RESEARCH PROJECT

APPROACHES FOR MODIFYING THE PHYSICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

By

Presented to the Department of Education
of Eastern Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Education

July 12, 2010
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Chapter 1

Background

Having been a substitute teacher for five years—having visiting dozens of school buildings and hundreds of different classrooms—I have witnessed first-hand the effects made upon students by the physical elements of their learning environment.

Some of these effects were awe-inspiring, as they were at a mountain-top elementary school in Missoula, Montana, where enormous windows flooded the classroom with sunlight, allowing students to see for miles without interruption and to ponder their city’s relationship to the rugged natural environment. From this classroom a teacher could easily point to a spot on a distant mountain and explain that thousands of years ago glacial Lake Missoula had filled the valley with aquatic life instead of people. As if from a scene out of Disney, deer and other critters from the adjacent wilderness (including a brown bear one morning) often wandered into the playground before being scared off by the recess bell.

At the bottom of the Missoula valley, however, at a different school—one which bordered a commercial highway—I also served time filling in for a resource teacher. My room was in the middle of wide, flat building, and therefore it had no windows on its grey brick walls. I taught a small roster, just ten students per period, but my room was merely a quarter of the size of a regular classroom. Buzzing florescent lights made everyone who entered the room look sickly and yellow. Not surprisingly, it was nearly impossible to motivate my students (who already faced many challenges with learning) to focus on their schoolwork. More than half of them spent the period coughing and wheezing into the stagnant air. After one day of subbing in that room I got sick and missed a week of school.
Although teachers are rarely allowed to hand-pick the environments within which they teach, all educators must acknowledge that these settings greatly influence the effectiveness of their lessons and the health and happiness of their students. Furthermore, modifications can be made to any classroom to improve learning and comfort—no matter how uninspired its original architectural design. Teachers must be intentional with the choices they make regarding lighting, desk arrangement, color scheme and ambient sound in their classrooms. Failure to do so would be a failure to reach the full learning potential of their classrooms.

Significance of This Study

Education always happens in a place—whether that place is outdoors, in a school basement or at home with a computer on the student’s lap. Therefore, the importance of the physical learning environment cannot be overstated. It may be tempting for over-worked teachers to take the physical elements of their classrooms for granted. After all, there are no state standards mandating a certain number of windows in a classroom. Curriculum designs rarely call for teachers to repaint the walls light blue, turn off the florescent lights and turn on reading lamps. Students are expected to pay attention to the white board no matter where they are seated. Teachers should focus on learning, plain and simple.

The physical classroom, however, has everything to do with learning. Ignoring its effects can add to students’ difficulties with curriculum content. An ill-conceived classroom make-up can passively cause discomfort, boredom, tiredness and aggression. On the other hand, teachers who intentionally modify their classrooms can expect to see gains in engagement, interaction, cooperation and self-motivation (Rosenfeld, 1977). Quite simply, the alteration of the physical elements of the classroom is one more tool to promote student learning.
Much research has already been done to identify the positive and negative effects of classroom elements. Some of these findings are alarming: 99% of middle school students cannot find desks and chairs which appropriately fit their changing bodies (Cotton, 2002). Some are surprising: The gap in performance between high-achieving and under-achieving gifted students could be closed through environmental modifications to classroom sound and lighting (Rayneri, Gerber & Wiley, 2003). Others are practical, simple to execute and show immediate results: If students in the back row of desks present behavior challenges, the teacher can divide the classroom into two halves and teach from the middle (Hood-Smith, 1983).

Given our constant interaction with the physical elements of our classrooms and school buildings, it is nearly impossibly to identify anyone for whom more knowledge on this topic would not be beneficial. Students will appreciate the added comfort and engagement with their learning material. Happier students will result in fewer discipline issues for teachers and administrators. If students are allowed to take more ownership of their learning environments (by taking part of the classroom modification process), they will treat these spaces with more care and respect—to the delight of custodians, librarians and technology specialists. Having personally altered their classrooms for the specific learning goals of their content areas, teachers will also feel more ownership in their overall instruction.

As an architecture major in college, the relationships between people and the buildings they inhabit have always been fascinating to me. Specifically, I loved studying environments which balance aesthetics with practical use—those which inspired people to action, and then make that action as easy as possible. When I become a teacher, my room will function in this way. Using the knowledge I have gained from studying the effects of the physical classroom environment, I will assess the space I have been assigned, and, in conjunction with the learning
goals of my curriculum, I will modify my classroom to best meet the needs of myself and my students.

Area of Focus

The purpose of this project is to identify the elements of the physical classroom which affect student learning, behavior, safety and comfort, and to examine how educators may modify these elements to reach the full potential of their individual learning environments.

Research Questions

- What elements of the physical classroom most affect student learning and behavior?
- How can teachers best modify their classrooms using only existing resources?
- How can the classroom be modified for students of different learning modalities, achievement levels and special needs?
- What physical considerations must be made for new technology in the classroom?
- How can I integrate physical classroom elements into my future teaching?

Possible Limitations

- Teachers have little choice over the existing architecture of their classrooms.
- Physical modifications often require funding and resources which may not be provided by the school administration, thus causing a financial strain on individual teachers choosing to make those changes themselves.
- The culture of a school building or district may not be open to progressive alterations to a classroom.
Administrators and fellow teachers may insist on unity among classrooms.

Funding and resources may be limited.

Unfamiliar practices (playing music, turning off lights, going outdoors during class time, allowing high volumes of classroom traffic, etc.) may be prohibited.

Definition of Terminology

- Learning environment: Anywhere learning takes place (classrooms, hallways, libraries, playgrounds, etc.).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In addition to curriculum, assessment, classroom management, and a host of other daily concerns, the effect of the physical classroom on students is also a major factor in their academic performance, behavior and health. Upon being given a room assignment, a K – 12 teacher should ask: How can I best utilize the existing classroom environment to ensure the physical and mental well being of my students, while also creating an environment which is conducive to their learning? To help teachers answer this question, this chapter will review research studies and scholarly articles regarding the arrangement of desks in the classroom, the consequences of inappropriately sized classroom furniture for growing adolescents, the effects of specific classroom elements (such as artificial and day lighting, size of meeting place, cleanliness and exposure to ambient noise) on student well being and performance, and the use of technology in the modern classroom.

Considerations for Desks in the Classroom

In their article, “Desk Arrangement Effects on Pupil Classroom Behavior,” Rosenfield, Lambert and Black (1985) studied six 5th and 6th grade classrooms to determine which desk arrangement model produced the most “on-task” behavior during class discussions: rows (4 rows of desk running front to back), clusters (arbitrarily arranged groups of 2 to 8 desks) or a circle (all desks arranged in one circle). Within each classroom, the researchers observed eight students: four boys and four girls. Also equally represented among the eight students were high ability, low ability, high interacting and low interacting learners. Each classroom was observed for an equal period of time using all three desk arrangement models. While the teachers conducted full-class discussion about brainstorming ideas for a writing assignments, the
researchers tallied occurrences of on-task behavior among students, such as speaking, discussing, hand-raising and listening, and off-task behavior, such as insulting and teasing, yelling, fighting and withdrawal responses.

The circle desk arrangement model produced the highest frequency of on-task behavior, as well as the lowest frequency of off-task behavior, and the row desk arrangement model produced the highest rates off-task behavior and the lowest rates of on-task behavior. Therefore, Rosenfield et al. (1985) recommended, "Teachers who wish to facilitate pupil interaction during discussion sessions would be wise to consider arranging desks in circles" (p. 106). Interestingly, the circle arrangement resulted in less hand-raising and more "on-task out-of-order" comments (speaking without first being prompted by the teacher), suggesting a more student-regulated classroom discussion.

Holley and Stelner's 2005 study also found benefits of the circular desk arrangement in encouraging students to share their perspectives with the class. When given a survey about their preferences for the classroom environment, a majority of 121 baccalaureate students indicated that a circular desk arrangement not only made students feel safer to share their opinions, but also made students feel more challenged. Additionally, Holley and Stelner (2005) asserted that how safe students feel in the classroom has a positive impact on their learning—both learning from other students and the teacher.

Conversely, a striking feature of the row arrangement model in the Rosenfield et al. study (1985) was the high rate of student withdrawal from the discussion. This finding can be looked at in conjunction with a study by Dykman and Reis (1979), who also studied student seating in rows. Rather than focus on the effect of desk arrangement on classroom discussion, they attempted to discern if a student's seating choice could help predict qualities of his or her self-
concept. Each of the nine classrooms they observed had 25 to 35 students. Each student was allowed to choose their own seat from a 5 by 6 desk grid. The students then filled out a questionnaire which the researchers used to assessed their self-concepts in four areas: peer, parent-home, academic and general. In their findings, Dykman and Reis (1979) stated that “students possessing personality traits indicative of feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy showed a marked tendency to be located in the rear and far-side regions of the classroom” (p. 352). Therefore, careful observation of student seating in the row desk arrangement model could help teachers identify students with poor self-concepts. A teacher hoping to coordinate the results of both studies on desk arrangement might seek further research on the effects of placing students with poor self-concepts in circle seating arrangements.

Kitagawa’s 1998 study focused on using student seating choice to predict behavior. In the study, 151 female junior college students completed a questionnaire regarding their seating preferences based a classroom with traditional rows of desks. Based on the findings, Kitagawa (1998) divided the classroom into four zones within which the students were found to have distinct characteristics. The front two rows of seats—regarded as “action seats,” where eager students sat—were contrasted with the rear two rows, which were populated with less motivated students (p. 45). The students who chose seats in the center of the seating arrangement had the best accomplishment rates, but also sought anonymity. The left and right side columns of seats felt removed from the teacher, as they could easily avoid the teacher’s eye contact. Kitagawa (1998) suggests that the four zone structure is a useful way for teachers to understand students’ personalities and characteristics.

However, Daly and Suite’s 1981 study—which investigated the impact of seat position on teachers’ initial judgments of students—warned that predicting student characteristics based
on seat preference could say more about the teacher than it does about the students. The teachers in this study made evaluations of students based on a seating chart with three pieces of data for each student: seat chosen, sex and grade level. Not surprisingly, the study found that students sitting forward in the classroom were regarded more positively than those sitting the back. The study also discovered, however, that high-anxiety teachers saw large differences in the characters of students sitting in the front and the back, whereas low-anxiety teachers saw small differences. Therefore, while it may be useful for teachers to anticipate certain student behaviors in specific areas of the classroom, Daly and Suite (1981) suggest that teachers should be careful not to judge students before those actual behaviors occur.

Hood-Smith and Leffingwell’s 1983 case study assessed the effects of desk arrangement on disruptive classroom behavior. The dependent variable in this study was classroom desk arrangement, and the independent variable was student behavior. The subjects were high school social studies students from a single classroom. The findings of the study were based upon observations performed before and after a specific alteration in desk arrangement. The data collected during these observations included instances of “actions zones” (high instances of off-task traffic between desks), classroom noise, one-to-one student-teacher contact and student work time.

The desks were initially configured in a “traditional” manner—six rows of six desks each—with the teacher’s desk at the front of the room. Hood-Smith and Leffingwell’s study (1983) found that, in this arrangement, the rear of the classroom was a near constant action zone, with students seated in these desks receiving low levels of teacher contact and spending less time on school work (when compared with students seated at the front of the room). After the desk alteration, which split the classroom into two halves—and which placed the teacher’s desk in the
middle of the room—action zones were nearly eliminated, and student-teacher contact and class work time increased for the classroom as a whole. Hood-Smith and Leffingwell’s (1983) findings support those of Rosenfield et al. (1985): classroom desk alteration can have an immediate and profound impact on student behavior.

Another consideration for teachers is whether or not their classroom furniture is appropriate for the age, sex and ethnicity of their students. In a 2002 study, Cotton, O’Connell, Palmer and Ruland took measurements of 211 sixth, seventh and eighth graders and their classroom furniture to determine if the students and the furniture were a good fit. They also looked at the sex and ethnicity of the students, identifying them as Caucasian-American, Mexican-American or African-American. The pieces of furniture studied were the three most common desk-chair combinations from eight local school districts.

Looking solely at the anatomical measurements of the students, Cotton et al. (2002) found that African-American students were generally taller than Caucasian-American and Mexican-American students, and that the greatest height difference between the sexes occurred in eighth grade, when most boys had entered pubescence. Comparing these measurements with the measurements of the classroom furniture shockingly revealed that 99% of the student sample could not find a desk at an appropriate height for their elbows. In general, each of the three designs was too tall for middle schoolers. This should be a major concern for middle school teachers; the study advises that ergonomically designed work stations can promote both anatomical alignment and “on-task behavior” (p. 276). Because middle level students are characterized by their rapid physical growth, and because of natural differences in height among ethnicities and boys and girls, teachers may consider utilizing adjustable desks, chairs and tables for their classrooms, a suggestion made by Saarni, Nygard, Kaukiainen and Rimpela (2007).
In Saarni’s et al. study (2007), sixth and eighth graders in Finland, and their classroom furniture, were measured in a similar fashion to that of the Cotton et al. study (2002). Saarni et al. (2007) also found classroom furniture which was ill-suited for middle schoolers’ bodies. Additionally, they video-recorded the students using the desks and chairs, and discovered that, more often and not, students sat with their backs, necks or arms in contorted positions, which were disadvantageous for health and learning.

Burke and Burke-Samidé’s 2004 article gave a similar warnings about the incompatibility of classroom furniture and students’ bodies. Traditional chairs concentrate 75 percent of a student’s weight on 4 square inches of bone, often causing weariness, discomfort and frequent postural changes. The article suggested that uncomfortable seating could be responsible for disruptive behavior, such as students falling out of chairs and lying on the floor during class time. Burke and Burke-Samide advise teachers to not solely blame students for such erratic behavior, as “students should not be expected to change their environmental preferences or to learn regardless of them” (p. 238). Instead, teachers should open to physical solutions, such as allowing students more movement through the classroom and alternative seating choices.

