

# THE SECRETS OF 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM DESIGN

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*It is really possible to design a truly student-centered classroom?*

**Here are five novel approaches to classroom design, in use by various schools, that could take you by surprise.**

1. Schools with two-teacher, team-taught interdisciplinary classes. These classrooms are nearly twice the size of regular classrooms, and they have double groups of students. Plus, students are taught in double-block periods.
2. Schools with classrooms that have either no walls; else have glass walls to separate classrooms from the corridors and breakout spaces. This allows students and visitors in the corridor to see what's happening in a classroom.
3. Schools with open-space or multi-use learning spaces as classrooms. They have wireless internet, and the furniture is movable. This allows students to team-up, collaborate and

engage in various activities.

4. Schools with absolutely no classrooms. They have small-group collaboration zones, project rooms, facilitator collaboration zones, single subject-matter learning environments, dual subject-matter learning environments, a digital media library, multi-group collaboration zones, and so on.
5. Schools with learning plazas large enough to house ninety to 120 students. These learning plazas have modular and mobile lecture-style seating to accommodate larger groups and to divide the plaza space. They use modern technology and flexible furniture. These plazas can be set up in several different configurations to aid the learning process.

That's not all. There are several more classrooms, around US, that currently use rolling tables, rolling chairs, mix and match tables, commissioned chairs, flexible tables, etc.

### ***What's so special with these classrooms?***

The classroom design. These classrooms aren't only innovative, they are learner-centered. The whole school space has been converted into an extended learning area. These aren't the traditional teacher-directed whole-group instruction classrooms. Students can learn anywhere in the school.

The question is – *Why to change your classroom design?*

The most prevalent classroom design – *students sitting in a row, with a teacher table in front, and facing a whiteboard* – is incompatible with 21st century learning standards. It was developed to create order and structure. To keep students on-task. It was designed to empower the traditional model of instruction – Students listen to lectures, take notes, and fill-in worksheets – to help students practice, and memorize the facts written in a book, and taught by the teacher. Twenty-first century learning standards are different.

Current standards measure student success terms of higher order skills. Students are measured for skills like creativity, reasoning, problem-solving, and so on. Students need to show that they can identify problems, create solutions, develop those solutions into working models.

As per Chickering and Gamson, “[Students] must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply their classroom learning to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.”

## **Effect of classroom design over student learning.**

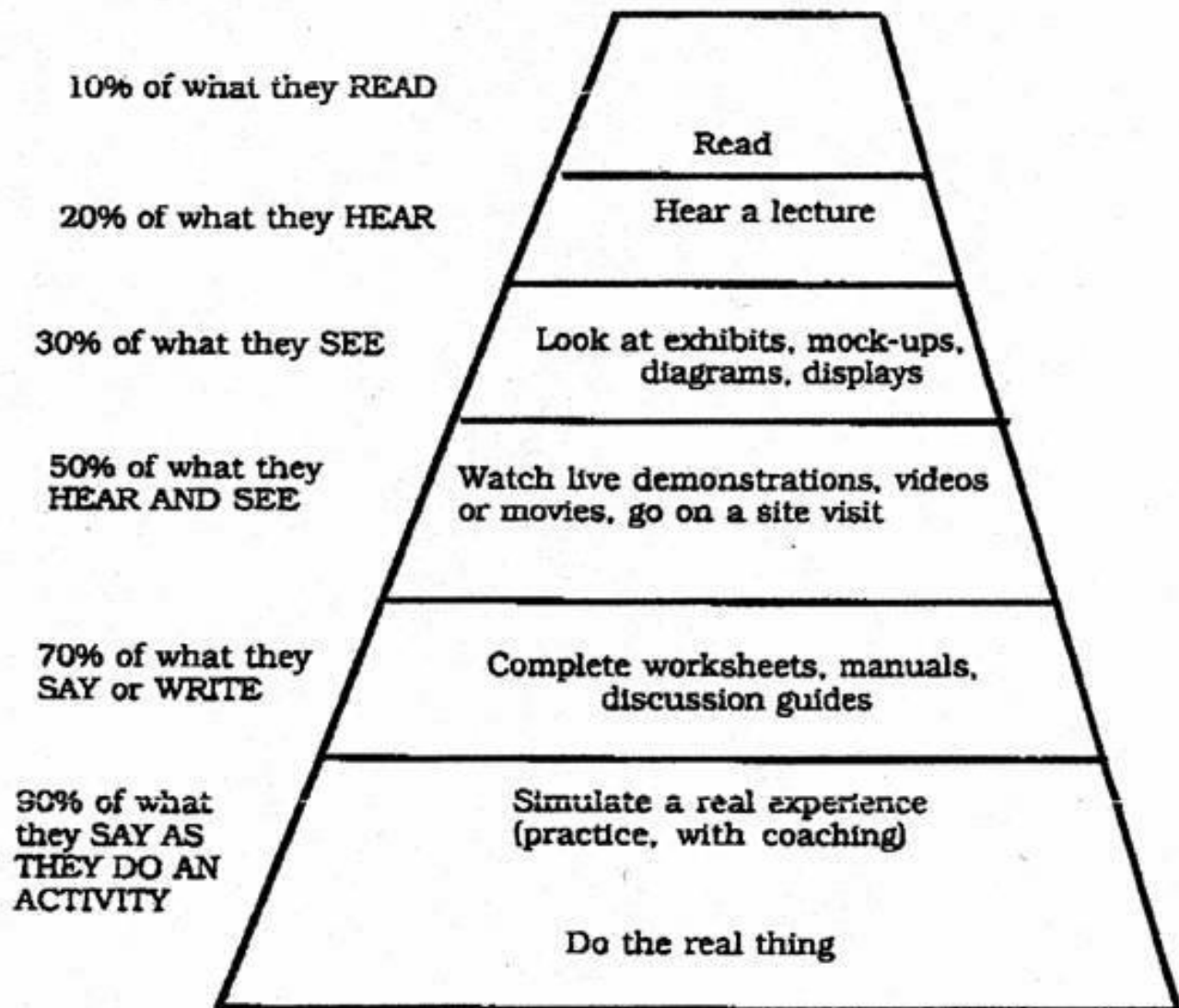
Even today, classrooms are designed to deliver lectures. Students sit in rows and listen to various teachers. It is expected from the student that they would learn by watching and listening to the teacher.

