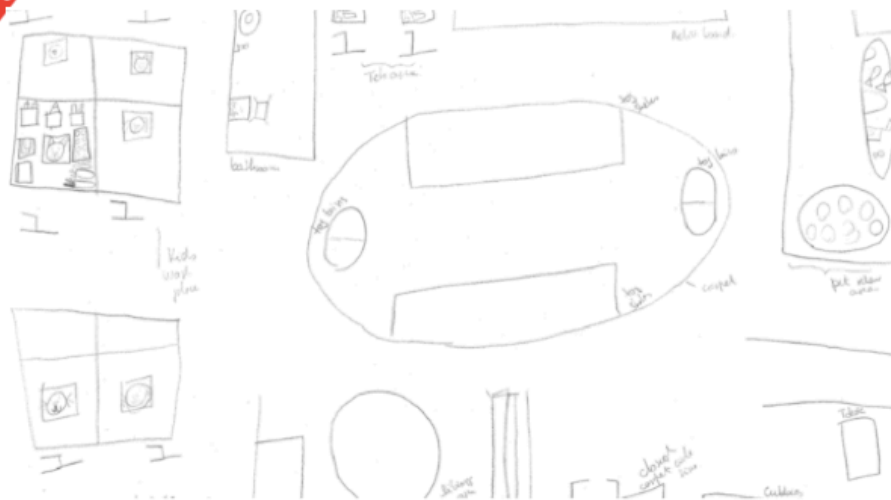


Pop Up Classroom



What is it?

Pop-Up Classroom is an activity that involves the students in designing how their own classroom is laid out and equipped.

The basic idea is to start the year with an empty classroom, and involve the children in designing the classroom layout.

Why do it?

It helps the students to take ownership of their learning objectives, by giving them authorship of the learning space; it establishes creativity, problem-solving and student empowerment as expectations in the classroom; and it offers opportunities for age-appropriate project-based learning activities.

How would I do it?

Here, we will describe one way to do it, and below we will talk about some possible variations, that we hope will give you ideas for how you could adapt Pop-Up Classroom to your own classroom.

In advance

1. Make sure your school principal knows you're going to do this. Talk to your facilities people about it, too, so they know what's going on and can help you – or at least not be taken by surprise!
2. Communicate with parents about it, especially parents of younger children who may accompany their children to the school on the first day of school. This exercise starts with an empty classroom, and you want them to know that this is part of a deliberate plan, not a lack of preparation on your part!

Prep

1. Before school starts, take photos of the furniture and equipment you have available for your classroom – tables, chairs, moving boards, rugs, shelves, rolling easel, active board, etc. Print out the photos and stick them to a poster. Put the poster in the classroom.
2. Empty the classroom. In an ideal world, you could move almost all the furniture and equipment out of the classroom, and start with nothing but carpet, or bean bags for the students to sit on.

When the students arrive

1. The “why is the classroom empty?” conversation

The first step is to tell them that the classroom is this way because you want to get their input on how to lay it out. This is going to be their classroom, for their use, so you want to get their thoughts and input on how to set it up.

2. The “why are we here?” conversation.

The next step is to talk with the students about what they are in the classroom. The idea is to talk about what the students should have learned by the end of the year.

* Older students will be able to engage on this topic fairly easily;

* With younger students, asking “why are you here?” will generate a wide range of answers (“because I’m a big boy/girl now”, “because my older brother/sister came here” and so on), before starting to focus on learning goals

A simple tool for this conversation is a list of skills and knowledge, organized by topic, that they should have mastered by year's end. This will help them to start to visualize what they might need in their classroom.

3. The "What Spaces and Layout Do We Need"? conversation

In the third step you can talk about how to set up areas of the classroom for different purposes, and what equipment should go in each area. Is there a need for an area where students can work on projects and, perhaps, leave work they will want to come back to later? An area where they could concentrate on something they are doing without being interrupted?

4. The "What Equipment Do We Need?" conversation

The fourth step: now the students know that they will be designing the classroom, and they've spent some time thinking about what the classroom is for. They now need to start getting down to some concrete proposals, coming up with ideas for what will need to be in the classroom, and where to put it. At this step, you'll need to try to keep the ideas from being too specific: "places to sit" and "display boards" are helpful.

Ask your students to draw what they believe would be the ideal classroom.

5. The "How Can We Do That With What We Have?" conversation

Fifth Step: At this point, the students need to consider the reality of the space, furniture and equipment they actually have.

This is where the poster you made earlier is useful: you can only equip the classroom with the furniture and equipment you have.