Al-Haboubi’s 2000 study assessed different sections of a rectangular classroom based on students’ ability to view the white board from each section. The independent variables were distance from the board and the angle at which students faced the board. The dependent variable was students’ accuracy in copying information from the board. Perhaps predictably, Al-Haboubi’s study (2000) found that the middle of the room—neither too close, nor too far back—was most advantageous for copying information from a white board. Alarmingly, however, fifty percent of students observed were seated in locations inappropriate for copying information. Teachers who spend much class time with a white board would be wise to arrange desks in the
middle of the room, with as few students as possible seated at the edges—especially those students for whom copying down information is already a challenge.

Another consideration for the placement of students throughout the room is that of hypnotic susceptibility. According to Sackheim, Paulhus and Weiman’s 1979 study, hypnotic susceptibility (in this case, the likelihood that a student will become unintentionally hypnotized while listening to the teacher) is based upon students’ lateral seating preference in coordination with their handedness (whether students write with their left of right hand). In the study, 64 undergraduate students identified their handedness, seating preference and were given the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Test. The findings yielded two useful pieces of information for classroom teachers. First, right-handed people who sat on the right side of a classroom were more prone to hypnosis than if they were seated on the left (as were left-handed people sitting on the left side of a room). Secondly, and perhaps more surprisingly, a large percentage of students preferred sitting in a location where they were more susceptible to hypnosis. Therefore, teachers looking to experiment with “awakening” a drowsy class could use this information when creating a seating chart.

Considerations for Classroom Lighting and Sound

A teacher’s desire to play music in the classroom has often considered a personal preference. However, there are indications that music can have a positive effect on student performance. Foran’s 2009 article suggests that music therapy—especially for students who have experienced trauma—can enhance emotional regulation and improve learning. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be debilitating for students, causing symptoms of dissociation, amnesia, flooding of memories and feelings, flashbacks, inability to plan for the future, poor self-
esteem and self-mutilation. Music, argues Foran (2009) can help establish emotional regulation. Tapping one’s foot while listening to familiar music increases brain activity by helping parts of the brain function that previously had been inert. Foran (2009) offers the following suggestions for teachers who would like to use music in the classroom:

- Choose music with a predictable beat.
- Start the day with 3 to 5 minutes of classical music.
- Play music during math lessons.
- Practice reading with music.

Although especially useful for students with PTSD, music in the classroom can help all students “manage their emotional responses when they are asked to focus their attention, call up relevant memories, and make associations in order to learn” (p. 57-58).

Rosenfeld’s 1977 article, *Theory Into Practice*, gave a comprehensive overview of the environmental modifications—such as music and lighting—teachers can make to their classrooms for the comfort and mental well-being of their students. Music in the learning environment, noted Rosenfeld (1977), increases production, reduces errors, tension and absenteeism. Physically, it can change blood rate, heart rate, blood pressure, respiration and muscle relaxation. Rosenfeld suggested music can be used strategically to combat mid-morning and mid-afternoon fatigue.

Rosenfeld (1977) also suggested that teachers consider the use of lighting to influence the mood and behavior of their classrooms. Light should fall on objects or spheres of activity which people look at—such as the front of the room, if the teacher is instructing, or group-work areas—but quiet spots should receive little light. Reading areas should have a flexible light source, one
which can be directed and focused on the pages of a text. Lastly, teachers should be careful not to juxtapose vast differences in light (such as placing a quiet spot next to a group-work area).

A classroom’s lighting can also play a major role in the physical development and academic performance of students. In his 1995 study, W. E. Hathaway compared four common light bulbs found in classrooms (full spectrum fluorescent lamps, with and without ultraviolet light supplements, cool white fluorescent lamps and high-pressure sodium vapor lamps), measuring their non-visual effects (their effects aside from the intensity of light produced). Over two years he studied the dental records, physical height, school attendance and academic achievement of 233 students as they moved from 4th to 6th grade. His findings indicated that full spectrum fluorescent lamps in general had the most positive association with attendance and academic performance: students got higher grades and they had fewer absences per year. Full spectrum fluorescent lamps with ultraviolet light supplements resulted in students getting fewer cavities and having the highest rates of physical growth. Alarmingly, high-pressure sodium vapor lamps, which are often found in newer schools, produced the poorest attendance, the lowest academic achievement, the worst dental records and the smallest gains in height. Although Hathaway (1995) admits that the full risks and benefits associated with each light bulb are still unclear, teachers would be wise to become knowledgeable about the light bulbs used in their classrooms.

Lighting was one of several classroom elements focused upon in a 2003 study conducted by Rayneri, Gerber and Wiley which sought to better understand the effects of learning environment on two groups of gifted students: those who achieved their potential and those under-achievers. The subjects of this study were 62 gifted middle school students divided into “under achieving” and “high achieving” groups. Rayneri et al. (2003) had these students
complete a self-report instrument, from which the authors deduced the students’ preferred learning environment. Under-achieving gifted students generally preferred low classroom lighting and more sound in the learning environment, while high achieving gifted students preferred more lighting and less sound. Perhaps the most useful finding from Rayneri’s et al. study (2003) was that both groups of gifted students resoundingly preferred an environment which allowed them to move freely about the classroom while working. If teachers have noticed a gifted student who is performing lower than expected, Rayneri et al. (2003) suggested these teachers research and enquire into the learning styles of these under achieving students, asserting that “teachers cannot know what works best if they do not know their students’ optimal learning styles” (p. 203). Modifications in lighting and sound could help make the difference for students struggling to reach their potential.

Although some students in Rayneri’s et al. study (2003) preferred the presence of sound in their learning environment, Hygge and Hogsoklan’s 2003 study measured the negative effects of ambient sound on student recall and recognition. In ten noise experiments performed on 1358 middle schoolers, Hygge and Hogsoklan (2003) measured the influence of various sounds (aircraft, road traffic, train noise and verbal noise) to determine how they affected recognition and recall (“a deeper level of mental processing”) of material the students had read during the experiment, as well as which type of sound caused the greatest and least distraction (p. 896). Aircraft sounds resulted in the greatest loss of recall and recognition, whereas train noise caused the least. Surprisingly, in some cases train noise resulted in higher instances of recognition. Hygge and Hogsoklan (2003) also found that noise interruption had a lasting effect on student effort and concentration; for up to ten minutes after the noise had occurred, they observed a drop in student effort during their reading. This information could be useful for teachers forced to deal
with noisy interruptions during their class periods. Rather than simply pushing forward with their lesson after a plane flies low over the school building, a teacher might test the effectiveness of reviewing important material that could have been lost during the distraction.

On a final note about sounds, Burke and Burke-Samide (2004) warn teachers that girls can hear more distinctly at an earlier age than boys. Girls can be more sensitive to sounds, and can occasionally hear sounds which boys cannot. Therefore, teachers would be wise to distance sensitive girls from energetic, vocal boys.

Considerations for Classroom Design

It is no secret that some school buildings feel more inviting to their occupants than other school buildings. In a 2008 study, C. K. Tanner sought to discover if certain design elements of a school building could also promote learning. He observed 24 elementary schools, recording data about their physical design, paying special attention to personal space and uninterrupted movement, large group meeting places (more than just the cafeteria and gymnasium, but interior and exterior spaces which allow for discussion as well as quiet thinking), day lighting and views, and classrooms which promote a variety of modes of instruction (including large and small group work, and wet areas for art). Tanner (2008) also looked at the 3rd grade ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) scores, and discovered, perhaps not surprisingly, that all of the elements listed above were linked to academic achievement. Although Tanner (2008) warns that his findings did not determine a causal relationship, merely an association, teachers have long inferred, for instance, that having a room with windows is better for their students’ learning than having no windows at all. When a new school building is being designed, teachers would be wise to combine their own
common sense with research, and to give their input to those whose decisions will impact their teaching environment for years to come.

In his 1977 article, Rosenfeld found that students in schools which intentionally utilized color showed the greatest improvements in positive social habits. Based upon the needs of the classroom’s learning activity, teachers can use color to alter student’s perceptions of the learning environment. Maroon and pink, for instance, make small rooms appear larder. Green and blue make large rooms feel smaller. Red increases excitement, whereas green increases relaxation. Color can help students feel pride for their school, and it can help decrease behavior problems.

Morales’s 1982 article describes how wall posters can be used for effective classroom management. The author suggests following several steps in creating posters whose purpose is explaining classroom rules. First, there should be as few rules as possible described in the posters—only those covering the four basic classroom behaviors: movement, noise, attention to the teacher, and interactions between students. Next, make an individual poster for each rule, and, within each poster, have one visual clue (for example, the rule “raise your hand” will include an image of a boy raising his hand). Post only the rules that will be observed during the lesson, and refer to those rules at the beginning of the lesson. Teachers must also give verbal approval to the students who follow the rules. Lastly, Morales (1982) urges teachers to be consistent in using the posters and giving approval, and to not fear being redundant in either case.

There are many other important aspects of the classroom environment which are within the teacher’s control. In a 1994 study, Y. C. Cheng examined questionnaires given to 21,622 mostly sixth graders in Hong Kong. The questionnaires asked the students to describe specific elements of their classrooms, their teachers and their personal attitudes on a 5-point scale. Cheng
(1994) studied students' responses regarding self concept, attitudes toward peers, teachers and school, and efficacy of learning, in order to group classrooms into two groups: “Effective classrooms” (which scored in the top 30% on Cheng’s questionnaire) and “ineffective classrooms” (which scored in the bottom 30%). “Effective classrooms” were perceived to have a comfortable amount of space, be equipped with appropriate physical facilities, and to be neat, clean and free of pollution. Although other common aspects of “effective classrooms” were also found—such as having a considerate class master and having positive interactions with teacher and peers—Cheng asserts that his findings “show that the physical environment and the psychological environment are both important” to student affective performance (p. 237). Therefore, keeping a clean and organized classroom should not be ignored as a frivolous concern in teachers’ efforts to promote student learning.

Classroom temperature is another physical element which teachers can often adjust. In their 2006 study, Wargocki and Wyon tested changes in outdoor air supply rate and classroom temperatures, and their effect on student test scores. The study compared 10 to 12 year-old children in six classrooms. The outdoor air supply rate for each room was increased (using the school’s ventilation system) from 3 liters/second to 9.5 liters/second (meaning that more than three times as much outdoor air was being circulated through the classroom as before the change). The classroom temperature was also decreased from 77 degrees Fahrenheit to 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Wargocki and Wyon (2006) found that the changes resulted in students working quicker and committing fewer errors. When comparing their results to the results of similar tests conducted on adults in office spaces, the authors discovered that, in general, school children are more susceptible to environmental conditions than office-working adults. They concluded that “improving [air quality and temperature] should be given as much priority as
teaching materials and methods” (27). Although most teachers do not have control over the amount of fresh air in their classrooms (beyond opening a window or two), it would be worth while for teachers to investigate their school building’s practice of circulating outdoor air.

Liu’s 2001 study also discussed the effects of a clean classroom—but one in which the students did the cleaning. The study compared the relationships between a school’s physical setting and its school management in China, Japan, France and the United States. In China and Japan, students spend much of the school day in a “homeroom” (with instructors traveling between rooms to teach different groups of students) which the students themselves were responsible to keep clean. This student responsibility, argues Liu (2001), results in giving the homeroom the feel of a residence and “provides students with the sense of belonging to the school” (p. 36). Although it would be difficult for Western school’s to immediately adopt the “homeroom” structure to their class schedules, teachers could consider the possible advantages of making students responsible for the cleanliness of their classrooms, and thus giving these students a sense of ownership and belonging in their learning environments.

Brody and Zimmerman’s 1975 study tested the effects of open vs. traditional classroom organization on the amount of personal space students required when interacting with others. Eighty third and fourth grade boys and girls from traditional and open classrooms were asked where they would position themselves (using cutouts of figures to represent individuals) when speaking to various people: best friend, non-best friend, bully, regular classroom teacher and unknown adult visitor to the classroom. The open classroom students consistently positioned themselves closer to the person with whom they were speaking than their traditional classroom counterparts. Brody and Zimmerman (1975) offer one possible explanation for this phenomena being that, in an open classroom, there is more interaction with others (students often work with
many other children, even those who not their friends) than there is in a traditional classroom. Traditional classroom teachers who wish to encourage more interaction between different groups of students might do further research on the implementation of open classroom practices in traditional classrooms.

Considerations for Technology Integration

As computers become more ubiquitous in the classroom, it is important to discover how they affect the learning environment. In a 2003 case study, W. M. Mucherah used a classroom climate questionnaire given to middle school students, classroom observations and teacher interviews to understand how classroom climate changes when computers are used. Mucherah (2003) paid special attention to the differences between male and female behavior in the presence of computers, and chose social studies classrooms specifically because computer use was less frequent in this subject area. Mucherah’s (2003) findings were complex in that teachers perceived computer use during their lessons as resulting in more on-task behavior and motivation, yet teachers also noted that planning for computer use took much more time than planning for “traditional” classroom use, and that, once computers were introduced as tools, students required more class time to cover a given topic. Furthermore, teachers felt they needed more computer training for their specific needs as classroom teachers. Mucherah (2003) also found that male students became more competitive toward computer use than did females, perhaps resulting in males using computers more often than did females, or females feeling intimidated to use computers. This information could be useful for teachers considering whether or not to introduce computers into their learning environments.
Mcvay, Murphy and Yoon (2008) conducted a qualitative study to determine which practices in the technological classroom (a classroom with a computer for each student) best promote learning. The results of the study were derived from questionnaires given to 73 undergraduate accounting students; the questionnaires were given before and after an intervention in the classroom environment which provided more space for students and teachers to interact at student work stations and which created more defined work and traffic spaces. In general, the findings of Mcvay et al. (2008) indicated that students appreciated increased individual work spaces—which allowed for more student choices between group and individual work—and appreciated the decrease in distractions from noise and lack of privacy due to classroom traffic. These findings suggest it would be worthwhile for traditional and technology classroom teachers alike to consider increasing the amount of personal space given to students, and to clearly separate it from traffic space.

