more of one characteristic than another (Berry Wilson, 2011). There are four developmental categories to keep in mind when working with first graders. These developmental categories include: cognitive, language, physical, and social emotional. Within each of these categories, there is a range of expected, common characteristics.

There are some major takeaway areas from these four developmental areas listed above (cognitive, language, physical, and social emotional). I will highlight two of them in this capstone – the physical and social emotional developmental areas. The first takeaway is that students at this level often have limited body control and need a lot of movement (Berry Wilson, 2011). Within classrooms in the primary grade levels, learning often involves hands-on activities, movement, and collaboration. Focusing on instruction, educators need to understand that children see and approach learning in different ways

than adults do (Carpenter, Fennema, Loef Franke, Levi, & Empson 2015). While students are learning how to control their body movement, it can be valuable for students to be specifically taught what having body control looks like, feels like, and sounds like.

The second takeaway from the developmental areas is that students in first grade are very social and need opportunities throughout each day to talk; there should not be a big focus on having it be quiet in the classroom unless absolutely necessary (Berry Wilson, 2011). First-grade students, when entering the school year, bring with them some basic academic understandings. Most first graders already have some understanding of addition and subtraction principles (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Gilbert, 2019). Mathematical learning begins well before students enter school because of a natural need to make sense of things in the world (Aunola, Leskinen, Lerkkanen, & Nurmi, 2004). It is important for educators to understand that students in first grade will be coming to class with a wide variety of knowledge. Morgan et al. (2015) support student-centered instruction [in math] at this age level to provide a real-life connection for students. The benefit for first-grade students in a student-centered classroom is that students have the potential to learn other strategies from their peers that could be used for a wide array of problems (Morgan et al., 2015). Student-centered learning supports this because of the hands on work, the movement, and the group collaboration, and effective use of flexible seating within this learning environment has great potential to increase student learning.

In primary grade levels, it is common practice for students to use manipulatives while learning mathematical concepts. The use of manipulatives is supportive of the mathematical hierarchical learning process (Carpenter et al., 2015). Manipulatives that

are most used during problem solving for the purposes of modeling include but are not limited to: counters (unifix cubes, buttons, tokens, etc.), paper and pencil drawings, money, and base-ten blocks (Carpenter et al., 2015). Using manipulatives for problem solving purposes affords students a visual, either for their own benefit or as a benefit for peers, to have a visual of what strategy a group member may have used (Carpenter et al., 2015). Manipulatives used in the classroom can work well for students who are working both independently as well as in groups. Environmental flexibility connects well to the use of manipulatives in classrooms. The use of manipulatives requires educators to have clear expectations and consequences for misuse just like flexible seating does.

Students in first grade are on the developmental path just like students at other grade levels. Educators should know the developmental stages of their students for a more in-depth understanding of who they are teaching. Students generally develop in a linear way where learned concepts build upon another (Aunola et al., 2004). The unique needs of first graders need to be taken into consideration when implementing flexible seating in the classroom to enhance the learning environment.

Students grow and learn when they make mistakes (Boaler, 2016). Cultivating an environment where mistakes are valued and worked through will help promote a deeper understanding in mathematical instruction (Boaler, 2016). Boaler (2016), in her research of the math classroom, stated that inequity is a problem when it comes to teaching and learning. In the United States, there is an elitist culture around teaching and learning where specific groups in math classes are created based on student performance (Boaler, 2016). We also see this in ability-based reading groups. This type of grouping can limit

learning for specific groups of students. When this elitist culture is recognized, and equity is sought, learning can be accessible to all students. One of the six strategies Boaler (2016) highlighted when it comes to teaching equitable [math] is the power of collaboration. When students learn to work well together, there is a much higher mathematical success rate (Boaler, 2016). This collaboration in math has the potential to be cultivated in all subject areas with a student-centered, flexible seating environment.

