How does the decoration of a classroom setting influence student academic achievement in an 11/12 grade of ELLs in Henry Street of International Studies?

Dr. Fayth Vaughn-Shavuo

Decorations play an important role in the classroom and sometimes it will help students improve their academic knowledge or help teachers achieve their daily aim. Therefore, if the students take advantage of that decoration of the classroom, it will help them a lot. This action research project will make me to explore how colors influence the students’ academic achievement.

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# ****Abstract****

There are different types of decoration of a classroom setting. Project “How does the decoration of a classroom setting influence student academic achievement in an 11/12 grade of ELLs in Henry Street of International Studies?” is a general action research project. Decoration plays an important role in the classroom and sometimes it will help students improve their academic knowledge or help teachers achieve their daily aim. This is kind of two-way help. Therefore, if the students take advantage of that decoration of the classroom, it will help them a lot. In this case, I want to see how it influences the students’ academic progress. In my research question, I explored how colors influence the students’ academic achievement.

The project will explore the following hypotheses: (a) There is a significant increase in academic achievement when students saw colorful handouts or learning posters. (b) There is a significant increase in academic achievement when the handouts or learning posters are warm colors.

The data collection tools used were intervention of colorful posters, questionnaires, interviews and time frames to record the impact of color on students’ academic achievement. There were 10 students in the case during one and a half month.

# Part I-Introduction

The purpose of this research is threefold: (a) to explore whether English language learners (ELLs) get help from the decoration of the classroom setting, especially through the content areas; (b) to examine how the students respond to and participate in content-based literacy instruction with colors; and (c) to investigate what factors influence the students’ responses, participation, and attitudes within two types of visual things, images and words. The primary focus of this research is on content-based instruction for ELLs. This investigation begins with the posters of the classroom and sees how they help students. As what I see, some of the classroom settings are really helpful with their studies and related with the class. Unfortunately, most of the students will ignore and pay no attention on that. Therefore, I have an idea that if I write them in different colors or their favorite color, will it help them pay more attention or attract them? Or if the teacher type the information in different types of words or charts, such as “ smart” ”smart ””smart” , will it be helpful? The researcher will focus on how colors influence the students’ academic achievement to investigate thoroughly in this action research project.

I chose this research topic for two reasons. First, the topic presented itself when I experienced my class in Senior High School. With the colors decoration, I had more interest in the text or the information when I saw them. Second, I do notice that there a lot of information in the classroom which I observed, and not everyone takes advantage of when it can help their studies. Therefore, I want to do the research and see how it works. I hope my research will help me in my student teaching as well.

**Research Question**

How does the decoration of a classroom setting influence student academic achievement in an 11/12 grade of ELLs in Henry Street of International Studies?

**Rationale of the study**

 I am doing my fieldwork in Henry Street School for the International Studies. I got the chance to observe the students there and got some feedback. A second language is always not easy to learn. That’s why sometimes it is important to have some special way to attract the student’s interest. Look at the picture on the right. Is it funny? I am surprised that most of the students ignored it, especially one day when “joyful” was showed in their test book, but no one explained its meaning when the teacher asked. If anyone noticed that, he/she would say “happy”. Meanwhile, I remembered that when I observed in another school, they decorated the classroom with English, Chinese and colorful pictures which influenced their studies. It is kind of inception which will be helpful. For example, if they see the decoration two minutes every day, I do believe they will know some words or use some words in the decoration.

# Part II-Methodology

**Setting**

Henry Street School for International Studies is a unique small school sponsored by the Asia Society, where all the students are prepared for college and to find careers through the pursuit of fascinating knowledge about other world regions, including their histories, economies, cultures and languages. Teachers, who are experts in their field, forge supportive relationships with students and parents while providing challenging, engaging and internationally-focused instruction. Teachers partner with community arts and business organizations to help each student succeed. The school’s vibrant multicultural learning environment extends beyond the classroom, through both real and virtual travel, and exchange opportunities with students around the world.

The school admissions priorities are that 8th graders students, Manhattan students or residents who attend an information session and New York City residents. Meanwhile, this school will provide students with disabilities the supports and services indicated on their IEPs. The school has ESL for ELLs. They served Grades Served (2012 - 2013): 06,07,08,09,10,11,12.

**Student population:**

99% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch

62% Dominican Republic

55% China

Other countries

The Henry Street School for International Studies is attempting to develop ways to build supportive environments for learners to explore the world of ideas connected to life work and to help them find positive ways to build friendships through cooperative academic work. Henry Street has self-contained classes for students with special needs. It also has ICT (integrated co-teaching) classes that mix special-needs students with general-education students. ICT classes have two teachers, one of whom is certified to teach special education. More than one fifth of the students in this school have received special education. Henry Street also offers extra resources known as SETSS (special education teacher support services). Most students are English language learners, some of them recent immigrants with extremely limited English skills.