Mcvay's et al. study (2008) was supported by the findings of Zandvliet and Straker (2001) who conducted a qualitative study (using questionnaires and case studies of 24 schools in Canada and Australia) focusing on the relationship between physical and psychosocial factors of technology classrooms. A large complaint in these learning environments was the lack of "workspace autonomy"—an element also valued in Mcvay's et al. (2008) study. Zandvliet and Straker (2001) found that even if students rated the quality of their technological equipment highly, they often rated the quality of their visual and workspace environments lowly. Mcvay et al (2008) asserted:

These data suggest that the provision of adequate working environments for students is more than a comfort or safety issue but rather also a learning issue in that an inadequate
physical learning environment might affect psychosocial disharmony, perhaps disrupting or distracting the intended learning goals in these settings (p. 44).

Spatial orientation and poor lighting were particularly identified as a less-than-ideal learning conditions. Mcvay et al (2008) suggested that teachers should assume that students will use the technology classroom beyond the mere use of computers—they will also use it for learning in the more “traditional” way of reading books, writing by hand and interacting with classmates—so, therefore, the technology classroom room should be inviting for all types of seated class work.

This same problem of balancing two methods of learning (“traditional” and “technological”) was seen in Mucherah’s study (2003), though in the opposite way: teachers in traditional classrooms searched for ways to effectively introduce technology into their lessons, and encountered unforeseen conflicts with time management and competition among students. These findings reinforce the point that students respond to more than mere instruction in their learning environments. Teachers must also consider the social and emotional implications of modifications to their physical classrooms (for themselves and their students), even if those modifications are simply the addition or removal of computers.

Summary of Literature Review

It cannot be denied that the physical environment of the classroom has a powerful (if sometimes indirect) influence on student health, behavior and academic achievement. Classroom seating arrangement, student interaction with lighting and sound, use of technology, and the overall design elements of the classroom all provide opportunities for teachers to better realize the social, physical and intellectual potential of their students.
Chapter 3: Classroom Modification Plan

This chapter will present two plans for classroom modification: one general plan which all teachers can use to assess and alter their current learning environments, and a modification plan specifically designed for an eighth grade language arts unit. The “General Modification Plan” section will be divided into two subsections—modifications to be made before the school year begins and modifications to be made during the school year—each of which will contain a set of questions and answers regarding modifications to any classroom. The “Target Population” section will describe the student population for whom the following action plan was created. The “Action Plan: Literature Circles for Eighth Grade Language Arts” section will offer a detailed description of how I would modify my classroom for a specific eighth grade language arts unit.

General Modification Plan

This section contains a general questionnaire (based upon my findings in the literature review chapter of this project) intended for all teachers interested in maximizing the potential of the physical elements of their classrooms to promote student learning and classroom management. The first subsection will describe questions for modifying a classroom before the school year has begun. The second subsection will address questions that may arise during the course of the school year.

Modifications to make before the school year begins

*Is my classroom furniture appropriate for my student population?*

One of the first places to begin preparation for the coming school year is by assessing the classroom furniture. Specifically, is the furniture appropriate for the students’ bodies? Because research has show that up to 99% of classroom furniture may be ill-fitted for students’ bodies—especially in middle schools—I will take measurements of the chairs, desks and tables I have
readily available (Cotton et al., 2002). By having the measurements of specific furniture, I will then be prepared to, at the very least, intentionally match the tallest students in the room with the tallest furniture and shortest students with the shortest furniture. If a large percentage of the furniture appears to be inappropriate for the students in my classroom, I may then speak to the building maintenance supervisor about changing furniture. If nothing can be done to replace inappropriate furniture, I will adjust my daily plans to include more movement throughout the room, so students are not stuck in uncomfortable furniture for extended periods of time.

*Is the classroom lighting safe and appropriate for my students’ bodies and learning?*

To help answer this question I will speak to my building’s maintenance supervisor and learn the type of light bulb used in my classroom, as light bulbs have been found to directly influence student health and learning (Hathaway, 1995). If my classroom light bulb are found to be high-pressure sodium vapor lamps, which are common in newer school buildings, I will inquire about having the bulbs changed to a healthier type (full spectrum fluorescent lamps, for instance). If bulbs cannot be replaced, I will consider how best to use the natural lighting in my room and how I might arrange reading lamps for activities. Because students’ specific environmental needs will dictate their desire for more or less lighting, it will be important for me to track classroom behavior and evidence of learning, no matter what alterations are made.

*How should the desks be arranged in my classroom?*

A major consideration for all teachers is that of how desks or tables will be arranged in the classroom. One way to approach this question is to ask: What is the focus of my classroom learning activities? If I plan on spending most of the period lecturing or having students engage in individual work, then arranging desks in a traditional pattern of rows and columns makes sense for my classroom. If my students will be engaged in group projects, then arranging desks
in clusters of three to five makes sense. If classroom discussion is the aim of my class, then I should arrange the desks in a circular pattern, so my students can see, address and answer each other with ease. The circular pattern also helps keep students engaged on the discussion topic, and has been found to make them feel more safely involved in the classroom community (Holley & Stelner, 2005).

If my students are often asked to focus their attention to a specific part of the room (a white board, a screen, or a lectern), I will make sure the view from every seat is conducive for students easily writing down information. A general rule is that students seated toward any corner of a rectangular room (oriented toward the center of the “front” of the room) will have trouble seeing information well enough to write it down. Therefore, I would remove desks from the corners of my room.

Lastly, in terms of seating arrangements, I will consider if there are spheres of activity which will require more or less lighting (focused light for reading; ambient light for group work), specific technology, or a differentiation in noise level. I will then organize my room to situate traffic areas and group work areas adjacently (perhaps near windows for ambient light) and place quiet and reading areas adjacently (with several lamps for focused light). I may also use sheets of colored paper upon the walls to promote specific activities in designated areas throughout the room. Red walls, for instance, have been shown to simulate activity and excitement, and would work best in group work areas, whereas green walls can increase relaxation, and would be best used in reading and quiet areas (Rosenfeld, 1977).

*Is there an apparatus for playing music in my classroom?*

Whether or not I plan to using music at the beginning of the school year, I will make sure to have a music player in my classroom, in the event that playing music becomes advantageous
for my class population. (See questions related to lethargic classrooms and students who have experienced a traumatic event.)

*Are there any predictable noisy interruptions throughout the day or week?*

Another useful piece of information I can gather before the school year has started is a schedule of predictable noisy interruptions from outside the classroom, such as trains, high volumes of road traffic, low-flying planes, and delivery and waste services for the school. I will then make preparations for these interruptions in my daily plans—such as building in time for repeating instructions and getting students back on task when interruptions occur.

*What are my classroom rules?*

Before the school year starts, I will list my classroom rules and group them for specific learning activities. Next, I will create posters which illustrate each of these rules. When the year begins, I will use these posters to inform students of expectations for each learning activity and transition period. Each rule will have its own poster which prints the rule as simply as possible (i.e.: “Raise you hand.”) and will include an illustration showing the rule being followed (i.e.: an image of a student raising his hand). I will show specific posters only when the students are expected to follow those specific rules. For instance, silence may be required for reading time, but not for group work time. Having individual posters will therefore allow me to communicate my precise expectations for each moment of class, starting on the first day.

*Can air quality and temperature be regulated?*

I will also assess the air quality and temperature of my classroom before the beginning of the school year. First, I will see if I have control of a thermostat for my room, and, if so, I will see if the thermostat is accurate. If I have accurate control, the temperature should be set for 68 degrees F, as higher temperatures interfere with student learning and comfort (Wargocki &
Wyon, 2006). I will also speak with the maintenance supervisor to discern what percentage of outdoor air is circulated through the room. If an amount below 10 liters-per-second can be increased, that is recommended. If the air ventilation system cannot be altered, I will experiment with circulating outdoor air with open windows—provided that this practice does not negatively affect the classroom temperature.

*Can students be given responsibility for keeping my classroom clean?*

Because students’ attitudes toward their schools and teachers are influenced by the cleanliness of the classroom, I will certainly start the year with a clean room. Beyond that, however, I will also consider creating a system which gives my students the responsibility for keeping *their* room clean as well. This practice should help give students a sense of ownership over their classroom and learning experience (Liu, 2001). Also, to help with student buy-in of this practice, I will implement my schedule of student responsibilities starting from the beginning of the year, so the added chores are not perceived as a punitive measure, but rather as a natural daily class activity.

**Modifications to make during the school year**

*How can seating choice help me predict student characteristics?*

One assessment I can make on the first day of school is to identify the seat each student chooses in the open seating arrangement. Although I must be careful not to read too much into student seating choices (the first day of school is certainly too soon to draw any conclusions about a student based on seating choice), analyzing these choices can be a helpful means to predict a student’s interest in school and learning. Generally, students who sit in the rear portion of the room desire to be more disengaged from learning activities, and students who sit in the front of the room desire to take a more active role. There is nothing inherently wrong with either
of these choices, unless the situation appears to result in students not learning. Therefore, if a student chooses to continually sit in the rear of the room and is consistently behind his or her classmates, then perhaps I should make a seating modification for that student. It could also be helpful for students who are continually seated near the front of the room—and thus monopolizing my attention—to sit in other parts of the room in order for me to engage a greater population of students.

*What if my current seating arrangement leads to classroom management difficulties?*

Despite my best intentions and plans, a seating arrangement (as a whole) will occasionally need to be abandoned due to classroom management issues. When I make this decision, it is important for me to re-ask the question: What is the focus of my classroom learning activities? Traditional rows and columns (which separate students from one another) work well for lectures and individual work. Clusters of desks work well for group work. A circular desk arrangement works well for discussion centered classrooms.

However, a fourth arrangement (dividing the classroom into two sides) is specifically designed for dealing with behavioral issues at the rear of the room. This strategy effectively does away with the “rear” area by having me teach the class from the middle of the room—with desks on both sides of me. In this arrangement, students are never more than a row or two away from me. My closer proximity to the students allows me to more closely observe trouble-makers and to deal with problems more quickly.

*What if classroom rules are not being followed?*

My classroom rules will need to be updated throughout the school year, depending on the specific needs of my individual classes. While activities for one class may be conducive to group work, in another class the learning of all students would be best accomplished if I assign
individual work. Regardless of the specific rules for each class section, every classroom rule should be displayed in the form of a poster at the beginning of the learning activity. If additional posters must be created for specific classes, I will follow the design described earlier in this chapter. After the posters have been displayed, I will encourage students to follow the rules by acknowledging students for their good behavior.

_How can students be prevented from behaving negatively toward classroom furniture?_

When my students behave negatively toward classroom furniture, I may mistakenly assume that the issue is solely about classroom management. In certain cases, however, my student may be trying to communicate his or her discomfort with our classroom furniture. If such behavior takes place (students falling out of their chairs and lying on the floor or sitting on their desks or chairs in inappropriate positions) I will seek to find out if their seating is causing them discomfort, and, if possible, I will alter the students’ seating. If that is not possible, I will add time for student movement to my lesson plans, so their bodies do not become sore from sitting for too long.

_How can I address class boredom and lethargy?_

If class lethargy becomes a problem, there are several approaches I can take. First of all, I should note the handedness of my students (is a student right- or left-handed?) and on which side of the room each student is seated. If a student’s handedness corresponds to the same side of the room on which they sit (for instance, a right-handed student is seated on the right side of the room), then it is possible said student is suffering from unintentional hypnosis (Sackeim et al, 1979). It is not uncommon for students to place themselves in these undesirable positions, so I may intentionally arrange my students throughout the room in order to avoid hypnosis.
Another solution to a drowsy class—especially early in the morning and immediately after lunch—is to play music as my students enter the classroom. This can wake up students and increase brain activity for the lessons to come.

*How can I help students who recently experienced a traumatic event?*

Music can also assist in the learning of students who have recently experienced a stressful event, or who have PTSD. Adding classical music with a predictable beat to lessons—especially math and reading lessons—can allow my students to better use their memories and learning strategies with their content material (Foran, 2009). Although, because not all students will respond well to music, I may limit music to certain areas of the room or designate other areas as quiet areas for students to read and work.

*How can I help students who are not reaching their potential?*

As the school year progresses—and as I become familiar with the learning styles and achievement levels of my students—it may be necessary for me to identify and isolate certain areas of the classroom for specific learning activities. Lighting, sound and color can be utilized for these activities. Specifically, for gifted and talented students, it has been found that differences in achievement can often be influenced by the environmental preferences of the learner (Rayneri et al., 2003). For instance, while most gifted and talented students prefer bright lighting and little sound, lower achieving gifted and talented students occasionally prefer the opposite. It has also been found that girls are generally more sensitive to sound than are boys, and often prefer a quieter environment for concentration (Burke & Burke-Samide, 2004). If I am attempting to engage an under-performing segment of the class population, offering choices in learning environment could make a difference. Areas of the classroom can be separated based upon their noise and lighting levels. Lamps and windows can be used to focus lighting for
students who prefer it, while the overhead lights can be turned off for portions of the class period. My students should be allowed to seek a comfortable position in which to do their class work—that often means somewhere other than sitting in a desk. I should also be open to students who prefer to work while lying on the floor or sitting on cushions—so long as their work gets done.

In some cases it may be appropriate to challenge students’ preferences regarding lighting and sound. Just as students can desire to be seated in an area of the classroom that renders them prone to hypnosis, so too may students choose to sit in too much lighting or in too quiet of a setting. Therefore, student choice in their learning environment is only productive if students make decisions which promote their learning. If students choose work spaces solely based on proximity to others who distract them, then I would experiment with placing them in different learning environments.