Now, the conversation is becoming very practical and concrete – what specific things will go where in the classroom? Will they fit? Are the ideas they had earlier going to work, with the furniture, equipment, and space you have? Can the students revise their earlier ideas, to make them work, or will they need to abandon some of them? Are there new ideas that come up, when they see furniture or equipment on the poster, that they had not thought about before?

(Of course, this part of the exercise can be extended into project-based learning exercises in age-appropriate ways: for example, 4th grade students could be asked to measure the room and all the available furniture and equipment, then submit ideas for a room design, with their proposals documented on graph paper. The students could be asked to present their ideas to their peers verbally, and could be asked to explain their thinking in a writing exercise, describing why and how their plan would enhance/support

teaching and learning in the room. If you use a longer exercise like this, you may want to start with a basic classroom layout rather than an empty room, as the exercise might stretch out over a few days.)

6. The “Let’s Do It!” step

Last Step: now you need to get the classroom set up.

Here, you’ll need to exercise some judgment and consider any school policies about students moving furniture, particularly heavy furniture. Certainly, it helps if the furniture and equipment has wheels! But, even if you have adults move most of the heavy items, it’s important to involve the students themselves in moving smaller items: it helps to drive home the fact that they are setting up their own classroom, for their own use, that it’s their responsibility.

This step can be divided into two parts: moving the furniture, and setting up equipment, books, and smaller items. The furniture will come in first, and will create the physical spaces the students have decided and agreed on. Once the spaces have been set up, and the furniture is in place, the students will need to equip the spaces for their purpose.

Suggestions from team members on how to proceed on specific grades

Kinder by Paula Marra

Asking children how to lay out the classroom only makes sense if the children have a clear idea of what goes on in a classroom - and for kindergarten children, classrooms are a new experience they know very little about, at first. So, the pop-up classroom discussion needs some context. That context will come with time, but we can accelerate things by using a goal-setting exercise that gets the children thinking about why they are in a classroom and what they hope to achieve there.

The teacher should first ask the students why they think they are at school. There will be many different answers: "because my sister comes to this school"; "because now I am a big boy"; "I don't know". At some point someone will say, "to learn to write", and the teacher can start to focus them on learning things at school, and on what they might learn. On a big sheet of paper, posted on the wall, the teacher should break down what learning to write involves (the separate skills - letter formation, left to right...), and do the same with the other (major) subjects. This results in a kind of timeline plan for learning through the year - a work plan or list of goals (see prototype picture).

With that discussion having happened first (at least, the first phase of it), we involve the children in designing the classroom layout: what areas the room should be divided into, the furniture and wall posters/active boards/etc. required in each, accommodations to the needs of the children in general (e.g., heights of the wall posters) and of particular children (e.g., standing desks, quiet/focus spaces - for example, kindergarten students said they would like a “Flow Area” for

students who don't want to be interrupted in their work for snack/break time, and a "Chill Area" for when they just need a minute.

The layout conversation may need quite a bit of teacher guidance in kindergarten, and may need to happen more than once during the year. For example, the teacher may humor a not-entirely-practical idea the students have (especially in kindergarten, where imaginations are vivid and practical experience limited), then later ask them to discuss whether that idea is really working.

By the way, the "why are we here" discussion can also be revisited. In the middle of the year the teacher and students can review the goals and tick off what they have achieved, and they can do it again toward the end of the year, by which time nearly everything can be checked. Then, the teacher can turn the page around and show that the name of the next grade (J1, in this case) is written there - the students are all ready to move on! (I have done this over the years.)

3rd Grade by Michael Schurr

By third grade, students have already experienced, on average, five years of school and are beginning to truly view their role at school as a learner. For some this happens earlier, for some a bit later, but the average student understands that they come to school to learn. In many cases, students view the teacher as the holder of all knowledge. Why wouldn't they? Teachers traditionally set up the classroom in advance of student's arrival, making the assumption that "teacher knows best."

But what if the year started with students deciding what *they* feel is needed to be successful:

Start with "What if" questions. "What do you like/dislike about school? What do you like/dislike about previous classrooms? What do you think you will need to feel comfortable and confident when learning new material?"

Next, use student feedback to create teams of students to sketch or build prototypes of what the classroom could look like. Everything from placement of furniture, class library, art supplies, teacher desk, etc.. Using the prototypes, students will provide feedback using the "I like, I wish, What if" protocol.

Then vote on the best ideas, which will lead to a prototype classroom. As a class, set up the classroom based off of favorite ideas.

After a few weeks of living in the space, conduct another feedback session where students discuss what is working, what isn't, what they would change and what they would keep the same. Again use the, "I like, I wish, What if" protocol. This process will continue throughout the year as the demands of the third grade curriculum change and evolve.