Success in math has been found to be connected to a few areas of control. First, students need a teacher if they are going to successfully learn mathematics. The teacher sets the tone, the environment, the pace, and the excitement around math (Boaler, 2016). The next thing learners need to be successful in mathematics is a strong curriculum. The topics and activities within curriculum are great supportive resources for the math learning process, and tasks related to the curriculum are part of creating deeper understanding and engagement (Boaler, 2016). In addition to these two areas, the classroom environment has been shown to play a role in overall learning (Dillon, 2018). Just like math, literacy also needs a teacher and supportive classroom environment to be most effective.

Overall, having flexible seating in a student-centered classroom, taught by an effective teacher with a quality curriculum, has the potential to set students up for success. The learning environment of a student-centered class cultivates a safe environment for students to make mistakes and try again, learn by watching their peers, and learn by teaching their peers. The well thought out addition of flexible seating during

instruction has the potential to support a more active learning environment, including group work stations and use of manipulatives in both reading and math.

Discovering the needs of first graders, it can be understood that this age range of students will require guidance while being introduced to a flexible environment. Looking at the specific age level of the students this capstone is focusing on supports the need for the unit plan. Now that the first-grade characteristics, needs, and development, have been laid out, these points will be used to create an effective unit plan for first-graders' learning to use flexible seating.

The Need for a Unit Plan

Just like teaching math or reading, it is important for educators to teach students about flexible seating. Since children have most likely been in classrooms with a traditional seating setup, it's important to note that using flexible seating is not innate. The classroom environment has the potential to support student achievement and positive student behavior (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) expressed the need for teachers to be well informed on how classroom arrangement helps or hinders students' needs. Providing educators with a teaching guide for using flexible seating in their classrooms will be a positive step in supporting students' academic and behavior needs.

Duncanson (2014) expressed the importance for educators to take a look at their classrooms through the eyes of students because of the impact the learning environment has on students. Seating type and arrangement has the potential to impact students' academic development, (Gremmen et al, 2016). Even when educators mean well, their

flexible seating classroom setup and how they implement the flexible seating into their classroom can afford negative results. Educators need to be able to successfully set up their classrooms for student learning and avoid hindering student success. This is an area that educators would glean many benefits from having a teaching guide to support flexible seating implementation.

Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) also pointed out that there is a lack of information for educators to access for the purpose of setting up their classrooms with the most effective seating arrangements. Having resources to reference would benefit teachers on setting up their classrooms in an effective way. Educators teach a variety of subject areas and are supported through this teaching with lesson plans, admin support, and training. Having teaching tools to support the implementation and teaching of environmental flexibility has the potential to increase the effectiveness of flexible seating in the classroom.

Summary

Reviewing flexible seating in relation to conventional seating, student-centered learning, math and reading instruction, and first-grade students' work habits lays the foundation needed for the understanding required to create a useful unit plan. The research available shows that flexible seating has the potential to positively impact student learning, and this project aims to increase the effective use of flexible seating in first-grade classrooms and to support educators in their classroom design.

In Chapter One there was background on why this project is focusing on flexible seating, including my experience with a variety of furniture in elementary classrooms. In Chapter Two there was a literature review on the topics that needed to be highlighted in

order to make this project successful. This included conventional and flexible seating, student-centered learning, first-grade education, and the need for a unit plan. Now, in Chapter Three, there will be an explanation of the research methods. It will explain the project overview, framework, choice of method, setting and audience, the project description, and the timeline. After Chapter Three, in Chapter Four, will be the capstone conclusion and reflection.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

In Chapter One, I shared my experience in education and my own introduction into flexible seating. As described in Chapter Two, seating arrangements and flexible seating in a student-centered classroom have been shown to impact student behavior and achievement (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Due to the impact of flexible seating on learning, and the increase in use of flexible seating in elementary classrooms, I have developed a unit plan to use as a flexible seating teaching guide in first-grade classrooms. This project is in response to my research question: *If elementary school classrooms are provided environmental flexibility, how can teachers effectively implement the flexibility to enhance student attention and work habits?*