*What if my students are leaving the classroom a mess?*

If my students are being disrespectful to the classroom environment, I will create a schedule of tasks that will allow them to take ownership of the cleanliness of the room. Such tasks will include picking up paper off the floor, keeping portfolios and bookshelves in order, pushing in chairs and straightening tables. The chores will be rotated equally through the class roster, or specific chores will be assigned to specific offenders. The cleaning of the room will become part of the end-of-class routine every day, and my students will be held in class until all chores have been finished, regardless of the bell. Although my students may be resentful of this routine as first, the implicit fairness of being responsible for one’s own mess should make an impact over time.
Is technology equally available for members of both sexes?

It has been found that boys are generally more competitive and assertive in the use of classroom technology, so I will make sure that girls are given equal opportunities with technology, especially when there is not enough equipment for all students at once (Mucherah, 2003). One way to ensure appropriate use is to have time limits for computer use and schedules which give those who typically don’t use computers regular opportunities to use them.

Requiring students to show me a completed entry task before using technology is another way to monitor the monopolization of computer use by specific individuals.

Target Population

The target population for my specific Action Plan are the students of the Title 1 middle school where I carried out my student teaching assignment in Spokane, Washington. At this middle school, 80% of students received free and reduced-price meals, and 30% of students were of an ethnic minority. Both of these statistics were representative of the student population in my eighth grade language arts classes. As seventh graders, 47% of my students had received passing scores on the reading portion of the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning), and 53% of them had received passing scores on the writing portion of the WASL. There was a wide range of home-languages spoken among my student population, including Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. The class also included four ELL (English language learner) students who spoke and wrote well enough to be included in the general language arts curriculum.

Statistics do not tell the whole story of the student population at this middle school. It was not uncommon for students' parents to suffer from drug addictions or to be incarcerated. A vast majority of students lived in single-parent households. Students often came to school hungry
or emotionally strained by their home situations. It was difficult to quantify the effects these circumstances had on student learning and classroom behavior, yet it is undeniable that students' home lives greatly and unpredictably impacted student engagement and attitude on a daily basis.

My sections of language arts were split into two groups: those who had passed the math portion of the WALS examination and those who had not. In general, this division also reflected whether or not students had passed the reading and writing portions of the WASL. Additionally, most of my students who suffered the consequences noted in the previous paragraph were also placed in the lower-achieving section of language arts. This meant that I had to teach the same curriculum to two very different groups of students in terms of past achievement, self efficacy and behavior. Thus my classroom modification plan includes an added challenge: Because the physical elements of my classroom could not be practically altered on a class-by-class basis, I needed to design my room to meet the learning needs of both sections of language arts, one which achieved at a high level with few behavior problems, and one which achieved at a low level with many behavior problems.

**Action Plan: Literature Teams for Eighth Grade Language Arts**

**Previous Classroom Arrangement**

In order to better understand the modifications I will make to my classroom for the Literature Teams Unit, it is important to know how the classroom had been arranged previously. Before Literature Teams, my lesson plans generally adhered to the following format: written entry task (5 minutes), discussion of the entry task (5 to 10 minutes), mini-lesson for language arts content (10 to 20 minutes), and individual or group work (15 to 30 minutes). This type of plan includes several types of learning activity: direct instruction (lecture), individual work,
group work and whole class discussion. I, therefore, chose a semi-circular desk arrangement, where each seat allowed students to view every other student in the classroom, for whole class discussions, but also the projection screen for entry tasks and mini-lessons. I also created a “quiet sphere” in the rear corner of the classroom, away from traffic (the “traffic sphere” was located at the front of the room, near the entrance, where I could easily greet students as they entered). Additionally, in the “quiet sphere,” there was a couch, several floor cushions and reading lamps for students to use during individual work time. Because at least half of the class period was spent focusing on the projection screen at the front of the room, the overhead lights were generally turned off. One major drawback to this arrangement was that in order to conduct effective group work, it was necessary for students to rearrange their tables and chairs into clusters.

Please see Appendix A for a detailed lesson plan from the Public Service Announcement (PSA) Unit which preceded the Literature Teams Unit. Although the “PSA Workshop” described in this lesson plan was a “group” activity, students were never given full control of the classroom. Students were always aware of directions being given from the front of the room, even while workshopping each other’s PSA campaigns. Whole class discussion (the central activity of this unit) occurred both before and after the main learning activity. The active role of the teacher in this lesson plan will be starkly contrasted with the student-initiated focus described in the Literature Team Unit below.

Literature Team Modifications

For the Literature Teams Unit, which lasts four weeks, students will be broken into several small groups (3 or 4 students each), and each group will read a specific novel selected by
the teacher based upon the students' reading levels, interests and interpersonal skills. The groups will be heterogeneous, as a diversity of student opinions and perspectives is a major goal of the unit, and because students of various abilities will be able to assist each other through the process of reading a novel. Because the groups will be reading different books (in this case, the books will all be about the Holocaust), there will be a minimum of common content and, likewise, a minimum of instruction from the front of the classroom. Instead, within their groups, students will alternate through specific "jobs" and conduct organized meetings to assist each other in understanding their books. The role of the teacher will be to facilitate group work (preparing graphic organizers and helping instill a common vocabulary among the class) and to make sure students know what is expected of them. The students will have much independence in this unit. They will have to decide, as a group, a schedule for finishing their book on time, the delegation of jobs, and how to use their class time in the most productive way.

Although the meetings themselves (and the work done to prepare for them—such as "job worksheets") will serve as formative assessments in this unit, each student will ultimately be responsible for creating a "Reflection Book" as a summative assessment. (Please see Appendix B for a sample lesson plan from this unit and a copy of the Reflection Book assignment and rubric.)

What follows is a plan for specific classroom modifications that will assist me in creating the overall learning experience described above.

Furniture arrangement

Whereas I had previously designed my lesson plans to include entry tasks, mini-lessons and individual and group work, this unit plan will nearly exclusively call for group work. Therefore, I will arrange my tables into clusters of two (so three to four students may face each other and have conversations). And where I had previously allowed my students to choose their
own seats, for these clusters of tables I will intentionally assign student to table clusters with their group mates. The main learning activities in the clusters will be group reading (taking turns reading aloud to other group members), discussing in small groups (team meetings), creating small group presentations, individual reading and individual working. I will do much less instruction from the head of the classroom, but will rather assist each group in solving specific problems.

From the previous furniture arrangement, I will retain the “quiet sphere” containing the couch, floor cushions and reading lamps. I will also cover the walls of this area with large green sheets of paper, which should increase relaxation and serve as a physical reminder that this area has as different purpose than other areas of the room (Rosenfeld, 1977). Because some teams will prefer to complete more of their work individually, students from all groups will be allowed to use the “quiet sphere” during group work time. Entire groups may also prefer the relief from sitting in standard tables and chairs during their work sessions. (Unfortunately, nearly all of the tables and chairs in my classroom are the same size, thus not conducive for a physically diverse student population.) So, as long as individuals are not using the “quiet sphere,” groups will be allowed to use it as well, or, at the very least, borrow floor cushions for personal use near the rest of their literature team.

**Lighting**

The benefit of creating Literature Teams well into the school year is that I will have had a chance, beforehand, to study the environmental preferences of my students, and to use this extra information when grouping them for the unit. Students are sensitive to the amount and type of lighting they require for desk work. Thankfully, the overhead lighting in my classroom is controlled by three independent light switches, allowing me to brighten or dim certain areas of
the room depending on the preferences of the groups. The windows and reading lamps will serve
as two additional sources of light. Based on previous knowledge and conversations with my
students, I will assign each group a lighting preference: bright overhead lights, natural ambient
light, or low lighting. Although it may be tempting to experiment with many different lighting
settings for different groups in an attempt to find the perfect setting, I will be careful to maintain
a predictable environment. Work that relies so heavily on self-motivation and teamwork will be
aided by a comfortable and reliable setting.

Sound

My first considerations for sound in the classroom will relate to the research I will have
conducted before the start of the school year, when I kept a log of noisy interruptions from
outside of the school building (such as high traffic periods, trains, garbage and utility trucks, and
low-flying planes). I was listening for interruptions which could be predicted, and thus planned
for with appropriate activities. On the day of the week with the most noisily interruptions, for
instance, I will plan to have a “Review Poetry Activity.” This activity is appropriate for noisy
days because it is a group activity in which students gather their previous materials (notes,
graphic organizers, journal reflections, Holocaust Narratives) and work together to create poems
to help them remember the covered information. Because there is much group interaction, the
activity is in itself noisy, and won’t be easily interrupted by outside noises. Also, because there is
no new content in this activity, I won’t feel the added pressure of making sure each student is up
to speed after distractions from outside the room. Rather, students groups and individual students
may move at their own pace and create poems with content that is already familiar to them. This
type of activity is much preferred to activities like tests or silent reading, which require extended
periods of concentration or unfamiliar material which would be lost, for example, the moment a plane flies over the school building.

My second consideration for sound in the classroom is the intentional use of music to motivate my students and get their brains working. The key challenge of playing music in the classroom is in accommodating the students who prefer to listen to music while reading and writing, while not undermining the preferences of students who prefer silence. In order to redirect my students’ attention on our specific content as they enter the classroom, I will, for instance, play swing music—the music we heard when we watched the film “Swing Kids” (a film about teens in Germany who defied the Hitler Youth by playing and dancing to swing music)—as students complete their entry tasks. Such musical additions to class content can also fight lethargy in the morning or directly following lunch. Students who find music distracting will be allowed to sit further away from the speakers.

Also, for silent and group reading time, I will play classical music, such as Bach or Mozart, which has a repetitive and predictable rhythm. Such music has been shown to increase brain activity while students are reading both silently and aloud (Foran, 2009). Students will also be encouraged to listen to their MP3 players if a specific kind of music helps them concentrate on reading.

*Posters for learning activities*

Although most of the learning activities for the Literature Teams unit are student-directed, the teacher, as facilitator, must ensure that the standards for these activities are being met and students are aware of their expectations at all times. Also, because my two sections of language arts will contain two very different student populations—one which will need continual
reminding of expectations, and one which will likely exceed expectations with no prompting whatsoever—I will need a variety of communications techniques for delivering my expectations.

During Literature Team Meeting days it will be vital for students to maintain their focus on the specific content of their Holocaust Narratives. The goal for these days (which happen twice a week, as students complete their novels) is for team members to engage in meaningful discussion related to the themes, characters and plot development of their previous readings. The group members will have prepared for these meetings by taking notes on the novel, completing graphic organizers and creating discussion questions to ask their group members. However, even with all of this preparation, powerful discussion will not necessarily result. Students in my morning classes will have had little experience with these types of structured discussions, where answers to questions are not always immediately available and students must often think, reflect and, occasionally, look through their books to find the desired information.

In anticipation of challenges with these meetings, I will create three additional classroom rule posters, which will be displayed for the entire day we have Literature Team meetings. The three new rules will be:

- Keep your book open.
- Give an answer to every question asked ("I don’t know" is not an option!)
- If you don’t know an answer, look one up.

These posters be designed using the same criteria as regular classroom rule posters. They will include the rule and an image of the rule being followed, and they will be explained and hung every time I expect the rule to be followed (the days we will have Literature Team Meetings). I will also praise students for following the rules as they conduct their meetings. Although these
rules are mostly intended for the morning classes, I will leave them hanging for the afternoon classes as well.

*Keeping the room clean*

Inherent to the practice of powerful Literature Team Meetings is respect for other people’s opinions and perspectives. Within meetings students will often be asked to make connections between their lives and the themes of their Holocaust Narratives. Therefore, a major learning target for Literature Team Meetings is communication and listening skills. These are skills which will serve students in nearly all facets of their future lives—especially when encountering people with whom they disagree.

When it comes to keeping the classroom clean, there are many opportunities for students to disagree about responsibility for clutter and debris. Part of my daily lesson plans will be having students take charge of straightening the room. Students will be responsible for clearing the floor of scrap paper, gum wrappers and pencil shavings, and they will return floor cushions, tables and chairs to their original positions. Failure to straighten the room will result in the entire class staying past the bell until the cleaning is completed. This practice has several purposes in the language arts classroom: the room will look better (students attitudes toward their schools and teachers are influenced by the cleanliness of the classroom), students will have a sense of ownership over their learning environment and their learning experiences, and, lastly (and particularly important to language arts), students will have to engage in effective communication in order to get their tasks completed. It will be obvious early in the year that arguing or refusing to cooperate will be of no benefit to individuals or to the entire class.
Using effective communication skills will be great practice for participating in Literature Team Meetings, where students are expected to share their diverse opinions, to disagree and debate, but to always do so respectfully.

Technology

My classroom will only have 10 laptop computers for use by all students in each section of language arts. Because my classes will each have at least 20 students, not all students will be able to use a computer at any given time. Thankfully, very few learning activities for this unit require individual use of computers. However, students will be asked to type the chapters of their Reflection Books, and many students do not have computers at home. Additionally, it has been shown that boys tend to be more aggressive in claiming computers than girls (Mucherah, 2003). Therefore, I will have to develop a plan to ensure equal access to technology for all students.

First, at the beginning of the week in which students will be primarily working on their Reflection Books, I will hang a visible checklist at the front of the room. When students claim a computer to use for the day, they will notate that day on the checklist. The rule will be that students may not use a computer for two consecutive days (unless no other students would like to use the computers).

Second, I will require that all students who wish to use a computer complete an entry task before they begin working. The entry task will be a short outline of their intended use of the computer, and a specific goal for the day. For instance, if a student wants to work on her Bridge-Builder Essay (see Appendix B), she will first write a working thesis statement and identify a theme from her Holocaust Narrative and a relevant connection to her own life. She will then set a goal, for example, of finishing an introduction and two body paragraphs over the course of the
period. This practice will have the intended purpose of limiting off-task behavior during computer use—such as boys rushing to claim computers in order to play games.

A further concern for classroom computer use is that of appropriate workspace: the space should be autonomous and should also be of use as a traditional workspace (for reading and writing with a pen and paper). Luckily, because my classroom has laptop computers with wireless internet use, I need not worry about this concern. Students will be able to simply insert the computer into their already customized workspace.