Unfortunately, it – *the classroom lecture* – isn’t the most effective instructional tool. As per National Training labs,

only 5 percent of the concepts taught via lectures are retained.

## PEOPLE GENERALLY REMEMBER

An important learning principle, supported by extensive research, is that people learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. The "lower down the cone" you go, the more you learn and retain.



Adapted from *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*, Edgar Dale Dryden Press, N.Y., 1954., p. 43.

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5227.

On the other hand, discussions groups (50%) and teaching others (80%) have very high-retention levels.

# **Classroom design matters.**

The classroom itself is a powerful teaching tool. It isn't just a room. It's a space where students connect. It's design influences not only pedagogy, curriculum and learning, but it also impacts the quality of student-interaction and student-engagement.

## ***Here are a few benefits of student-centered classrooms***

1. Increased levels of student-teacher interaction
2. Improved concentration, enhances learning, and better student behavior
3. Better collaboration among students
4. Active learning in the classroom.

## **How to design an effective 21st century classroom**

Active learning. That's your first challenge – you need to figure out how your classroom can help promote active learning.

Moreover, an effective classroom design also supports collaborative learning, increases student-teacher interactions, and boosts student engagement. Here is a checklist to help you figure out if your classroom design supports active learning.

## **The 12 Characteristics of effective 21st century classrooms.**

1. Learning and instruction happen with the aid of a variety of digital tools and resources, like videos, manipulatives, graphics, text files, etc.
2. Teachers and students have unequivocal access to a digital library.
3. Students have the provision to collaborate with students in their classroom, and across the school.
4. Teachers have the provision to personalize classroom instruction.
5. Students have the provision to personalize their learning experience.
6. Students have the choice to select how and what they want to learn.
7. Students can choose to individualize or personalize their learning path.
8. Teachers, students and parents can monitor student-progress by themselves.
9. Teachers can diagnose and assess students without disturbing their learning cycle.
10. Freedom of movement in the classroom – flexible layouts, movable furniture, wireless networking of digital devices.
11. Teachers and students can connect with external experts from the classroom.
12. Teachers and students have 24 X 7 access to school resources.

**Howbeit, developing a student-centered classroom isn't an easy task. Every design has limitations. Here are a few factors you should think over while considering a new classroom design. Read over these factors**

## **and consider how each could affect your design decisions.**

1. Your goals for the upcoming school year
2. Number of students, and their age
3. Shape and size of your classroom
4. Classroom activities and learning assessments
5. Classroom furniture
6. Available electronic equipment
7. Digital tools at your disposal
8. Location of electrical outlets, internet access boxes, windows, doors, etc.
9. Limitations of the school Wi-Fi, and
10. Classroom supplies

Moreover, you should consider collaborating with teachers from other schools too. Their experience with technology integration and classroom design can often help prevent wasting money and time on resources that elsewhere have already proven to be ineffective.

How did you modify your classroom? Comment below to share your classroom design. We'd love to know.

### **References**

The Impact of ICT on Schools: Classroom Design and Curriculum Delivery

Designing New Learning Environments to Support 21st Century Skills

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STUDENT AND TECHNOLOGY  
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