# Date Collection and Analysis

According to my question, I collected my data from questionnaires, interviews and time frame intervals. I will do colorful handouts as well, for example, type a lesson in colors and try to see what the differences are after I do it. Moreover, I will use time frame intervals to record the progress of their class and test them. I will let them use the decoration one day of their studies to do my research as well. The changes will be using time frame intervals to record the results, thus I will use a line graph to record the results so that they can be seen clearly.

As the researcher, I used questionnaires, interviews and time frames to see how colors influenced student academic achievement in an 11/12 grade of ELLs in the Henry Street School of International Studies. Based upon my questionnaires, 80 percent of the students finished them and gave them back to me while 10 percent did part of them; the rest just wrote down the name. In my questionnaires, they were asked,” Do you like teachers to write down the words or the new knowledge in your favorite color? If they present work in a color that you dislike, how it will impact your study? Or maybe you don’t care.” One student said,” I like all of blue. It’s my favorite color. I don’t care they will impact my study.” The last sentence had some grammar mistake. I thought he wanted to say “I don’t care; they will not impact my study.” When he was asked,” What kind of decoration of the classroom setting do you like? Could you write down more details, please?” He answered,” I dislike all of classroom; maybe my heart is not on here.” This is a Chinese boy named Student two who came here three years ago with his parents. After the interview of Student two, I knew that he has been learning English since he was in Junior High School in China, but he never spoke it after he came here. His family is running a restaurant in that district. He told me that he would help his family in the restaurant after he graduated instead of going to college for further education. Before I did the questionnaires, I found that he always stared at the window in class when the teacher was teaching. He didn’t care about studies, however, he told me the truth and he was honest. A student answered,” No, because they never ask me,” when she were asked:” Have you ever had some experience of doing a good job after seeing your favorite color or charts during classes? Please describe.” I felt a little upset after I saw the answer. I didn’t get a chance to interview this student because I wanted to know what her feelings were or what happened.

I printed a colorful handout one day of their ESL class in the afternoon. This was a story about the famous story,” The Three Little Pigs”. There were supposed to be seven students in this class but only four came. Two of them paid attention on the handout and said,” Wow, I like it.” The rest just looked at the paper, and then put it away. Moreover, I did the time frame for those students to observe how long they can focus on the class. Two students who didn’t care about the colorful paper began to chat after 15 minutes of the class, what’s worse; their voice was as loud as the teacher’s. They didn’t show the respect to the teacher which was really annoy.

One day, I asked my cooperating teacher to take one class to use the decoration of the class for my observation. Based on my observation, only 20 percent of the students concentrated on the teacher the whole class, 40 percent of the students spent 20 minutes in class then chatted with classmates who sat next to them, 30 percent of the students ignored the teachers and did whatever they want, such as chatting, listening the music and surrounding in the classroom and 10 percent of them were absent. But when I asked them to get involved an activity, 80 percent of the students were participant well and they enjoyed it. Thus, it means if teacher put knowledge into some funny activities, it may improve the interesting of their studies.

Based on my data collection, three students did the evaluation of my research. One student wrote down three words from black and white chart, four words from colorful chart. The second student remembered four words of each chart. The third one wrote down four words of each chart and one word of each chart was wrong. It can’t prove that colorful words are easier to remember because of limited information.

# Part III-Literature Review

The topic which guides these literature reviews are about the different classroom settings of different grades of different schools have different influence and different degree. Those papers can assist the researcher to get the general ideas of different classroom setting and explore the researcher’s project. They can inspire the data collection of the researcher and get more evidence of the importance of the classroom setting. The following papers are relevant to my topic research question “How does the decoration of a classroom setting influence student academic achievement in an 11/12 grade of ELLs in Henry Street of International Studies?” because the strategies which I mention above can lead to explore the my hypotheses. In order to get strong evidences to support my hypotheses, the researcher will using these papers as follows.

In the article by Lawrence, et al. (2005), the author investigates the relative and combined influence of classroom condition and teacher intervention on perceptions of classroom violence. Classroom environment, teacher intervention, and observer status influenced evaluations of the teacher and school, but not the assailant. I want to use the intervention strategy in this paper which gave my some ideas.

In the research article by Sara, et al. (2005), it examined two questions about the relation between kindergarten classroom processes (setting and quality) and children's engagement in activities, compliance with teachers' requests, and interactions with peers. First, how do children's engagement, compliance, and cooperation vary as a function of teachers' use of classroom settings, and second, how does classroom quality moderate the co-occurrence between teachers' choice of classroom settings and children's behaviors? This is what I want to talk about in my research about teacher’s use of classroom settings in class whether help students’ academic achievement.