Reaching Diverse Learners

This Literature Team Unit includes many classroom modifications to help to reach diverse learners, such as ELL students and students with racially diverse backgrounds. To begin with, the “clusters” seating arrangement allows diverse students to participate in heterogeneous groups which contain, for instance, other students from diverse backgrounds, but also students in the majority. The Literature Team Unit celebrates diversity of opinion and perspective, so coming from a non-traditional background (with all of the hardships that go along with it) is something to be proud of—not merely something to look beyond. These groups will also combine students at different reading and achievement levels (lower achievers with middle achievers, and middle achievers with higher achievers), so students will be able to better assist each other with their projects. Their differences in achievement will not be so glaring as to make students feel self-conscious, but lower-achieving students will benefit from seeing positive role-models. (A good example of the work produced in this team environment can be seen in Appendix D.)

ELL and minority students will be placed in clusters that are near my desk. This proximity will allow me to easily make informal assessments about their understanding of the
material, and to quickly and inconspicuously give them class materials and assignments before I give them to other students. This will allow these students to become familiar with our content before they are asked to analyze and discuss it with others.

I will also make sure minority and ELL students are seated in positions where they can easily see the front screen and classroom rule posters. This is a challenge with clustered desks, as students may be facing in any direction. If my room is arranged in traditional rows and patterns, I will make sure that these students are not seated on the extreme edges of the classroom, but closer to the center of the room.

Music therapy may also help ELL and diverse students. As these students often face additional social challenges than their counterparts in the majority, music can help them increase emotional regulation and reduce tension and absenteeism in school. This is another reason I will keep these students closer to my desk, where my speakers are located. Additionally, if there is a noisy interruption in the classroom and students lose focus, if ELL and minority students are placed next to me, I can immediately check for any loss of understanding or I can review the material which had just been covered.

Freedom of movement throughout the classroom will also be especially important to minority students. Research shows that African-American eighth graders are typically taller than their classmates, and, because all of my classroom furniture is the same size, these students may find it difficult to stay comfortable in tables and chairs which are too small (Cotton et al, 2002). Group activities, such as literature team meetings and review poetry days have built-in student movement. Individual activities, such as reading and completing graphic organizers, can also be done in areas of the students’ choosing, including the couch and upon floor cushions.
I will be observant, however, as to where my minority and ELL students choose to sit when given the choice. If they often place themselves in the back of the room, in seats which are not advantageous to viewing the front screen, or with their friends to socialize and not complete school work, I will intervene and make sure the students are positioned to see the front screen and complete their work. Dimmer lighting can also be utilized to help ELL and minority students stay focused on their assignments.

Equal use of technology will also be a major concern for ELL and minority students. ELL students especially may not be comfortable asserting their desire for computer use when the number of available computers is limited (as in my classroom). My technology plan will allow all students the chance for computer use through charting which students use computers on certain days, and by requiring students to complete entry tasks before they use computers. In some cases, I will allow my ELL and minority to complete their entry tasks ahead of time, or we will work together to write out their goals for computer use.

Alternate furniture arrangement

Although the desk-cluster design is by far the most advantageous seating arrangement for the learning activities in the Literature Team Unit, challenges with classroom management could force me to make a modification to that design to ensure that all students have a productive learning environment. Being familiar with the students in my morning sections of language arts, I know that many of those students have difficulties being seated next to more than one person at a time. Not only can particular groupings of students result in compromises to their own learning, but a group that is constantly off-task can distract the entire class—or worse, set an example of behavior which is counter-productive to the goals of the Literature Team Unit (respect of others, self motivation and individual responsibility).
Therefore, I may be required to arrange my classroom tables into traditional rows and columns, each table being physically separated from its neighbors. This way I can ensure that challenging students will never be seated by more than one other students, and that the most challenging students will be allowed to sit at tables by themselves.

Such a large modification to the physical classroom will also result in modification to lesson plans as well. Whereas I had previously designed my lessons to allow for a maximum of student-led learning activities, with a traditional classroom design I will focus on more direct instruction and lecture, which will be followed by students engaging in individual work as opposed to group work.

A good example of the difference between these teaching styles can be seen in the two ways I would teach “Euphemisms in Holocaust Narratives.” With tables arranged in clusters, students would be given an entry task which includes a definition and several examples of euphemisms from daily life. With students clear on what euphemisms are (but not necessarily how they relate to the Holocaust), I would then allow the Literature Teams to work together in defining the multiple meanings of specific Nazi euphemisms, such as “relocation” and “final solution,” and, most importantly, to come up with their own explanation as to why the Nazis used euphemisms. Lastly, I would have the groups work together to form lists of euphemisms from their own Holocaust narratives.

In contrast, my lesson plan for teaching euphemism in a classroom of traditional rows and columns (for a full lesson plan, see Appendix C) would require me to lead students through every step of the process, from defining euphemisms, to relating them to the Holocaust in general, to citing specific examples from the students’ narratives. At most, students would be asked to share their thinking with their desk mates. Rather than circulating through the room to
help Literature Teams with their specific problems, I would remain at the front of the room and field questions from individuals, answering for the benefit of the entire class.

The effects of a seating arrangement modification are not limited to instructional style and isolated classroom management problems, but can also create new management challenges. Whereas this modification was designed to focus my morning sections of language arts students on their learning activities, it could have the opposite effect on my afternoon sections, which I would expect to thrive on student-initiated group work. Therefore, even if my alternate seating arrangement appears to positively affect my morning group, I will have to watch for negative effects on my afternoon group. The key to judging these modifications will be through assessment.
Chapter 4: Assessment and Evaluation

In this chapter I will offer my predicted outcomes of my Classroom Modification Plan described in Chapter 3. The first section will include general observations regarding the specific modifications I will have made to the physical classroom. Next I will describe the successful final project of an ELL student. I will then use class data to explain how a difference in seating arrangement impacted student performance and behavior, and I will predict how my overall modifications would have effected students learning when compared with no modifications at all. Finally, I will offer feedback from a survey of student perspectives on the classroom’s design for the Literature Team Unit.

Observations

Where I had previously arranged my tables in a semi-circular pattern, for Literature Teams I arranged them in “cluster” pattern, with three to four students intentionally assigned to a pair of facing tables. The main learning activities in the clusters were group reading, individual work (with assistance from group members), creation of class presentations, and, most importantly, group meetings where they discussed the content of their Holocaust narratives. I did much less direct instruction and lecture with this desk arrangement, but rather assisted each group to solve specific problems.

My afternoon section of classes thrived with this seating arrangement. Because most of these students were self-motivated and familiar with having in-depth, small group discussions (as opposed to whole-class discussions run by the teacher) this group of students used this seating arrangement to their advantage, completing assignments as teams and looking first to each other when in need of assistance. Their responses to learning activities were personal and included
high-level analysis. The small group environment created by the cluster arrangement made students feel comfortable with their group members, and they benefited from a group reading experience.

Most students in my morning section of classes, however, had difficulties being seating next to more than one person and being given personal responsibility for most of their class time. Although we remained in “clusters” for half of the unit, due to management difficulties with these sections (usually one or more students per day were sent to the office during this time), I ultimately decided to employ my alternate seating arrangement of traditional rows and columns of tables. As was stated in Chapter 3, my lessons were also altered to include more direct instruction as opposed to free work time.

As planned, my morning group of students responded very well to the modified seating arrangement. Not only did classroom management issues decrease, but their engagement and completion of work increased with more work-space autonomy and more direct instruction from me. For this group of students, the traditional row and column seating arrangement appeared to be a success. However, for my afternoon students who had previously thrived on group discussion and teamwork, the opposite happened: their engagement through direct instruction decreased and they became much more sluggish over the course of the period.

I used two different approaches to address the issue of my afternoon classes being lethargic. First of all, I studied the students who seemed to be the most sluggish and discovered that their handedness (whether they were right- or left-handed) corresponded with the side of the room (right or left) in which they were seated, which can cause unintentional hypnosis in students (Sackeim et al, 1979). I encouraged them to sit on the opposite side of the room.
My second means of addressing this issue was effective almost immediately. I decided to play classical music (Mozart) as my student entered the room and completed their entry tasks. This portion of class was now followed by a short class discussion—the portion of the class most affected by their lethargy, as they had preferred small group discussion in the “cluster” arrangement. The classical music was successful in that it engaged them in the initial writing task (they often requested more than the given five minutes in order to continue writing), and they were much more open to sharing their writing when it came to class discussion (I often had to cut the class discussions short).

The practice of hanging posters in the room to help facilitate Literature Team Meetings was also successful. The posters were intended to offer structure to the meetings and solutions to students who lacked practice asking and answering difficult questions, and keeping discussion going through conversation. The posters offered three new rules: 1. Keep your book open. 2. Given an answer to every question asked. 3. If you don’t have an answer, look one up. In my morning classes, we modeled these new behaviors by practicing them while discussing a short story we had all read together. By the next Literature Team Meeting, the students were familiar with the rules, and my interventions were specific—I continuously referred them to the three rules—and soon students began to get back on task with a just a look from me.

As an added benefit, although I did not model the new rules for my afternoon sections of language arts, those students also began to follow the rules when they became stuck on a difficult question.

I was surprised to find that once students had become accustomed to having the lights off for the beginning of class (when the projector and screen were used for entry tasks), they nearly universally preferred to have the lights off for the remainder of class, no matter what learning
activity was planned—reading, writing, working in groups or working on computers. However, even with the lights off, students still appeared to have their learning preferences met, as some chose further darkness beneath the tables and in corners, some chose be seated directly beneath lamps, and other chose seats closer to the windows.

Although students were also given choices as to where they held their Literature Team Meetings, the most successful meetings happened when students were seated comfortably, with each student able to see the others. The best meeting I witnessed occurred with a group of three girls and one boy from an afternoon section who were seated on the floor directly beside my desk. Their seats were not advantageous for writing, but were perfect for casual discussion. Perhaps the departure from the usual learning environment (tables and chairs) allowed them to feel more comfortable opening up.

The worst meetings I saw occurred when students were seated in a row, unable to look at each other, and when groups of students were close enough to over-hear and interact with other groups. These problems did not occur with the “cluster” seating arrangement, but when students were forced to make the transition between the traditional, teacher-led arrangement and the student-led activity of Literature Team Meetings. Even though I would have them rearrange their tables if they wanted, students often made a poor effort and simply tried to have meetings as the tables stood.

*Sample Student Work*

Appendix D contains a sample of student work from the Literature Team Unit which highlights the unit goals of showings of perspective through choices in expression and using teamwork to further one’s thinking. This Reflection Book was created by a Vietnamese ELL
student who, before the start of this unit, had been quiet and withdrawn. During the unit she was grouped with several open-minded classmates with whom she was not yet familiar. Through the process of being on a team and working together, she opened up with her classmates and felt free to display her strengths as a learner and thinker—including her talents as an visual artist and her ability to find and explain complex themes in the text. Her essays included profound insights about her Holocaust Narrative—especially her “Bridge-Building Essay,” in which she used her personal experience of arriving in a new country as a link to the narrator’s struggle to move on after a major change in his life. Rather than this minority ELL student only benefiting from the help of her majority-background classmates, she ending up being their greatest asset in the Literature Team Unit.

I believe the closeness this student felt with her teammates was influenced by several environmental factors. The “cluster” seating arrangement allowed her to quickly feel like an equal member of her literature team. The signs promoting behavior during the literature team meetings gave her a greater chance to speak when she knew the answers to questions; wait time was build-in as other students looked for answers themselves. When the seating arrangement was changed to traditional rows and columns, she sought out a quiet, lowly lit environment within which to complete her work. Although she did not use technology to complete her Reflection Book, her use of visual arts made her project one of the most unique in the grade.

Summative Assessments and Behavioral Statistics

In order to formally assess the effects of my classroom modifications on both student learning and student behavior, I employed several comparisons of specific data. First, I compared students’ final unit grades between a school year when I had made no classroom modifications
during my Literature Team Unit and a year when I employed my Classroom Modification Plan. To assess the plan's impact on student behavior, I also compared the total number of blue slips (citations for severe student behavior) given during those two years.

I was also curious about the impact of my seating arrangement modification halfway through the unit. Therefore, to assess the impact of that changing from "clusters" to rows and columns, I compared student data before and after that particular modification. Also, because this modification was made to target the performance of my morning sections of language arts (although it inevitably affected my afternoon sections too), I compared the data from these two groups as well. The collected data included blue slips given, percentage of assignments uncompleted and average grade on formative assessments.

For the comparison between a year with classroom modifications and a year without, I simply looked at students' final grades and discovered that students scored an average of 2.8 out of 4 points when there were modifications to the classroom and 2.6 points when there were none. The impact of modification was especially felt for assignments such as the "Team Voices Essay," a paper for which students interviewed their team mates and compared their responses. Students who succeeded on this assignment were typically members of teams who got along with each other. When the room was modified, students scored an average of 3.0 on the "Team Voices Essay." When the room was unmodified, students scored 2.6. Based upon the scores of this particular assignment, it appears that my classroom modifications allowed students to create closer relationships with their team members.

Students were also given slightly more blue slips during the year with no modifications (20 blue slips, compared with 17 for the modified classroom), suggesting that modifications positively influence classroom behavior as well.
Perhaps the most striking statistic from my research was the drop in blue slips given to my morning language arts classes after the desks had been changed from "clusters" to traditional rows and columns. The change occurred between weeks 2 and 3.

Graphs 1 and 2. Red line = a.m. classes. Green line = p.m. classes.