With the increased use of flexible seating, teachers and students are experiencing classroom learning in a new way. As previously stated, my district is investing in redesigning schools and classrooms, with a focus on the furniture. Several classrooms have already begun the transition into their flexible environments, and so the need for some guidance, support, and boundaries is high. Teachers and support staff need a unit plan to guide their teaching in the implementation of flexible seating so the students learn how to most effectively use and navigate these new environments. A detailed layout of the two-week unit plan, used to implement flexible seating in a first-grade classroom, will be shared. This unit plan includes when to introduce the flexible environment, how to introduce the use of each flexible option within the classroom, how to set student

expectations in the flexible environment, and how to set student expectations in the flexible environment. Also included is the rationale that supports this project. This chapter will be the outline for the project I completed to address the needs of the teachers and support staff who will be implementing flexible seating into their classrooms. The start of this chapter lays out how I arrived at the need for a teaching guide, or what I am calling a Two-Week Flexible Seating Unit Plan, and my intentions for this guide. Then, I will unfold the project's details including the framework, the choice of method, the setting as well as the project description, and the timeline of the project. I will end this section with a summary of Chapter Three, and information about Chapter Four.

Overview

As you can gather from reading Chapter One and Chapter Two, the benefits of flexible seating have the potential to support students when implemented effectively. As I have navigated using flexible seating on my own, I developed a desire for a teaching tool to effectively implement flexible seating in my classroom. Looking into the research on classrooms with flexible learning environments, brought clarity and awareness to the importance of seating implementation and guidelines. So, this has brought me to creating my own teaching tool, a two-week unit plan for implementing flexible seating into a first-grade classroom.

My goal was to create a useful tool for first-grade teachers to use for an increase of effective use of flexible seating. This tool is in the form of a two-week unit plan. It has been shown that just having environmental flexibility does not increase academic success or an increase in positive behavior; there must be clear expectations on how to use this

new type of furniture. The creation of a unit plan for implementing the use of flexible seating in first-grade classrooms offers a step-by-step guide for educators needing support with introducing flexible seating into their classrooms.

Framework

The framework for this capstone project is guided by the creation of expectations focused on the use of unfamiliar flexible seating furniture. With little teacher tools focused on the implementation of flexible seating, the framework is all about getting students familiar with a new classroom setting that does not fall in line with traditional classrooms. Using resources created for classrooms, the unit plan focuses on three things:

- Consistency – Wong and Wong (2009) shared that an important teacher focus during the first week of school is to provide students with consistency. Students tend to be more successful when the classroom is well structured and where procedures are predictable. In the CCC Collaborative Literacy curriculum, specifically the *Being a Reader Teacher's Manual* (2016), the goal is to begin by building structure and then moving into fostering independence. When there is consistency in the classroom and in the instruction, and students have begun working independently, students develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning (CCC Collaborative Literacy: Being a Reader, 2016).
- Student-centered learning – The classroom environment should reinforce the learning model of the classroom. Espey (2008) pointed out the importance of the connections between seating and learning. Movable furniture is needed for ease of transition into groups and individual work spaces. Student-centered learning,

requiring hands on lessons, may have less teacher direction, but clear expectations are still required.

- Classroom management – Wong and Wong (2009) stressed the need for effective classroom management so that student learning can take place. Classroom management supports student learning by organizing students, lessons, the classroom, and time (Wong & Wong, 2009). Consistency is part of classroom management, such as procedures and routines. In addition, student involvement and furniture arrangement are important (Wong & Wong, 2009). In order for flexible seating to be successful, teachers will need to have effective classroom management skills.

The unit plan provides teachers with a standards based plan to implement flexible seating. There are first-grade standards that will be covered by this unit plan. They are listed here:

- 1.1.1.1.1 Demonstrate ways good citizens participate in the civic life of their community; explain why participation is important. For example: Ways to participate—pick up trash in the park, vote, help make class decisions.
- 1.1.4.7.1 Identify characteristics of effective rules; participate in a process to establish rules. For example: Characteristics of effective rules—fair, understandable, enforceable, connected to goals.

The learning targets based on the MN standards included in the unit plan are:

- Students will participate in making and agreeing to classroom flexible furniture arrangement.

- Students will be able to safely use each piece of flexible seating and know the variety of ways each piece of flexible seating can be used and why.
- Students will be able to decide and choose independently what seating choice is best for them depending on what they are working on and how they feel.