In the research article by Baloglu, N. (2009), the author talks about how the behaviors of teachers in classroom setting influence high school students. Glenn and Nelsen's research (2000) found that good behavior must be developed through a process that teachers and parents must model. I notice that not only will the decorations of classroom setting influence the students but also, the behavior of teachers. I will mention this in my research paper.

In order to focus on colors, I found the research article by Valanides, et al. (2008) as well, which discusses the scaffold design of ODRES (Observe, Discuss, and Reason with Evidence in Science), a computer tool that was designed to be used with elementary school children in science, and report on the effects of learning with ODRES on students' conceptual understandings about light, color, and vision.

Burke, et al. (2004) mentioned that in view of the classroom setting of a veteran educator, Dunn and Dunn share that the well-structured classroom may actually be preventing some students from achieving. Researchers conducted seventeen studies on the environmental elements in the Dunn and Dunn Learning-Style Model and revealed that students achieve higher or have improved attitudes when their learning environment reflects their learning preferences. This is what I am taking about in my research question about how classroom settings influence students’ achievement. I will describe what the design is in my class and see how student achievement is affected.

In the research of article by Chee-Kit Looi, et al. (2011), the designs of the classroom settings are different at school. I would like to know how they influence students’ studies. This paper critically examines the impact of adopting a systemic approach to innovative education reforms at the macro, meso, and micro levels in Singapore. It presents the case for adopting design research as a methodology for CSCL(Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning ) integration that meets the needs of schools, and discusses a specific CSCL innovation that holds the potential for sustaining transformation in classroom practices.

## I want to know if I use different images in the class whether the students will be more interested. In the article by Marilyn, A. R. (2010) focuses on children’s responses about the design of two images of interior classroom environments. Results from this study can be used by designers of child development centers to guide the design of the space to reflect one that incorporates children's preferences for design.

In the research article by Harry, T. R. (2009), it describes subcategories of the classroom such as: \* Size and shape of room \* Lighting \* Style and décor of room \* Heating \* Type of desks and working areas \* Storage and supplies on hand \* Learning methods (boards, electronic, personal computers, etc.) \* Audiovisual technologies \* Class period sizes and weekly frequency of classroom meetings. I will use those ideas to make note of my time frame intervals and to record my observations.

In the article by [J-K, Liang](http://search.proquest.com/education/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/J-K,+Liang/$N?accountid=8204), et al. (2005), it is drawing from design experiences with our digital classroom, environment series and other studies, attempts to describe a few valuable design perspectives for educational computing inside the classroom. In my school, there are limited tools for technology. I try to know how the decoration of the classroom setting without technology influences studies. This study concludes with a discussion of short- and long-term research possibilities.

In the article by James, P. M. (1997), it presents one solution to the problem of gaining feedback for immediate correction of teaching problems and student learning problems. A method is presented to provide instructors with an evaluative procedure that gauges the progress of the course as estimated by individual students. In my research, I am going to design handouts which are different from before.

## And also in the case study by [Shih-Chung, Lee](http://search.proquest.com/education/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/Shih-Chung,+Lee/$N?accountid=8204)(1998), it talked about technology and a multimedia classroom which is not the main focus of my research. But I choose it since I want to see if using some other decorations or design which are similar to the multimedia classroom, will have an effect on learning, especially in a poor school.

At last, in the research article by [Plotnick, Eric](http://search.proquest.com/education/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/Plotnick,+Eric/$N?accountid=8204)(2004), it reports on the relationships among classroom teaching, learning activities, and technology integration in the middle school classroom. Documented within the study are the typical learning activities and potential role for technology within the classroom learning environment of middle schools. I want to use “potential role” what it mentioned in the paper to do my research. I will let students do some decoration of their classroom and let them think about their role in their decoration of the room.

To draw a conclusion, all these research indicate the importance of classroom setting and by using them will help students with academic learning. And many factors should be concerned when decorating the classroom.

# Part IV-Findings

To conduct my research, I used questionnaires, interviews and time frames. At the beginning, I thought that what I did in my questionnaires would be interesting and the students who are in my class would be loved to do them. Unfortunately, few students did it seriously and finished all of my questions. Therefore, I tried to pretend being a student, thinking about how I would respond if someone gave me those questions at my age of 17/18. After I did that, I would say I wouldn’t do those questions seriously as well which sounds terrible, but it is what it is. At that age, most of students just want to play and do whatever they want to do. They would not pay any attention to the teachers if they didn’t want to. Moreover, because of the education system, teachers couldn’t force students or punish them which is totally different in Asia countries. From what I see, the only choices are for teachers to think about their lesson plans or change some teaching styles.