As a behavioral intervention, the seating modification appears to have been a success. According to Graph 1, in my morning classes blue slips dropped from 13 in the first two weeks to 3 in the last two weeks. However, a look at the amount of uncompleted work during this unit offers a mixed picture. (Uncompleted assignments included students' failure to read their Holocaust narratives, their failure to complete graphic organizers for Team Meetings, and their failure to complete daily group or individual projects.) As Graph 2 shows, the percentage of completed work dropped drastically for my morning classes after the desk modification, yet the same modification caused uncompleted work to rise slightly for my afternoon classes. My morning classes, it seems, completed more individual work, while my afternoon classes completed more group work. This same trend can be seen in a comparison of the average score on formative assessments (graphic organizers and group and individual daily projects).
Again, the traditional desk arrangement helped my morning classes achieve higher grades on formative assessments, but it appeared to hinder my afternoon classes, who achieved at a high level with tables grouped in “clusters.”

Although it is impossible to deny the influential power of classroom modifications, this data also exposes the difficulty in making positive adjustments for one group of students without also negatively affecting another group.

Survey of Students

In addition to my own observations and collection of student data, I also received input directly from my students by giving them a survey with questions regarding the design of the classroom during the Literature Circles Unit (see Appendix E for a copy of the survey). Some of the results were predictable: a vast majority of p.m. students preferred “clusters;” only around half of the a.m. students had a positive experience with clusters; nearly all students had mostly positive feedback about the lighting (they like the lights turned off). Perhaps surprisingly, there was a wide variety of response about sound in the classroom. Feedback ranged from students
appreciating music and being allowed to work in groups (these were a majority of the responses),
to students feeling the room was generally too noisy and that the music was a distraction
(especially classical music). These negative responses could be due to the fact that sound is more
difficult for a teacher to control than lighting. Needless to say, I will have to revisit my methods
of offering students real options for sound in their learning environment.

I was happy to see that there was a wide variety in students’ favorite places to do
individual and group work. The responses were evenly split between “table,” “floor” and
“couch” for individual work; many students chose those same responses for group work—but
also circled “with my friends,” reminding me that a positive learning environment is composed
of more than just physical structures, but people as well.
Chapter 5: Predicted Implementation and Reflections

Predicted Implementation

The advantage of my modification plan is that it includes a general questionnaire that can be applied to any subject and any classroom. I will continue to implement (and add to) that questionnaire for the rest of my teaching career. For language arts specifically, I intend to make a number of modification plans (similar to the plan in Chapter 3) that I will apply to units with specific learning activities, such as Literature Team Meetings. For instance, I would like to create a modification plan for a language arts class that is engaged in activities surrounding reading and performing a play by Shakespeare.

Needless to say, however, I will also want to make improvements to my Literature Team Unit modification plan before I implement it again. First, I would like to explore the idea of making large classroom modifications (such as table arrangements) from class period to class period. If my assessments show me anything, they reveal that what is good for one group of students is not necessarily good for another group. My specific problem is that changing desks is time-consuming and cumbersome. My guiding questions for traditional and action research on this problem would include:

- How have middle school teachers successfully altered their classrooms between class periods?
- Assuming desks are changed on a period-by-period basis, should that activity be an entry task for my in-coming students, or an exit task for my out-going students?

My second area of focus will surround providing a personalized sound environment for all students. My questions for research will include:
- How can I keep control over the sound levels in my classroom, while at the same time offer students responsibility and autonomy over their own learning experiences?
- Can partitions be used effectively to manage sound levels (without adding to classroom management issues)?

The challenges I face in further implementation of my modification plan for Literature Teams directly relate to my guiding questions. The biggest challenge is creating a single learning environment that meets the needs of all students. It is also difficult to allow students choice and freedom to customize their own learning environment and to still maintain my authority over the classroom. Language Arts presents the specific challenge of creating effective learning spaces for reading and writing—two common activities about which students are very particular. Some students can instantly immerse themselves in a good book—even on a noisy school bus—while other students cannot concentrate without complete silence. Creating a space that accommodates both of these students (especially when one or the other is not vocal about their preference) is a major hurdle to overcome.

What I Learned

The major lesson I learned by completing this project is that making modifications to the classroom hinges on nothing than more than my will to make intentional decisions about my students’ learning environment. If I choose to ignore the physical elements of my classroom, I am disregarding a powerful learning tool to promote student learning and behavior—or worse: I am preventing students from reaching their full potential because I am not addressing their learning preferences. As Burke (2004) states, “Students should not be expected to change their
environmental preferences or to learn regardless of them” (238). Rather, if a student cannot learn in my classroom, it is my job to find out why, and to make the necessary modifications.

**How This Project Will Affect My Future Professional Development**

Although my project touches briefly on the inclusion of classroom technology, this subject will only become more important as the years pass. Incorporating Smartboards, computers for all students and various Web 2.0 tools will likely be the focus of classroom modifications to come. It will also be more and more common to have students “attend” classes remotely through web conferencing. Therefore my professional development for classroom modifications will include readings, classes, and professional learning communities which strive to make the most of new technology in the classroom.
References


Appendices
Appendix A: Public Service Announcement Student Workshop

Teacher Candidate: Sam Mills

Cooperating Teacher:  

School District:  

University Supervisor:  

Unit/Subject: Language Arts  

Lesson Title: P.S.A. Student Workshop  

Classroom rules and routines that affect the lesson:  
Each day begins with an entry task which students begin without being prompted by teacher. During whole-class discussions, students are expected to raise their hands when they wish to speak. During small group work, talking is permitted, but not shouting across the room. MP3 players are permitted during individual work time—but only if they are not disruptive. At the end of the class period students will clear their work areas and stand behind their pushed-in chairs. They are dismissed by the teacher, not the bell.  

Physical arrangement and grouping patterns that affect the lesson:  
Students in this class have a seating arrangement based upon their individual work habits, their likelihood to engage in off-task behavior, and their proximity to positive role models. Desks are arranged to promote student focus during class mini-lessons, and for students to quickly share ideas with others during discussion. During individual work time, students may use entire classroom, including floors, under tables and adjacent hallway to work, so long as they are productive. Students are intentionally placed in groups with a range of reading ability in order to allow high achievers to assist middle achievers, and middle achievers to assist lower achievers.  

Total number of students: 21  Female: 7  Male: 14  Age Range: 13 - 15  

Describe the range of abilities in the classroom:  
This class is comprised of students who did not reach standard on the seventh grade WASL test in Math scores. In general, that correlates with failing to reach standard in reading and writing as well. Therefore, there is a wide range of ability in the room. The lowest achieving readers are at a 3rd grade level, although there are also several students reading at a high-school level.  

Describe the range of socio-economic backgrounds of the students:  
70% of students in this classroom receive free or reduced lunch. For this reason computer technology is provided for the students to complete research and typing of papers. There is minimal out-of-school homework given due to the wide variety of added home responsibilities our students takes on. They are assessed by their work at school, not the advantages they might receive (or might not) receive at home.
Describe the racial/ethnic composition of the classroom and what is done to make the teaching and learning culturally responsive:
28% of students in this classroom are of racial/ethnic minority. Because this is a language arts and social studies class, students are often given a chance to reflect upon their life experiences. A major part of sharing these experiences with classmates is the lesson of being sensitive to people whose experiences are different from yours. Sharing is celebrated, but not mandatory. As a social studies class, we often learn about injustice and racism, which offers opportunities to treat difficult subjects with maturity and understanding. There is zero-tolerance for racially/ethnically insensitive remarks. All students are held to the same high standards and expectations.

How many students are limited English proficient (LEP)?: 3
For these students, make sure to check with them individually for understanding after I given an assignment or in-class direction. When possible, I give these students the next days assignments the day before, as time to think through them is invaluable. Because speaking is a vital aspect to learning a new language (and because these students are occasionally hesitant to speak in class) during class discussions I ask them questions using vocabulary of which I know they are familiar, and a question we have previously discussed. When possible, I provide them ahead of time with a vocabulary list of words that will be vital to know for the upcoming lesson.

How many special education students are in the class?: 0 Gifted/talented?: 0
No modifications are necessary.

How many 504 students are there?: 0
No accommodations are necessary.

Additional Considerations:
Because of the proximity of our room to a branch of special education classrooms, our students have the extra learning opportunity to practice acting maturely around those are different and vulnerable to teasing. This is an on-going learning project, but students understand there is zero-tolerance policy for teasing those with special needs—which is extended to a zero-tolerance policy for teasing anyone with difference, including those with different sexual orientations, religious beliefs and family structures.

Learning Target: I can evaluate my classmates’ public service announcements for message, intended audience and use of persuasive appeals.

- Writing EALR: 4. The student analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of written work.
  - Component: 4.1. Analyzes and evaluates others' and own writing.

- Grade Level Expectation: 4.1.1. Analyzes and evaluates writing using established criteria.

- Clear target aligned with assessment: The learning target is aligned with assessment as the purpose of this learning activity is students providing useful feedback and assessment of each other’s work based on specific criteria provided by the teacher. Students will complete a workshop sheet, and the teacher will circulate through the room to informally assess the activity and field students questions.

- Identify Prior Knowledge: Students are familiar with the idea of “audience” and the
persuasive appeals of Logos, Pathos and Ethos. They are familiar with analyzing a text for message. The guiding questions are familiar from the previous unit, but will directed toward the students’ interests, rather than toward a historical topic. We have been discussing the idea of workshop all week in class. Students have been evaluating PSAs based on the workshop criteria (see attached worksheet), and they have been conducting research in order to find content to fulfill this criteria.

Assessment Strategies:
1. The peer workshop will serve as a formative assessment based on the criteria provided by the teacher. Students will receive multiple perspectives from different students (groups will be arranged by the teacher). (4.B)
2. The teacher will circulate during the workshop to make sure feedback in constructive and appropriate. In the case of students failing to provide adequate feedback, the teacher will step in and give formative feedback to the students.
3. The final essay and PSA campaign will serve as the students’ summative assessment on the objective of evaluating message, audience and persuasive appeals. In this essay they will describe their own intentional use of purpose, message and audience in creating a PSA for an issue of their choosing. The information in their essay must correspond with the PSA they have created. They will be assessed on a standards-based grading scale.

Grouping of Students for Instruction: Students in this class have an assigned seating chart designed to promote whole-class and small group discussions, as well as ease in classroom management for the teacher. That said, the students will be given much individual work time for this unit. Discussion, however, is still a major aspect to each class (with a discussion following an entry task—at the very least). During these discussions, the teacher allows wait time for answers—to include students who need extra time to process questions—rather than simply calling on the first responders to questions. Occasionally, small groups (the workshop groups, for example) will be arranged based upon the work habits of students, their reading levels, their attitudes when working with others, their ability to positively affect their group members, and for a wide range of cultural and personal perspectives within the group. (5.H, 7.H)

LEARNING ACTIVITIES:
Learning Activities to engage all students:
- Introduction: This unit calls for the students to create a PSA campaign to call an audience to action on an issue of the student’s choosing. After finding an issue and creating a call to action, the students will research media channels by which to spread their message. After being guided through the initial steps of this project with the teacher, much the creation of the PSA campaign will be student-led. For this unit, the teacher is definitively the facilitator, working to help the students toward their own self-created goal.
- Guiding Questions:
  - How can one person make a difference when encountering a social challenge?
  - How do people communicate effectively?
- These are the same guiding questions from the previous unit covering the Holocaust, so the students are familiar with considering them. For this unit, however, their answers will be slightly different. Rather than
focusing on an external event, such as the holocaust, the students will turn
these questions on themselves, asking if they can make a difference, and
how best to communicate their calls to action. In a sense, this unit makes
more concrete these questions which had been more rhetorical (especially
the first question) in the previous unit.

- **Entry Task**: Students will spend 5 minutes writing their answer to the following prompt:
  - What does the expression “You reap what you sow” mean? Give an example.
    Write down your thinking.

- **Discussion**:
  - We will discuss students answers to the entry task.
    - Teacher expects a range of responses—those from “I don’t know” to well-
      thought answers. Concerns will be addressed. A discussion of “reaping
      what you sow” will ensue—and it will be tied to getting from workshops
      what you put into them. Students will hopefully see that they can learn
      from looking at others work, just as they can learn from feedback.

- **Class Activity**:
  - Teacher will hand students their workshop sheets. Students will complete the
    questions for the viewers of their PSAs. This will allow students to receive
    feedback based upon their specific concerns.
  - Teacher will direct students to their workshop groups. These groups are arranged
    based upon chemistry of students and a diversity of their projects.
  - From instructions given by the teacher, students will fill out their workshop sheets
    and short discussions will ensue. Group members will alternate viewing and
    having their work viewed.

- **Closure Activity**: There will be a whole-class discussion following the workshop.
  Students will be encouraged to share especially powerful PSAs they viewed, and to share
  any learning experiences they had—both directly through comments on their work, and
  through viewing the work of others.

- **Remainder of Class**: Students will be given the rest of the block period to finish working
  on their PSA and essay assignment. They will be aided by the feedback received in
  workshop.

- **Differentiated Instruction**: Small groups allows for help from classmates. Students who
  need special help were given a copy of the workshop worksheet ahead of time. For this
  unit, students are given choices for their expressions (media channels, messages) to show
  their learning. The teacher will help students individually as needed.

**Instructional Materials, Resources, and Technology**:
- Doc cam and projector (for teacher)
- Computers for students use (for unit project)
- Workshop graphic organizer
- Copies of various PSAs (to be used for examples)

**Management Plan**:
- My classes are talkative, by nature, because I use group discussion as a means for
  students to generate ideas. To ensure that groups remain on-task, I circulate through the
  room and ask pertinent questions to promote discussion. The discussion during the
workshop could become heated (the subjects of the PSAs could be controversial and students might be sensitive to criticism of their work from other students); in advance, I will ask students to recite my expectations for showing each other respect.