Choice of Method

This capstone project is a two-week unit plan for the purpose of supporting educators in the implementation of flexible seating into their classrooms. The unit plan focuses on setting expectations, building student confidence, and practicing the flexible seating expectations to build positive classroom habits. The images included in this unit plan serve as a visual for students as well as extra support of any English language learners in the classroom.

Setting and Audience

This curriculum has been designed for first-grade teachers who are implementing flexible seating into their classrooms. The curriculum can be used at an inner city school, or a rural school; the expectation is that the educators who teach this unit plan in their classrooms will be teaching students of any background the use and expectations surrounding flexible seating. The curriculum has visuals included for English language learners, as well as vocabulary support.

The unit plan was designed by a teacher who currently works in a first ring suburb of a metropolitan area. This past school year, her first-grade classroom consisted of 26 students, 13 boys and 13 girls. Twenty-four of the students attended kindergarten at the school, and two students transferred in from other schools in the area. The demographics

of the students are as follows: 61.5% White, 23% two or more races, 7.7% Asian, 3.8% Black, and 3.8% Hispanic. Of the 26 students, 15% receive English language support, 3.8% are on individual education plans (IEP), and 7.7% receive speech services. During the school year, one Hispanic child moved out of the district, and one student who was two or more races transferred classrooms.

The school itself houses students in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. There are five sections of each grade, kindergarten through sixth, except for fourth grade with four sections. Each class has 22 to 29 students, with around 790 students (not including pre-K). The student population is diverse in that some come from low-income households, middle and upper class households, different racial backgrounds, and a variety of family dynamics. About half of the students enrolled at this school are open-enrolled from other districts.

Project Description

The capstone project includes two weeks of instruction, a unit plan, on implementing flexible seating in a first-grade classroom. Each week consists of three 20-minute lessons and two 10-minute lessons, for a total of 10 lessons. It is suggested to start the lessons on the first day of using flexible seating. A sample schedule would suggest teaching the longer lessons on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday each week, and the shorter lessons on Tuesday and Thursday. If that is not possible, it is acceptable to change the schedule to something that would work better for your classroom. It would also be beneficial to support learning flexible seating at other learning times. This can be

done by adding in reminders of the learned expectations of flexible seating before students transition to using the furniture.

The instruction focuses on three key components during each lesson: consistency, student-centered learning, and classroom management. Each lesson has a lot of repetition, movement and practice, and sharing of expectations. To support these components, the unit plan includes visuals to support student learning.

Prior to beginning the unit plan, teachers are suggested to give students a short pre-assessment to gain an understanding of any prior knowledge students may be bringing to the learning environment. In addition, each lesson has a way to assess the students' learning. These assessments are mainly formative assessments, and student observation is important. Included in the unit plan is also a mid-unit assessment to check for any reteaching needs. There is also a post unit plan assessment to address any final learning gaps.

Timeline

The expectation would be for this unit plan to be implemented and taught at the start of using flexible seating. The flexible environment might be set up at the beginning of the school year, and if this is the case, then this is when the unit plan should begin. If flexible seating is not used at the start of the year and is obtained at a later date in the school year, this unit plan is designed to be able to be used at that time as well.

Implementation of flexible seating with the unit plan on day one helps to prevent students and educators from feeling a lack of direction in the classroom with furniture they may be unfamiliar with. Once teaching of the lessons has begun, it is suggested to follow a

Monday through Friday schedule for the two weeks. Adjust as needed. Extension lessons have suggested days, but this too is flexible. If reteaching is necessary, additional days of teaching can be added. The assessments each day will help determine if reteaching would be beneficial.

Summary

The Two-Week Flexible Seating Unit Plan is designed to support educators and students in using flexible seating in a way that best supports a positive learning environment. Students need structure, and this unit plan guides teachers on implementing flexible seating in throughout two weeks. With the increase in environmental flexibility in my district, this project will be a welcomed tool in the first-grade classrooms, and could also be the start to a more comprehensive teaching plan.

