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From the Editors

In this issue of *Focus on Teacher Education*, we present three articles. The first article, by Eugene Geist and David Matthews, deals with classroom environments and how teacher educators can encourage preservice candidates to prepare learning ecologies for active student learning. The second piece, by Martin Scanlan, considers how to teach English language learners from an asset-based perspective instead of a deficit model. The last article, by Raholanda White, is a short summary of university grading policies drawn from her research at colleges and universities in Tennessee.

We would like to thank Kelly A. Russell, adjunct faculty at Athens State University, for her assistance in preparing this edition. Her editorial assistance and comments were invaluable.

We are grateful that we continue to receive a large volume of manuscripts for consideration. The variety of submissions and the quality of manuscripts are amazing to us. We encourage the readership to continue to consider *Focus on Teacher Education* as an avenue for publishing your research and work.

—Jerry Aldridge and Janice Patterson

Opening DORRS: Five Principles for Helping Future Teachers Prepare the Classroom Environment for Active Learning

Eugene Geist and David Matthews, Ohio University

Future teachers need to understand how to design learning environments. As teacher educators, we must make sure this information is part of their teacher preparation program. Whether that environment is outdoors or indoors, natural or created by people, the environment influences how we perceive the experience. People also display different emotional and physical responses to different environments (Kopek, 2006).

In this article, we describe the DORRS principles. These principles are designed to help teachers and teacher candidates analyze classroom and other learning environments. These principles include **defensibility, ownership, relevance, responsiveness,** and **significance (DORRS),** and are designed to guide classroom practitioners in this task.

Defensibility

This aspect of DORRS is often the hardest to understand. If we think about porches and patios, why would someone prefer to sit on a porch or patio than in the middle of an open yard? People tend to like congregating near objects and structures like buildings, trees, rocks, and rivers (Alexander, 1977). This makes us feel safe and secure and comfortable. There is something "familiar" about a small cozy space.

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It provides a barrier to the outside world or a shield from unwanted light and noise, and it allows the child to be mentally in control of the space.

In a classroom, this concept is also true. Lots of open spaces are not conducive to children's psychological comfort. So we have to create nice defensible spaces in the classroom where children can work alone or in groups.

The classroom environment has to be relevant to children's lives and needs as learners. The question that needs to be asked to determine if the space is relevant is, "Does the space reflect the cultures and needs of the children in the class?"

Ownership

Children must feel some ownership of the environment. After all, this is a place where t hey will spend a good portion of their day, five days a week. They need to have some degree of control over what is in the space and what it looks like. Having some control over the environment allows a child to develop self-identity and express relationships to the greater classroom community.

In the classroom, children should have some say in the look and feel of the classroom environment (Chase & Doan, 1996). Teachers are not honoring ownership when they set up a classroom alone or with little input from the children. This leads to classrooms that do not reflect the characters or the cultures of the children who are in them. By involving children in the process and giving them some choices and guidance in making the environment a comfortable place, the teacher ensures that the space can better meets everyone's educational needs (Helm & Katz, 2001; Helm, Katz, & Scranton, 2000; Katz & Chard, 2000).

Relevance

The classroom environment has to be relevant to children's lives and needs as learners. The question that needs to be asked to determine if the space is relevant is, "Does the space reflect the cultures and needs of the children in the class?" The idea of relevance includes concepts of cultural diversity, age appropriateness, and individual appropriateness, along with community and parental involvement and links to the "real world." The goal is to make the classroom, and ultimately the curriculum, relevant to the children's lives outside the classroom (Helm & Katz, 2001; Helm et al., 2000; Katz & Chard, 2000).

Responsiveness

Classroom space must respond to the needs of the situation or curriculum quickly and efficiently (Curtis & Carter, 2003). A responsive environment will support situations in which the environment needs to be quickly restructured to allow for different activities. Your students may also think of responsiveness as the flexibility to carry out great ideas quickly and effectively (Armstrong & Miami University, 1985; Mitchell, 1973).

In a static classroom, the desks never move and, for that matter, the children rarely move either. Much of this is the fault of the desk design. They are often heavy and bulky and difficult to move out of the way. Some classrooms use tables, but these are usually found in the lower grades and while they can help create a more responsive classroom, they are still heavy and difficult to move.

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in academic English. In short, raising the capacity of the staff in educational linguistics will promote the success of students who are ELL in heterogeneous groupings (Brisk, 1998).

Conclusion

In summary, best practices encourage schools to view students who are ELL from an asset-based perspective and to craft service delivery to these students in a comprehensive manner. By building the capacity of all teachers to teach all students, schools are better able to embrace linguistically diverse populations. This article has articulated specific strategies for schools to use to develop asset-based approaches to linguistic diversity by helping all educators understand how to better serve students who are ELL.

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Significance

What we teach children should be important and significant to their later life and development. A lack of significance can lead to the "cute curriculum," in which activities are engaged in because they are "cute" but lack true educational objectives (Aldridge, Calhoun, & Aman, 2000). In classrooms that lack relevance, we hear children ask, "Why do I need to know this?" or "When will I ever use this?"

Teachers must learn to integrate what the children *need* to know and what they *want* to know. This needs to be balanced with local, state, and national standards and developed into curriculum. A significant classroom is one that mirrors and integrates life outside the classroom into the learning that takes place in the classroom. A classroom should not be a foreign space that is radically different from any other space where children live, play, and work. It should be comfortable and familiar to them (Curtis & Carter, 2003).

Using the DORRS principles requires an investment of time, but time spent preparing is never wasted. The above steps provide a strategy, not an answer. Making good decisions is at the heart of good classroom design. Professional designers know that good design is, at best, a thoughtful extension of their imagination. The imagination is at the center of the classroom environment.

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