- If I have called the class to attention and people remain talking, I say, “I’ll wait,” and wait for them to finish. Students often police themselves after this announcement. I have found that a display of respect often gets quickly returned.
- If a student is being disruptive and uncooperative, the student may be moved to a new location in the classroom, if the problem was location specific. If the student is a disruption to the entire class, he or she may be removed to a neighboring classroom (the neighboring classrooms work as teams—so any neighboring teacher will be familiar with these students as a social studies or math teacher).
- At the beginning of the year, students filled out Venn diagrams in which they listed their expectations for the “teacher” and for the “students” and for “both”. We used these charts to help create the list of class expectations and rules. Although the students mostly expressed the same desires as the teachers, it was very useful to have their input and they appreciated the chance to have ownership over what happens in the classroom. (7.D, 9.E)

**LESSON PLAN RATIONALE**

**Learning Targets**

- How do the learning targets relate to the EALRs, state learning goals, district goals, school goals, or classroom goals?
  - Learning target: “I can evaluate my classmates’ public service announcements for message, intended audience and use of persuasive appeals.”
    - This learning target directly aligns with the Writing GLE: 4.1.1. “Analyzes and evaluates writing using established criteria.” It is a school and classroom goal to create media literate students, which means students must be adept at writing more than essays and formal papers, but must be able to communicate and evaluate all types of media. The workshop will give students the chance to use specific criteria to look at projects including several different media. Being exposed to different peer examples will lead to student self-assessment (as will the student-generated questions for their viewers to answer, which will precede the workshop and result in further reflection). (10.E)
  - How do the learning targets relate to the previous and future lessons? (explain or provide a unit plan) (unit plan provided)
    - This learning target is directly related to the summative assessment for this unit, as the provided rubric shows: students are being specifically assessed on their ability to explain their use of message, purpose and audience in a multi-media PSA campaign. With the input from their peers, students will be able to better meet the criteria for the summative assessment.
    - Previous lessons have included reading to identify logos, pathos and ethos, and use those persuasive appeals in their own writing. This project will call for similar use of persuasion—and the ability to identify it. (2.F)
How do the learning targets incorporate a multicultural perspective?
- The PSA projects will provide students the opportunity to promote their own cultural and community interests. Much of this project is student-led, and the concerns of all cultures and perspectives will be given attention.

Why are the learning targets appropriate for all students in the class? (highlight any modifications for individual students)
- The target is appropriate for all students because all students can learn from feedback given on their work, as well as viewing and evaluating the work of others. No only does this improves students understanding of the content, but it also provides a learning opportunity for students to practice giving feedback in a polite and constructive manner.

Assessment Strategies

- How does the strategy accommodate students developmental or achievement levels?
  - The workshop will give struggling students many opportunities to receive constructive feedback before the summative assessment, and to see many good examples of work being completed. Much of this project is student-led, so students will be able to choose outlets for their thinking which best utilize their strengths and interests. The teacher will also be available to help students with their specific problems during individual work time.

- How does the strategy respond to differences in students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds?
  - Students will be asked to evaluate PSAs which cover issues with many different cultural connections. The target audiences for these PSAs may be minority communities. Students will be allowed to seek out media channels and outlets which correspond with their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In workshop, students will be valued for their unique perspectives as audience members—especially if they are members of minority communities. Cultural diversity among the student projects will be encouraged and celebrated.

Learning Experiences

- How have you demonstrated your understanding of students’ cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, first language development, English acquisition, socioeconomic status (SES), and gender?
  - I have a zero-tolerance policy for derogatory and racially and culturally insensitive remarks. This classroom gives very little homework in an effort to recognize that students have many different levels of home responsibility away from school—many of these are due to cultural and socioeconomic influences. Students are not required to get materials from their homes; everything they need to succeed in school is provided at school. This project allows students to celebrate their specific cultural interests and tolerance of others’ interests is a constant expectation.

- How do the experiences accommodate the learning needs of students with disabilities or 504 students?
N/A. Covered in previous lesson.

- How do the experiences incorporate multicultural perspectives?
  - Students’ projects will give them the opportunity to promote their own cultural and community interests. Much of this project is student-led, and the concerns of all cultures and perspectives will be given attention.

- How do the experiences stimulate student problem solving and critical thinking?
  - Critical thinking is essential to this lesson, as its main focus is for students to decipher the subtle messages contained in the PSAs created by their peers. Students will be required to analyze written, audio and video works, and to see beyond their initial reaction and look for specific criteria relating to message, audience and persuasive appeals. During class discussion, he teacher’s questions do not produce “yes” or “no” answers, but force students to think deeply and realize that the same question can produce different answers. This entire unit is about solving world and community problems. The students are given the task to find a variety of solutions to any given problem. (8.D)

- How do the experiences create an inclusive and supportive learning community?
  - This lesson will use small groups (workshops) and whole class discussion, where the student will share and add to each other’s thinking. Inclusion, understanding and acceptance of differing viewpoints will be major factors to this lesson. A byproduct of this until will be students’ exposure to many different causes and ways of making a difference for those causes.

- Describe the research base or principles of effective practice that form the basis of the learning experiences.
  - Scaffolding and the peer workshop approach are both utilized in this lesson.
  - Students have been continually exposed to notion of persuasive techniques throughout the year. Logos, pathos and ethos are familiar in every student’s vocabulary. These terms are helpful in analyzing media for purpose and intended audience—they can use these persuasive techniques throughout their lives, whenever they find themselves in a situation where they must convince someone of something.
  - This lesson and unit incorporate aspects of gathering research and analyzing society that interdisciplinarily connect with social studies (which is also taught during this block). Several themes covered in social studies (i.e.: individual rights vs. common good) are central themes when studying the influence of public service announcements. (6.D)
  - Lastly, standards-based grading is a means of assessment which allows students to know precisely where they are achieving and falling short of standard. In standards-based grading, students’ grades are not determined their behavior and other non-content-related qualities, such as effort and attendance. Standards-based grading demystifies the grading process for students who have had little success in school, and it communicates to them—in the most direct way possible—what they need to do and know to reach standard.

Family Interactions

- Describe your plan for collaboration with families to support student learning.
Family communication and collaboration is an important ingredient to student success. XXXXXX Middle School conducts student-led conferences (which I have attended for most students in this class), where students are the focus and explain to their parents or guardians what they have been doing in school. The teacher listens as the student presents—much in the same way the parents listens. These interactions are usually very positive, because the student chooses the work to present, and the student fields any questions.

Additionally, I have gotten to know several families through my work with the XXXXXX Middle School track team.

From the beginning of the year, families have the phone number of the classroom, and I have had many phone interactions with parents regarding student behavior, the specifics of assignments, and how parents can best help their children at home.

Because the students are members of a “school team,” having four core teachers (I am one of these), special conferences between these teachers and families are very successful in that, usually, the student has formed a close bond with at least one of the core teachers. This way parent interaction with even the most challenging students can include positive discussion of student work and behavior.

This plan in particular is great for family involvement because media that is directed toward families (in home languages, about home interests, etc.) can be the subject of the students’ projects. Because student-led conferences are designed to have students present their work to their parents, the work will necessarily be in family-friendly language.
Appendix B: Reflection Book Assignment and Lesson Plan

Embedded Assessment 1 (Unit 4)

Literature Teams

Reflection Book and Presentations

Your assignment is to create a Reflection Book based on the work and thinking you have done individually and with your Literature Team while reading a book about the Holocaust. Your Reflection Book will show your thinking on the following questions:

- How has my thinking evolved through reading a book about the Holocaust?
- How has the author written about the Holocaust to create empathy in the reader?

After you have created your Reflection Book, you will present a chapter of it to the entire class.

PREPARATION

- Reading your Holocaust book (following the schedule created by your Literature Team).
- Completing graphic organizers for each of the five jobs.
- Participating in Literature Team Discussion:
  - Speaking clearly and respectfully
  - Taking notes
  - Asking questions

CREATING THE REFLECTION BOOK (5 Chapters):

Vocabulary List (Diction Detective)

Create a list of 10 powerful vocabulary words or phrases found in your Holocaust book. Each entry will include:

- Word or phrase
- Definition
- Explanation of why you chose that word (How is it important to the story?)

Bridge-Builders Essay

Write an essay explaining how the themes in your Holocaust book connect to your life. Your essay must include:

- Thesis statement
- Specific examples from your life (family, community, school, etc.) and from the book (quotes, paraphrasing, descriptions)
- Commentary which explains how they connect thematically

**Main Event Chart (Reporter)**

Create a chart (or time-line) which shows the main events of the novel. Your chart must include:
- At least 5 events from the novel—and the reason why you chose them.
- The Climax of the novel (the event which caused the most change in the book—this is usually near the end)
- A paragraph explaining why the Climax was the most important event.

**Team Voices Comparison (Discussion Leader)**

Write compare-and-contrast essay examining your team member’s different views, interpretations or opinions of one element of the novel (a character, event, theme, etc.). The goal for this essay is to present each team member’s viewpoint in a respectful manner, while still highlighting the differences and similarities.

**Visual Representation (Artist)**

Create an image to represent a theme in your Holocaust book. The image may be drawn, a collage, a chart of symbols or a comic strip. To accompany your image, write a paragraph explaining why you chose your particular image and how it connects to the theme of your book.

**BOOK PRESENTATIONS**

**Presenting**

After creating your book, you will prepare a 3 - 4 minute presentation in which you will explain one of your chapters to the entire class.
- Because not everyone read your book, you will have to summarize the main events and themes of the book and explain how they relate to your chapter.
- You must also include a visual aid (a poster or a sheet to use with the doc-cam).
- You might ask the class how your findings relate to their Holocaust books.
- In the last portion of your presentation, you will take several questions from the class.

**Listening**

During the presentations of your classmates, you will be assessed on your listening skills.
Lesson Title: Literature Team Reflection Book work day

Learning Target: I can use the themes in my Holocaust narrative to create powerful pieces of writing.
- Writing EALR 3: The student writes clearly and effectively.
  o Component 3.1: Develops ideas and organizes writing.
  - GLE 3.1.1: Analyzes ideas, selects a manageable topic, and elaborates using specific, relevant details and/or examples.

Assessment Strategies: Because students are reading books in literature teams, there is much personal responsibility for learning. The teacher will rely on much formative assessment—both oral and written—before the summative assessment for this unit, which is a reflection book and presentation, for which students will compile, revise and add to the work they have completed for their literature teams. The work their literature teams is comprised of doing specific jobs for each meeting: creating discussion questions, examining diction and vocabulary, making outside connections to the text, creating illustrations and summarizing the main literary elements (plot, setting, character development). Students will also be assessed on their speaking, listening and questioning skills. This particular lesson involves student creation of their summative assessment. They will have access to all previous formative assessments, their books, as well as peer and teacher feedback.

Grouping of Students for Instruction: Students in this class have a seating chart which intentionally places them near or away from students based upon their habits working with others. Some students are isolated because they work best alone. Others, who have shown moments of hard work, are placed next to positive role-models. The teacher tries to allow wait time for answers to include students who need extra time to process questions—rather than simply calling on the first responders to questions. The literature teams were intentionally arranged based upon the work habits of students, their reading levels, their attitudes when working with others and ability to positively affect their group members. In this particular lesson, students will work individually in the computer lab. They will likely be seated near the group members who read similar narratives.
Learning Experiences:

- Introduction: The students are completing their Literature Team Reflection Books. See attached copy of assignment. Although this is an individual assignment, their work in groups was integral to the project’s completion. Because the project is due in two days, I would like to give them as much time to work individually as possible.
- Guiding Questions:
  - How can one person make a difference when encountering a social challenge?
  - How do people communicate effectively?
- Entry Task: Students will be prompted (via doc cam) to gather materials and get ready for the computer lab. This can be a disruptive transition, especially considering that the computers in the computer lab take five or so minutes to get fired up. Therefore, I have a second entry task for the computer lab. They will make a goal card for the day and place it next to their computers. This should get them focused on their tasks, and eat up some of the down time.
- Class Activity: Students will work on their Reflection Books.
- Closure Activity: Each student will present a portion of their Reflection Book to the class. This will be a formal activity, for which they will be summatively assessed on presentation and listening skills.
- Differentiated Instruction: Students’ literature teams were designed for their optimal learning. During the goal-setting portion of class, teacher will personally review student goals to ensure that they rigorous, yet realistic. During individual time, teacher will circulate through the room to provide struggling students with specific assistance.

Materials Needed:
- Literature Circle Books
- Doc-cam
- Final assignment with rubric
Appendix C: Euphemism in Holocaust Narratives Lesson Plan

Teacher Candidate: [Blank]  
Date: [Blank]  
Cooperating Teacher:  
Grade: 8  
School District:  
School:  
University Supervisor:  

Unit/Subject: Language Arts  

Lesson Title: Euphemism in Holocaust Narratives  

Learning Target: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to identify and understand euphemism in their Holocaust narratives (they are reading novels in literature teams), and the reasons for its specific use by the Nazis during the Holocaust.  
- Reading EALR 1: The student understands and uses different skills and strategies to read.  
  - Component 1.3 Build vocabulary through wide reading.  
- GLE 1.3.2: Understand and apply content/academic vocabulary critical to the meaning of the text, including vocabularies relevant to different contexts, cultures and communities.

Assessment Strategies: Because students are reading books in literature teams, there is much personal responsibility for learning. The teacher will rely on much formative assessment—both oral and written—before the summative assessment for this unit, which is a reflection book and presentation, for which students will compile, revise and add to the work they have completed for their literature teams. The work their literature teams is comprised of doing specific jobs for each meeting: creating discussion questions, examining diction and vocabulary, making outside connections to the text, creating illustrations and summarizing the main literary elements (plot, setting, character development). Students will also be assessed on their speaking, listening and questioning skills. This particular lesson will rely on formative assessment by the teacher in the form of questioning students during discussion and looking at student work. Students will be able to show their understanding during the vocabulary portion of their summative assessment.