In Chapter One, the background on why this capstone's focus is on flexible seating was laid out. In Chapter Two, the Literature Review, the topics that needed to be highlighted in order to make this project successful were shared. Now, in Chapter Three, project details were given. It explained the project overview, framework, choice of method, setting and audience, the project description, and the timeline. Next, in Chapter Four, will be the conclusion and review of the project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

In Chapter One I shared an overview of my experience in education and my own introduction into flexible seating. Chapter Two was the literature review that laid out the research surrounding seating arrangements and flexible seating in a student-centered classroom and the impact those have on student behavior and achievement. Chapter Three presented the information on the unit plan to be used as a flexible-seating teaching guide in first-grade classrooms. It laid out how this tool relates to the impact of flexible seating on learning and the increase in use of flexible seating in elementary classrooms. This capstone project is in response to my research question: *If elementary school classrooms are provided environmental flexibility, how can teachers effectively implement the flexibility to enhance student attention and work habits?* Lastly, Chapter Four lays out my reflections on the Two-Week Flexible Seating Unit Plan, including what I learned, what parts of my literature review were the most important, and the benefits this project will provide to the teaching profession.

The success of flexible seating is reliant on the implementation of the flexible environment within the classroom. The impact flexible seating has on student work habits will be benefited by educator investment and teaching. Throughout the district I currently work in, classrooms are being funded to be rooms designed with the latest in innovative student work spaces. Even in receiving this flexible seating for their classrooms, educators are provided with little guidance for implementing the flexible seating into

their teaching and curriculum. For this reason, teachers and educators participating in the flexible seating investment will benefit from the use of the Two-Week Flexible Seating Unit Plan created for this capstone.

Project Reflection

Throughout the work on my capstone, I had learnings both through the creation of my project and through the writing of my capstone. The work invested in the capstone gave me a deeper understanding of student-centered learning and brought clarity to the development age stage of a first grader. I will bring these learnings with me as I implement the unit plan in my classroom

The work I put in on the capstone writing supported learning that is connected to my research question: If elementary school classrooms are provided environmental flexibility, how can teachers effectively implement the flexibility to enhance student attention and work habits? Learning more deeply about student-centered learning and first-grade education highlighted student attention and work habits. I learned that students at this age-level are best supported through active learning. The active learning enhances student attention. When looking at the work habits in student-centered learning for first graders, the classroom environment will likely look different from a traditional classroom. I learned that as an educator, allowing student movement and collaboration, work habits of first graders might look different, but student work habits are supported. I also had some take-aways from creating my capstone project.

During the project creation, my big learning was with the writing portion of the unit plan. This was my first time diving into a subject area and writing lesson plans.

Creating a curriculum challenged me in a new way. Writing curriculum was a change from writing the Literature Review, or even the other chapters of my capstone. First, I worked on formatting a unit plan to ensure ease of flow and use. I used *The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2011) to direct my work. I've taught from a curriculum that was not well laid out, making it hard to navigate. So, I worked to create a curriculum that would be easy for educators to use or reference when needed. Next, I began creating user-friendly days within the unit plan. In my experience, I have enjoyed using curriculum books from The Center for the Collaborative Classroom, so I used their *Being a Reader Teacher Manual* (2016) to support my unit plan creation. In addition to the formatting, being sure to create clear and concise learning targets in line with the standards was important. The learning targets were helpful in acting like a guide to my writing. Overall, I learned a lot while creating this flexible seating curriculum.

Revisiting the Literature Review

Thinking back to the literature review of this capstone project, the Student-Centered Learning section, as well as the First-Grade Education section, played a large part in guiding the writing and creation of my project. Student-centered learning was important to keep in the forefront of my planning to be sure that each lesson was active and provided students with hands-on learning. Looking back at the literature review, Rao, Slovin, Zenigami, and Black (2017) impacted my lesson planning by keeping in mind the importance of not just transferring information to the students. Student-centered learning is an active learning process, and I wanted the first-graders to

be moving and talking, especially with each other. I also found it important that Rao et al. (2017) pointed out that students learn by being reflective. Because of this, I wanted to be mindful about having students reflect on their learning regularly. The First-Grade Education section also supported these important points.