4th Grade by Richard Brehl

Start with a discussion about why we come to school (similar to Kinder, above). Brainstorm about ways we learn. Try to lead them to key ideas such as: learning is about what we don't know, experimenting and trying new things, making mistakes are how we learn. Getting out of our comfort zone. Learning alone and with others. Where do we learn? How does the classroom affect how we learn?

Brainstorm list of learning activities we do in the classroom. (group work, presenting, circle time, independent work at desks, etc).

Review area, perimeter and measurement.

Students could be asked to measure the room and all the objects in it, then submit ideas for a room redesign, with their proposals documented on graph paper. The students could be asked to

make a poster and present their ideas to their peers verbally, and could be asked to explain their thinking in a writing exercise, describing why and how their plan would enhance/support teaching and learning in the room.

Lastly, we go through a feedback phase where students offer at least one thing they like about every other proposal, and one thing about each proposal that they think might present a challenge.

Using that feedback data, we could compile the most popular design ideas into a final design for the classroom.

While we have traditionally done this at the end of the year, I think we could move this to the beginning of the year. They come to us with a sense of area and perimeter, and this exercise is just an extension.

5th grade by Meg Krause

HMW create a classroom that gets us excited about learning?

5th graders have lots of experience in classrooms, and as the oldest students in the Lower School they think they know a lot!

Begin by asking students what they need to learn. Then have the students ask the teachers(s) what they need to be able to teach. (I'm thinking here about things like student engagement/curiosity.)

Then move on to some kind of visual inspiration activity. Students could look through magazines and make sketches. They should include places that stand out for them- so they need to be encouraged to look for images beyond schools. For example, libraries, offices, gymnasiums, zoos, etc. All these images could become a huge collage on one wall of the classroom. Then students use sticky dots to indicate the places that stand out and why.

Next, students could share whatever they find unsatisfying about the present setup. Ask students to draw a map of their current classroom, in as much detail as possible. Then students use sticky notes to write a word or two that shows how they feel in each section of the classroom.

Once students have identified some wishes for a future classroom and some problems with the present classroom, direct them to work with a partner to identify a need. (Example, HMW create quiet places for reading? HMW design a classroom for more movement?)

Middle School by Robin U

At our school I was lucky enough to be able to pilot certain types of furniture. I teach Grade 7 Humanities and I was always moving my classroom set up around (at least three times a week). For Socratic seminars we needed tables facing each other in a square or rectangle, for a video or pecha kucha we needed all the desks facing forward, for small group projects we sat in table groups of 4 -6 and for whole class simulations we sometimes didn't want any desks at all.

Our school ordered 8 tables for me - each one was on wheels and each one had a lever where you could flip the table top and push the tables against the wall or to make almost a wall of their own. They also put whiteboards on almost all the walls (some teachers in the HS were lucky enough to have the kind of walls that you can write on) so we had great opportunities to arrange the classroom to suit the students and/or our learning needs on a daily basis. It was so fantastic - so I LOVE your idea and I think it will definitely work.

We made a video of all the different classroom set-ups if you want me to try to find it. We were also lucky enough to have a few big beanbag chairs which made an amazing reading space for students and we could move that space whenever we wanted.

The kids really liked the flexibility of the classroom space because they had ownership of it but also because I did. When they came in and saw a certain set-up, they would get excited about what we were doing. They also came up with their own ideas when they saw what we could do. I think that MS aged students can clearly see the relationship that Paula is articulating between learning spaces, knowledge, creativity, process and innovation.

If you don't have money for these types of tables - you could do the same with other furniture - but with these tables, it's really amazing.

Introducing the idea at the beginning of the year could be really cool with students writing about what they notice with the different spaces ie. it's hard to actively listen to others when you have to twist your head around to focus on someone three rows behind you.

High School by Lisa Yokana

I am planning to do this on day one with my architecture I class.

I will put all the furniture in the middle of the room and ask them to lay it out so that it works for our class. I will tell them that they can throw anything out or discard for later use. They will be confused. I will then ask them what they think they need to know and how they think they should proceed?

Instead of asking them about the learning first, since it's high school, I want to have the shock value of coming into a room that's not prepped for them. I want them to work through the problem. It may take more than one day for them to do this. And I will also tell them, after they start asking questions, that it doesn't have to stay this way for the whole year but just for the first activity. I want them to be totally confused and then have to dig their way out. After they actually figure something out, we will process like crazy. We will talk about how they worked, what role they took, how they felt and then about the process that they chose to follow. Then we will talk about what they would do differently next time they are faced with an open-ended problem like this.

I will document like crazy, taking photos along the way that I can post and record some of their responses in the reflection part.