Grouping of Students for Instruction: Students in this class have a seating chart which intentionally places them near or away from students based upon their habits working with others. Some students are isolated because they work best alone. Others, who have shown moments of hard work, are placed next to positive role-models. The teacher tries to allow wait time for answers to include students who need extra time to process questions—rather than simply calling on the first responders to questions. The literature teams were intentionally arranged based upon the work habits of students, their reading levels, their attitudes when working with others and ability to positively affect their group members.
Learning Experiences:

- Introduction: The students are almost half-way through their novels and have met three or four times with their Literature Teams. The usual schedule for a language arts day is to begin with a mini-lesson which focuses on the finer points of one of their five jobs (reporter, discussion leader, artist, diction detective, bridge builder—these jobs alternate for every Literature Team Meeting). Students are usual given time after the lesson to read quietly or to complete individual work (graphic organizers for their jobs). Today’s lesson focuses on identifying euphemism—a skill which aid their work as diction detective and their vocabulary lists for their final Reflection Books and Presentation (summative assessment).

- Guiding Questions:
  - How can one person make a difference when encountering a social challenge?
  - How do people communicate effectively?
    - We have been discussing these questions since the beginning of this unit. Today’s lesson deals mostly with the second question—with a twist. The Nazis used euphemism to communicate misinformation rather than clear information. It was effective for their purpose, but their goals in communication were vastly different from the goals of a Language Arts classroom.

- Entry Task (on doc-cam): “What does the expression ‘I need to powder my nose’ mean? How do you know? Explain your thinking.”
  - Why would people say this?
    - Because they don’t want to talk about what they’re really doing.
  - Is this lying?
  - When is it a good situation to say this?/When is it unnecessary?

- Discussion: Introduce topic of Euphemism: When a more pleasant phrase is substituted for something that is unpleasant. (Graphic on doc-cam)
  - Give example of “Release” from The Giver.
  - Explain the difference between “denotation” and “connotation” (Graphic on doc-cam)
  - Questions:
    - Why would somebody want to do this?
    - Do you have any examples from your own life?
      - School?
      - Home?
      - Punishment?

- Class activity:
  - I hand each table an index card with an example of a Euphemism written on it. The students are to work in pairs or as individuals and think of instances when their euphemism might be used.
  - Students share their euphemisms with those around them—first by reading the phrase itself, and then by asking to see if their classmates if they know what the
connotative meaning is. The student then, on their own, offers an example of an instance when somebody might use this euphemism.

- **Discussion:**
  - This seems useful, but can euphemisms have a negative purpose?
  - The Nazi’s were masters of Euphemism.
    - Place Graphic under doc cam (list of euphemisms for Nazi treatment of Jews).
  - Compare dictionary definitions with context definitions.
  - Do any of these terms appear in your texts?
  - Why would the Nazis want to use terms in this way?
    - So people would not be aware of their true intentions.
    - So the Jews would be compliant.
    - So the Jews would keep their hope alive (believe the denotative definitions of the words).
    - Give example of someone constantly telling you to take your medicine.

- **Closure Activity:**
  - Hand out sheet to students.
  - Explain that their books contain euphemisms too.
  - Introduce the idea of skimming:
    - Looking through text quickly for specific information.
      - Rely on memory.
      - Look for clues.
        - Germans talking to Jews.
        - Jews feeling hopeful about their situation.
        - Jews feeling confused or misled.

- **Differentiated Instruction:**
  - Students literature teams were created for their optimal learning. Teacher will specifically assign euphemism cards to students based on their ability to decode the words. Students who need extra assistance with skimming will receive guided individual help and specific examples of euphemism from the teacher.

**Materials Needed:**
- Literature Circle Books
- Doc-cam
- Handouts
- Graphics for doc-cam
- Dictionaries
- Index cards for activity
- “Jobs” graphic organizers
- Final assignment with rubric
Appendix D: Sample Work: Reflection Book of ELL Student
For me, my picture connect the idea of the "evil" Holocaust with the novel idea "beauty out of the ugliness." Mix those thing up I want to show a picture, a funny picture but also show the ugly of a fact.

The main character (Misha) and Uri was give me the idea of the ANT.

+ Misha: he small, he quick. He's gonna die if he not quick enough to run or just be alone with nobody help. Because everybody is bigger than him.

+ Uri: he's a two face person. He look like Misha. But in the end he changed.

And Nazis is just like one big monster, unstoppable with the power of saying "Bla Bla Bla..." but can control people.
When I read "Milkweed", in the end I realized the book is about the life of the "nobody" boy, it no really take about how bad and ugly the Holocaust was. I saw it not good at all but it give the boy, the major characters the story of his life, the experience, people that he met. So that why when I chose 5 main events of the novel I choose the moment that he remember a most of some thing that could change his life.

1. The first time that he met Uni: The first person that take care of his life, that he listen to, count on, believe in, the reason why he could survive, but also one of the reason why Nisha don't want to be a Jew.

2. The first time that he met Janina: I think it is a really lovely moment for him, to met the one that could be his little sister later. The one that he rember the most, just one to keep memory about her for himself.

3. Life in the ghetto: the past of time that he kind of grow up. He knew more thing, got the point of the Holocaust how ugly it could be. But when you read this part you can feel sweetness, the happiness because he have a family, have someone love him and care for him. It just like "beauty out of ugliness.

4. The life after 3 years in the farm: for me, this is the Climax. The war was over, no Jackboot no stolen food anymore, you have to work for food. It just turn upside down for him like he say "The word is returning but for me there was no normal to return to." It exciting and make me wonder you gonna happen, it not really that much thing happened but it sure changed his life alot.

5. When he get old when remember what used to happened:

A big chapter that take about how he felt, what is he thing-thinking he second his granddaughter, look at the milkweed thinking about his memory, thing that he couldn't forgot. "The milkweed does not change colors. The milkweed is green in October as in July" he says.
Vocabulary

for me those 10 words that I fine out from "milkweed" book so important and powerful cause it connect to the major character and alot people in the book. It might be a normal word but it mean a lot.

Stopthief
Misha
Peppynoodle

I think it really important word cause the major character didn't have a name. He just call himself whatever people want to call him. But he proud of about those name and it also show to who is he in difference part of the book too.

Jew
Gipsy
I though that he is a Jew, Gipsy but he real happy to be a Jew too.

I connect those words because I want to show how difference is who is he and the want that he want to be.

Jackboot
Himmler

Those people that he admit want to be in the beginning but when he knew what they do he don't want to do anymore.

Mother
Oranje
Angel

This kind of childish belief of the major character and some of his friend. I think it want to show that they don't know alot of think what they don't know and need to know is how to survive Angel might normal but mother and orange... It just want to show how childish they are but they are children anyway.

And all those words just say one thing that show stermide the -holocaust was. Life of a person won't be like this if there no thing call "libcue"
**DEFINITION**

*Gypsy*: One of the nomadic people originally migrating from the border region between Iran and India to Europe in the 14th or 15th century.


*Mother*: A woman who given birth to a child.

*Angel*: 1. One of immortal being attendant upon God.
2. A kind and lovable person.
3. A financial backer of an enterprise especially a dramatic production.

*Orange*: A fruit of the orange tree, with a yellowish-red rind and a sectioned, edible pulp.
TEAM VOICES COMPARISON

+ Why the book name is "Milkweed"?

FEAN:
It like a simple of "freedom" because it outside the war of ghetto. And people think that every things outside the war, the life out there is like heaven.

ME:
I agree with him. But also think the milkweed is look like his life. It a weed so everybody want to destroy it but for somehow it still live and green as in October as in July.

+ What is the author trying to say?

FEAN:
Try to show how many Jew was affected. How the people in ghetto be affected by the Holocaust. How terrible there life without food.

ME:
I think it more about a personal story. Show the changes of the main character have in his life, what is he thinking because it fell by the main character.
Have you ever blamed your life? Cause it to terrible cause it to change to much. Why it have to change day by day? Thing could look nice in the begin but not really much in the end, like the begin of a sunny day but in the rest of the day is wet and cold raining.

For me, I wonder about it everyday. And when those time come I felt lost. Then I heard "Milkweed" I think I really look like the main character of the book. Why? Because I don't know what I gonna be or what might happen to me. Just like him, Risha, he didn't know about the Holocaust. He didn't know how bad it could be. How could he know, he just a kid back then. The problem with us do just we can't find out what is wrong and thing that we should do.

But if you still think our problem is really difference you gonna surprised cause our solution will always a same. Everything we need to do is accept it and move on. For example when I moved to America, big change I had to leaved all behind my friend, what I used to with to come to a new place that I don't know anything about it. Life of Risha, he had to move on, too. He had to leave his friend, Tizza, people that he felt happy to be with, place that he lived, thing that he did and just the reason like my cause we have to do it.

Getting again, change give your life a challenge, make it exciting. It might not affect that much good but it have to. I would accept it at much as possible.
Appendix E: Student Survey

A quick SURVEY about our CLASSROOM SETUP during LITERATURE TEAMS

Mr. Mills wants to know what you think about the way his classroom is designed. This survey will not affect your grade in any way. Being honest will help Mr. Mills arrange his classroom in the future. You do not need to provide your name. Thanks.

Please circle your answers to the questions below.

1. How did you feel about the “cluster” desk arrangement for Literature Teams? It was:
   Perfect   Good   Fine   Poor   Horrible

2. How did you feel about the lighting in the classroom? It was:
   Perfect   Good   Fine   Poor   Horrible

3. How did you feel about the sound level in the classroom? It was:
   Perfect   Good   Fine   Poor   Horrible

4. Where was your favorite place to do individual work?
   Table     Floor   Couch   With my friends   Other: ________________

5. Where was your favorite place to do group work?
   Table     Floor   Couch   With my friends   Other: ________________

Use the space below to offer any further comments about classroom design—or expand on your answers to the above questions:
APPROACHES FOR MODIFYING THE PHYSICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

By: [Name]
Eastern Washington University

Educational and Teaching Background
- B.A. in Architecture from Columbia University
- Adjunct Assistant Professor at University of Montana
  - Taught Composition 100 and 101
- Substitute teacher
- Student Teaching at Shaw Middle School
- Graphic artist and cartoonist

What brought me to this topic?
- Life-long interest in architecture and design
- Reflection on my own working spaces
  - Offices
  - Classrooms
- Variety of spaces seen while subbing and teaching
- Universally applicable to my (or anyone's) practice

Significance of this study
- The physical classroom is another tool to be used in conjunction with content
- Most teachers recognize that the environment affects learning—the question is how much?
- My goal: to create space which inspires people to action and makes that action as easy as possible.
- "That form ever follows function. This is the law."
  —Louis Sullivan

Research questions:
- What elements of the physical classroom most affect student learning and behavior?
- How can teachers best modify their classrooms using only existing resources?
- How can the classroom be modified for students of different learning modalities, achievement levels and special needs?
- What physical considerations must be made for new technology in the classroom?
- How can I integrate physical classroom elements into my future teaching?

Highlights of Literature Review: Desks
- 99% of classroom furniture is ill-fitted for students' bodies
- Choice of seat can cause unintentional hypnosis
- Circular seating arrangement increases students' sense of safety in the classroom
Highlights of Lit Review: Lighting and Sound
- Light bulbs can influence achievement, attendance, cavities and growth
- Preferences for lighting and sound are often opposite for higher and lower achieving students
- Music increases brain activity

Highlights of Lit Review: Design
- Color of walls can influence mood of students
- Temperature and air quality influence achievement
- Alternative arrangement
  - Open classroom
  - International practices

Highlights of Lit Review: Technology
- Technology workspaces should remain compatible for traditional school work
- Male students are more competitive for computer use than are girls

Modification Plan: Questionnaire
- Why Questions?
- Before the start of the school year
- During the school year
- Ongoing additions

Student Population
- Title 1 Middle School
- 8th Grade language arts
- Wide range of abilities
- Sections were divided based on students’ 7th Grade WASL scores

Previous Classroom Arrangement
- Semi-circular table arrangement
- Ideal for class discussions
- Teacher leads activities (there is a “front” of the classroom)
- All students can view projection screen
**Literature Teams Arrangement**
- Cluster arrangement
- Ideal for small group discussions
- Students lead activities
- Student choice:
  - Seating
  - Lighting
  - Sound

**Reaching Diverse Learners**
- Heterogeneous groups
- Proximity to teacher, projection screen
- Choices in learning environment
  - Seating
  - Lighting
  - Sound
  - Equal use of technology

**Alternate Arrangement**
- Intervention for discipline issues (for A.M. classes)
- Traditional rows and columns
- "Function follows Form"
  - Teacher centered activities
- Variety of environment maintained, but access dependent on teacher's approval

**Assessment: Observations**
- P.M. classes thrived with "clusters"
  - Sluggish with "traditional" arrangement
  - Music enlivened discussion
- A.M. classes struggled with "clusters"
  - More engaged with "traditional" arrangement
- Signs kept both groups on task
- Lights off universally appreciated
- Best group work:
  - Students were seated comfortably
  - Students could easily see one another

**Assessment: Student Work**
- ELL student
- At first withdrawn, opened up during Lit Team Unit
  - Artistic talents emerged
- Clusters: relationships with group members
- Signs: Wait time from other students
- Traditional: Relief from other students
  - Choice of quiet, low-light environment

**Assessment: Predicted Discipline Outcomes**
- Red line: A.M. classes
- Green line: P.M. classes

Seating arrangement changed between weeks 2 and 3.
Assessment: Predicted Achievement Outcomes

Red line: A.M. classes  
Green line: P.M. classes

Average score on Assessments

Seating arrangement changed between weeks 2 and 3.

Assessment: Student Survey

- Students give feedback regarding how the classroom met their environmental preferences:
  - Seating and movement
  - Lighting
  - Sound
  - Individual work
  - Group work

Reflection: Future Practice

- I will add to my questionnaire
- Subbing: Create signs for expectations
  - Incorporating my comics
- Create modification plans for a variety of language arts units (i.e.: creative writing, plays, research paper, etc.)
- Active in improving school conditions

Reflection: Further Research

- Is it possible to rearrange furniture between classes?
- What modifications will new classroom technologies require?

In one quote . . .

"Students should not be expected to change their environmental preferences or to learn regardless of them."

-Burc, 2004

May I answer any questions?