As I was writing the lesson plans for this project, I also kept my audience in mind. The First-Grade Education section played a large role in guiding my project creation. During each step of creating each lesson, I thought of Berry Wilson's (2011) research and how it should be taken into consideration in a project like this. The unit plan needed to be relevant for first grade, and knowing where first graders are at developmentally is imperative for this process. This project made me think about the need for hands-on learning, and how students at this age are still developing their body control as stated in my literature review. Knowing that first graders are very active offered me knowledge to use in creating the unit plan. Overall, all the parts of my Literature Review were really beneficial to this project because creating my unit plan required me to have a clear understanding of both conventional and flexible seating, student-centered learning, and first-grade education. Even with this information, I ran into some limitations in creating my unit plan.

Limitations

In creating this project, it was a challenge to clearly create lesson plans that could be used to support the variety of flexible seating that is offered for classrooms to invest in. There was difficulty in not knowing what specific furniture teachers and staff will be using. If I had that information I feel like I could have gotten more creative with photos

and videos to include in the unit plan. This would have benefited this project by providing a unit plan with less prep-work for the educators. I worry that without providing completed videos and useful photos that some educators may skip over this part of the unit plan because of the added prep-work. This was not the only area of limitation for this project.

This project was created during the summer while I did not have students in the classroom. This felt a bit frustrating to me. Not having my students to be involved in this process and not having my flexible furniture to use as examples in creating a video and safe and unsafe examples was a limitation in this project. I feel like I could have even possibly made a sample video and sample photos to use as guides to offer more support to educators who will be making their own. In addition to the limitations of this project, I also reflected on what a possible follow-up project could be.

This particular project is also limited by only focusing on one grade level, first grade. As a follow-up to this project, a possible future research project could focus on implementing flexible seating into more grade levels. For example, in a follow-up project, I would love to create a unit plan for each grade level in our school, grades kindergarten through sixth grade. Having this project available in schools would potentially offer educators in the building cohesiveness in teaching student about the effective use of flexible seating. However, this project is focused on benefiting first-grade students and teachers, and having a plan to get this unit plan to those teachers is a start to providing them with support they may need in the beginning to use flexible seating in their classrooms.

Communicating the Results

This project will initially be shared with my teaching team – five first-grade teachers, including me. Sharing the project with my team will not only provide support for us as teachers, but it will potentially put us all on the same page. Our students switch classrooms for health, science, and social studies lessons throughout the year. Having each teacher educating students on flexible seating in our first-grade classrooms will provide students with what they need to be successful with the furniture in each classroom. If this approach proves to be successful, the project could be shared with the first-grade teachers in the entire district. I would like to wait to share this project with the district to see if the initial implementation in my building is a success, or if there are any major things that should be changed. If using this project in my own building and in my district proves to be beneficial, this project would be a benefit the teaching profession.

Benefits to the Profession

There are definite benefits that could come out of this project. The possible benefits to the profession include a more successful use of the flexible seating the district is investing in. The district has taken a risk in the large investment in funding to outfit the many classrooms. There was an initial hope for teacher support in this process. The intention was good – the district was planning to provide educators with an option to partake in a flexible seating cohort. This cohort didn't end up being provided for whatever reason. Because educators with the flexible seating haven't received this support, my project, if provided to the teachers, could be used in its place or even in addition to any future cohort. The results of using this project in first-grade classrooms

would benefit the flexible seating classrooms by increasing the success of the environmental flexibility.

Final Conclusion

This capstone project is the final step in completing my Masters of Art in Teaching degree from Hamline University. This capstone project was written and designed in response to my research question: *If elementary school classrooms are provided environmental flexibility, how can teachers effectively implement the flexibility to enhance student attention and work habits?* Through the work on this project, I can confirm that with proper implementation, within flexible learning environments, teachers have the ability to enhance student attention and work habits by knowing their students developmental stage and by using a student-centered learning approach. To support teachers in effectively guiding students in a classroom with flexible seating, I created a unit plan for the implementation of flexible seating.

Throughout Chapter Four, I reviewed my capstone project by reflecting on what I learned, limitations I discovered, thoughts on a follow-up project, and how my project will help the teaching profession. The overall success of environmental flexibility can be supported by this capstone project.

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