Classroom Hot Spots

Workshop for Cleaning and Organizing Literacy Materials

Housecleaning experts call them "hot spots"—the places in any home where junk collects (think of the messy counter next to the phone, or the jumble of shoes near the front door). We grow accustomed to the clutter and exasperated by it at the same time.

Classrooms have "hot spots" too: places where disorganized piles of paper grow or students are always elbowing and jostling each other as they gather materials. In an overcrowded classroom, it's hard to know how to reorganize these spaces—especially when it's your own classroom and you've become accustomed to living with the hot spots in it.

This workshop is designed to open up teachers to collaborating with colleagues. It requires a certain level of trust, so you'll want to be sure you allow teachers to select their own partners.

Begin by asking everyone in the workshop to find a partner. Then ask each participant to pull out a clean sheet of paper and pen (or provide materials yourself), and write silently for 10 minutes in response to the following prompt:

Think of your classroom organization and layout. What area is a "hot spot" causing problems? It could be a place where there is too much traffic or noise during certain stretches of the day, a location that is always messy, or a spot where students often jostle for position or argue over materials.

Why do you think the area is a hot spot?

After 10 minutes, have all participants share their responses with their partners. After everyone has shared his or her hot spot, ask partner teams to spend the next 30 minutes visiting their partners' classrooms to view each hot spot. Ask each team to brainstorm solutions to the problem within each classroom (i.e., moving materials, instituting new classroom rules, etc.). After 30 minutes, teams should return to the whole group and share what solutions were generated.

You might also launch the next workshop by having volunteers share whether or not they followed through with plans, and what difference the changes made in their classrooms.