

Reflecting on my Classroom Literacy Environment by Dr. Carmen Gordillo

*Does my classroom reflect where I would like to work? Would someone feel comfortable working here? What do I have in my classroom that is conducive to learning?* These are questions I reflect on when I set up my middle school classroom at the beginning of each school year. I also think back to when I completed my most challenging academic work throughout my dissertation writing journey. My favorite places to work were at a café (either Barnes & Noble or Starbucks), my dining room table, and my bed. What was it about these places that I liked? I enjoyed the comfort of my bed and plush chairs at the cafés. I liked spreading out my books and materials on my dining room table. The social aspect of the cafés helped me be more productive because having people around me working made the process (seem) less daunting. Therefore, I strive to emulate these experiences for my students. In the corner of my classroom I have a couch, lamp, pillows, a rocking chair, plush chairs, plants, and different types of books on display. In addition, I have various tools available for students, such as highlighters, different sized Post-its, Sharpie markers, Crayola markers, white boards, different color papers, and pens. Additionally, one of my goals each year is to continue building my classroom library. Here are some tips that have helped me build my library:

- Go to library sales (You can purchase a bag of books for as little as twenty-five cents!);
- Ask parents at *Back to School Night* if they would be able to donate any gently used books or magazines;
- Ask students if they have any books at home that they would like to donate to the class;

- Ask family members and friends for book donations as gifts;
- Attend literacy conferences where books are given as freebies;
- And, definitely enter book raffles at conferences, workshops, and on Twitter (I have won 3 times!).

There is much written about the literacy environment in the early grades. I think this should be an area of focus in the upper graders too. It is truly worth investing time and resources in to your classroom setting. I noticed that it brings in a new energy to the classroom and lessons. Recently I asked some of my eight grade students why they enjoy working in our “Café Area.” Here are some of their responses:

*“I like sitting in the couch area because it is more comfortable than my desk and that helps me focus.” - Briana*

*“I like working in this area because it is way more comfortable than my desk. It helps me focus more without having to try and get comfortable in those uncomfortable desks.” - Gio*

*“The reason why I like sitting on the rocking chair is because it helps me think in a way. All my best ideas come from that chair. It helps me think and process my thoughts.” - Laila*

*“I like to sit on the couch because it is comfy to write and it is relaxing. It is easy to focus.” - Shaun*

I encourage middle school teachers to rethink the design, tools, and layout of their classrooms. What changes can you make to foster student engagement in your room tomorrow?