I did the questionnaires of five questions. First, I found that 40 percent of the students like teachers write down the words or the new knowledge in their favorite color, while 50 percent of them don’t care about and the 10 percent of students didn’t finish the questionnaires. Second, 50 percent of the senior students answered that they don’t care about if words present in their dislike color, 10 percent of them said it will impact their study, 10 percent of the students said it depended on whether or not she like the teacher, and 10 percent announced it would not impact their study; the rest of them didn’t answer the question. Third, I found that 73 percent of the students like the warm colors and they had more interest in them. Fourth, 30 percent of the students described those different types of charts would affect their study or mood, while 50 percent of the students claimed they would not affect by those different types of charts and 20 percent of the students didn’t reply. Fifth, I observed that 40 percent of those students had never had any experience of doing a good job after seeing their favorite color or charts during class, while 20 percent of the students said they had experiences of that, the rest of students didn’t do the question.

I gave them handouts in colors, and then I observed student responses. I observed that 80% of the students didn’t pay attention to it while 15% of the students really enjoyed looking them. The remaining 5% of the students didn’t care about it. In my research, 50 percent of the students did enjoy the color text books and they absorbed them better than before. They told me that they felt tired to see black words all day. Moreover, they told me that colors made them feel happy especially when they saw some color which they liked.

In my research, I gave all the students five minutes to remember two charts of five words. One chart is five words with black and white words; the other is five words with colorful words. Unfortunately, only three students were in the class in that day. One student wrote down three words from black and white chart, four words from colorful chart. The second student remembered four words of each chart. The third one wrote down four words of each chart and one word of each chart was wrong.

Meanwhile, I asked the teacher to give the students one day to use the information from the decorations in the classroom and I used a time frame to record the progress. I found that the teacher can’t get any respect from their students about 30 minutes of the class. Sometimes, when the teacher was teaching in the class, the students were chatting as well. From what I see, only 20 percent of the students concentrated on the teacher the whole class, 40 percent of the students spent 20 minutes in class then chatted with classmates who sat next to them, 30 percent of the students ignored the teachers and did whatever they want, such as chatting, listening the music and surrounding in the classroom and 10 percent of them were absent. I used a colorful learning poster as well; the result was a little different. The students have to match those pictures with the vocabulary cards. Based on my observation, 80 percent of the students were participant well, while 20 percent of them had no much interesting to do and they just kept chatting.

# Part V-Conclusion

After almost six weeks, I noticed that the students who have motivation cared about something new in their text books whether it was in color or not. Those students who didn’t pay attention in their studies would not care about how the text books and the handouts looked.

Leaving aside the characteristic of the students themselves, this research has identified colorful pictures would attract the interest of the student and the results of the study presented clearly show 40 percent of the 11/12 grade of English Language Learners in Henry Street of International Studies liked teachers writing down the words in colors. And students would like to do some activities as well, especially with colorful pictures.

The research had the delimitation of having a limited number of students to be observed. Additionally, there was limited time to do the research. Data were only collected from the students who came to school regularly because some of the students skipped the class; therefore, there might be limited results. Meanwhile, the sample was not evenly balanced between males and females. The difference in gender may have affected the results in some cases. For example, 70 percent of the girls in this class and 42 percent of them like crocus. It will influence the result of the favorite color. Finally, the color questionnaires of the researcher are a little bit much, so the students are not certain.

In addition to the results, because some of the inquiries in this study were not supported, future research projects should explore additional variables. For example, future research would look to determine whether the motivation of the students will let students do better. In conclusion, there was limited time to do the research and there is insufficient evidence to prove the inquiry driving my action research. For this reason, additional research is needed.

This action research has refreshed my thoughts and my teaching philosophy. Based upon my observations, the only way to reach students effectively is that teachers have to think about their lesson plan or change some of their teaching styles. At their age of 17/18, while in adolescence, they will have their ways to deal with their lives and studies. Most of the students just want to play and do whatever they want to do. They will not pay any attention on the teachers if they don’t want to. It is a hard grade to handle but they will listen to you, if you treat them with respect. Thus, it is hard to be a teacher especially to be a good teacher. The students of 17/18 in adolescence have their ways to deal with their lives and studies. The only way is that teachers have to be patient; however, my co-teacher will get loud and raise her voice sometimes. I wouldn’t know how to deal with those students if I were the teacher. Probably, I would be crazy and yell in class which sounds ridiculous. Moreover, because of the education system, teachers couldn’t force students or punish them which is totally different in Asia countries. From what I see, the only choices are for teachers to think about their lesson plans or change some teaching styles. I suggest that joyful Learning: Create a learning environment which recognizes that second language acquisition as well as content attainment may be more successful when the teaching-learning process is more enjoyable.

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