The Impact of Seating Arrangement in a Classroom on Pupils’ Verbal Participation in Year 8 and Year 9 RE Lessons
Personal Audit

**Strengths**
- Innovative Lessons
- Assessment for learning
- Relationships with pupils and staff

**Weaknesses**
- APP for all classes
- Pupil participation in class discussion
- Differentiation for high ability pupils
Literature used to support the study: Participation

**Clay R 2009**
- Comparing worksheets and oral participation levels. 5% increase of participation on oral groups.
- ‘Influence of the teacher may be important’

**BSF [http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/d/699](http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/d/699)**
- ‘Flexible space, which did not follow traditional classroom formula’

**Cross et al 2009**
Pupil participation levels were helped by:
- Pupil mediation and counselling
- Pupil involvement in planning or evaluation
- Specific responsibilities i.e. Prefect.

‘Pupils associated participation with active engagement demonstrating respectful relations and ‘making a difference’” (p6)

‘Pupils within the case study schools suggested that environments which were interactive, respectful and inclusive offered enhanced opportunities for participation’. (p8)

‘Where teachers created opportunities for pupil to express, participate and contribute, pupils felt ownership and pride in the school community’. (p8)
Literature used to support the study: Seating

Wannarka and Ruhl 2003
• ‘students at the back of the classroom tend to interact with each other more frequently than those seated at the front, potentially adversely impacting their attention to the task’

Marx et al 1999:
• ‘question asking was more frequent when the children were seated in the semi-circular arrangement’ (p259)
• ‘physical characteristics of a classroom setting can influence the behaviour of its users’ (p249)
• ‘among the physical aspects in need of consideration is the positioning of students relative to the teacher in the classroom space’ (p249)

McCorskey and McVetta 1978
• ‘if the purpose of the class is primarily one of information dissemination, the traditional [rows and columns] arrangement is probably best because it minimizes student-student interaction and paces the primary interaction focus in the classroom on the teach’ (p103)
• ‘an arrangement that is disagreeable to the student may erect a needless barrier, possibly one that will prevent learning. (p104)

Beresford 2007
‘They associated sitting around tables with groupwork, a horseshoe arrangement with class discussion and rows with teacher delivery. They were disorientated when asked to discuss in rows or listen to a teacher when grouped around tables’ (p41)
Methodology

3 Methods used following on from the research in the literature review.

Questionnaire
• Given to all pupils (47 handed out, 34 completed) after the lesson with a circle arrangement. Not all completed. See appendix 1 for the questionnaire used.
• Closed questions on a Likert scale and a tick box system.
• One open question to allow for longer answers, especially for those not involved in the focus group.
• Questionnaires chosen because: Easier to create statistical results (Cohen et al 2007 p321)

More participants and less time to complete.
• Problems: pupils not taking the time to read questions. End of lesson issues. Likert scale problems.
• Results shown as percentages.

Focus Group
6 pupils selected randomly: 3 from year 8 and 3 from year 9
Questions asked – see appendix 2
Focus group chosen because: Discussion groups are less formal than interviews

‘You can explain any ambiguities and correct any misunderstandings of your questions’ (Drever 2003 p3)

Problems: ‘Once a group is formed, answers may be influenced by the social nature of the exercise’ (Taylor et al 2006 p38)

Small sample
Leading questions
Results: Quotations written down by myself. Transcription not necessary for small scale study
Methodology continued

Observation

• Carried out twice by LSA in the classroom using a tick list to see which pupils participated. Once in rows and columns and once in the circle using a total of 47 pupils.
• Observation chosen because: used another person to observe. Quick method of tallying who is participating
• Problems: ‘There is almost inevitably an element of interpretation’ (Denscombe 2007 p209)
• Results shown by the number of pupils NOT participating in a circle compared with a row and columns approach.
Results

Questionnaire: results show as percentages

Q1: first impressions of classroom in circle

Q2: After the lesson using circle

Q4: pupil's self perception of their involvement in the circle seating arrangement
Results continued

**Observation**
Number of pupils not participating in rows and columns: 22/47
Number of pupils not participating in the circle approach: 8/47

**Focus Group Key Quotes:**

Q1: ‘I don’t like it when stuff moves about all the time’
   ‘I didn’t know where to sit and I didn’t get there in time to sit with my friends’
   ‘don’t care’

Q2: ‘so that we could behave better and everyone can see everyone’
   ‘so we can’t see each other when we have to write stuff’

Q3: ‘It was ok. You joined in but you couldn’t stop us when we were talking’
   ‘I liked being able to see people who were talking because sometimes you have to bend round to see’

Q4: ‘In a circle but not on chairs. I want to sit on the floor’
   ‘I don’t really mind because you can still hear everyone talking anyway’
Impact of results:

- Results suggested the majority of pupils preferred the circle arrangement when taking part in a class discussion and participation increased.

Do it again?

100 minute lessons means I could use both the seating arrangements in one lesson. This would mean subject attrition would be lower and pupils would be able to directly compare their experiences without a 2 week break. Start off with the circle approach first and then move to rows and columns. Familiarity of task tackled this way. Record focus group as it was more like an interview due to having to write it down.
Bibliography:

Seating:

Participation:
- http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/d/699

Methodology
Appendices

Appendix 1:

Questionnaire for KS3 pupils looking at their opinions of a horseshoe seating arrangement.

Look at this scale:

1                                                    5         10
I like it a lot                                Don’t care                                    I hate it

Use this scale to answer the following questions. Put the number you think answers the question best in the box. Some questions require you to write an answer. If you get stuck then put up your hand and ask for help.

1) What did you think of the new classroom layout when you FIRST walked through the door?  

2) What do you think of the new classroom layout now you have finished the lesson?

3) What effect does the new classroom layout have on class discussions?

4) How would you rate your participation in today’s lesson? (tick the box)

   a) I never participate in any lesson
   b) I put my hand up less than usual
   c) I put my hand up the same as usual
   d) I put my hand up more than usual
   e) I put my hand up A LOT more than usual
   f) I had my hand up all the time
Appendices

Appendix 2: Questions asked during the focus group.

• How did you feel when you walked in the classroom and it had changed?
• Why do you think I put the tables facing the wall?
• How did you feel about sitting in a circle for discussions?
• How would you arrange a classroom for good discussions to take place?
Appendix 3: tally chart used during the observation

Pupil hand up:
Pupil answering question:
Pupil shouting out on task:

Cross out each pupil who participates in any of the above ways.