

# Flexible Classrooms Are More Than Just Good-Looking

Written by Hannah Morgan, Viggi Storyteller

Classroom furniture hasn't changed much since the one room school house. Not until recently at least.

Walk into most classrooms and you'll see rows of chairs and desks. In some classrooms, you may even see the very same tethered desk-chair you sat in when you were in school. If you're left handed, you remember how difficult it was to write on one of the right-handed desk units. Either way, students typically have one choice when it comes to seating- confining and uncomfortable.

Now, think about the last time you walked into a trendy coffee house. You have the option sit in a traditional chair at a table or in a comfy lounge chair. Maybe you prefer sitting at a high-top table for a better view. Whatever your preference, these seating options make your experience more enjoyable and may make you linger a little longer.

Some teachers have begun to lift these seating ideas by providing students with similar choices. And you know what they are finding? Students are performing better, both academically and behaviorally.

In preschool through high school, innovative teachers are creating flexible learning environments, often using their own money or donations. Adding yoga balls, standing desks, yoga mats, bean bag chairs, whatever they can get their hands on, teachers are ditching the traditional classroom fixtures in favor of more student-friendly options.

Children like to have choices and begin to express their preferences at an early age, as any parent knows. But in school, students don't have many choices. Imagine how they must feel when they are able to choose what they sit on during their six-hour school day.

Teachers looking for alternative seating are eager to introduce options. The Vidget Organic Seating System is one solution finding its way into classrooms across the country. The three-in-one seating solution can be a chair, stool or desk, depending on how it is positioned. It's functionality, innovative design and fun colors, make it a unique addition to a classroom for any age.

## The Many Benefits of Flexible Seating

Teachers who have incorporated flexible seating in their classrooms have noticed positive results such as longer attention spans, less disruptive behavior, and higher quality work.

When one preschool teacher introduced an over-active student to the Vidget she said, "It makes a big difference for Pearl. She is 100 times better and able to sit in circle time for up to 45 minutes. Without it, she's everywhere, up out of her seat, crawling on the floor." Allowing children to quietly fidget and move in flexible seating options has made it easier for many teachers to manage their classrooms.

Another benefit derived from introducing flexible seating and allowing students to physically move their bodies is that that they burn more calories. This movement also helps strengthen core muscles. Granted, it isn't as good a recess, but every bit of movement helps students physically and cognitively.

Research has found that fidgeting and movement helps children with ADHD focus and problem solve. So rather than tell students to sit still, teachers are encouraging quiet fidgeting to help students learn.

It's not only about having fun places to sit. The benefits that come from allowing students to choose helps them engage in school and engaged students learn better. They can choose a seat that best suits their mood or what they are most comfortable in.

Tara, an occupational therapist and preK teacher shared that "since incorporating the Vidget in our classroom, I have noticed an improvement in attention span, participation, and regulation in my students. They are happy and engaging in

classroom routines and activities. The Vidget's bright colors make it fun and attractive to use, and the kids love the versatility of the seat.”

The versatility of the Vidget makes it an ideal solution not only for classrooms, but for libraries and pediatric offices too.

“Students who were unable to remain seated independently or maintain attention to task have improved in this area. It gives them just enough movement” reported a kindergarten teacher in Ohio.

### **Addressing Loss of Control**

If you're a teacher, you may worry about losing control of your classroom if you were to add flexible seating. You imagine your students roaming around the room, bothering other students or misusing the alternative seat.

But teachers who have added Vidgets and other seating options to their classrooms have found some simple guidelines help manage the potential chaos. Sue, a kindergarten teacher, said she is “more comfortable with him [very active student] on a Vidget because I don't have to be worried about him tipping. I know it can move--but it's meant too. I don't have to be worried about him tipping back like I am in a traditional chair.

By emphasizing that choosing where a student sits is a privilege, teachers develop an agreement with students. They understand there are consequences to misusing the furniture and they may lose access to these choices if they are not using it appropriately. Setting expectations is an important step in managing appropriate behavior.

Some teachers ease into how they offer students choices. Either by rewarding students with a choice or by having students pre-assigned to different seating options and rotating them through. This also allows students to determine which type of seat they find most beneficial.

Some teachers go as far as sending letters home to parents to help educate them on the benefits of alternative seating so it doesn't come as a surprise.

### **Addressing Costs**

Most teachers would love to offer seating options in their classrooms, but many already fund “the extras” out of their own pockets.

As research mounts and teachers share their positive outcomes, word has spread through online teacher forums and within school districts. The media has even covered stories about successes from flexible seating in classrooms This evidence helps teachers build a case to request funding for flexible seating solutions.

Teachers determined to innovate their classrooms also share tips and cost saving tricks they've used to add fun, low-cost seating. From refurbished tires to converted milk crates, teachers are desperate to turn their classrooms into more comfortable, student-centered spaces.

If your budget doesn't allow for the purchase of new seating, you can research grants. Another alternative is to start a DonorsChoose.org or AdoptAClassroom.org campaign. These are online requests for classroom funding submitted by public school teachers. Anyone can donate to any project that inspires them.

### **Next Steps**

There are teachers and schools implementing flexible seating solutions across the world. You can learn more about how they've done it and the outcomes by asking teachers in different districts and joining forums and groups dedicated to the subject.

Most importantly, you can help share this article with school administrators, teachers and parents to create more awareness and improve the academic and behavioral outcomes of students.