

Using Flexible Seating to Decrease Off-Task Behaviors

Sarah Sanchez

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Teachers College of San Joaquin

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Purpose

As a moderate/severe preschool teacher, I am always looking for strategies which I can use to decrease off task behaviors, increase on task behaviors, and increase engagement in my students. The students in my class usually join my classroom just after they turn three years old, and often have significant disabilities and delays. They are each capable of incredible growth, especially when provided with the appropriate environment. There is not a lot of research regarding effective strategies and activities for my population, so moderate/severe preschool teachers, like myself, are often learning as they go, using trial and error. Through this study, I'm hoping to find out if and how effective flexible seating is as a classroom strategy for moderate/severe preschool teachers. As a relatively new moderate/severe preschool teacher, currently in my third year, I've found that there are not a lot of specific established tools and strategies for my population. With my project, I hope to find one practical classroom strategy that leads to results, which I can then share with other teachers on my site, in my district, in my area, and across the world through the internet. I especially hope to help other moderate/severe teachers use flexible seating to foster 21st century learning environments, which will in turn, allow every student the opportunity to reach his/her full potential.

Summary of Research

Flexible seating is a cooperative student-centered 21st-century classroom practice, which allows for personalization, movability and maneuverability for students and teachers (Chen, V. Leger, A. & Reil, A., 2016; Kennedy, M., 2016; Lewington, J., 2012; Schilling, D.L. & Schwartz, I.S., 2004; Wierman, M, 2016). Teachers have implemented flexible seating using items such as: therapy balls, wobble chairs, bean bags, pillows, standing desks, seating cushions,

and rocking seats, among other seating options (Al-Eisa, E., Buragadda, S., & Melam, G. R., 2013; Kennedy, M., 2016; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). These and other types of flexible seating have been incorporated into special education classrooms, for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, behavioral challenges, and other disabilities, as well as in general education classrooms for typically developing students (Buli-Holmberg, J., & Jeyaprabhan, S., 2016; Kennedy, M., 2016; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004).

Research has revealed flexible seating to promote greater well-being, lower affective-filters, keep students on-task, limit distractions, and help regulate sensory input, as well as contribute to increased overall student comfort (Al-Eisa, E., Buragadda, S., & Melam, G. R., 2013; Alward, Keith R., 1973; Chen, V. Leger, A. & Reil, A., 2016; Miller, H. 2008; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). General education and special education teacher researchers who have implemented flexible seating in their classrooms have found this strategy to be correlated with increased student engagement, higher academic/functional classroom performance, a greater number of on-task behaviors, higher self-reported well-being, and increased appropriate in-seat behaviors (Al-Eisa, E., Buragadda, S., & Melam, G. R., 2013; Burgoyne & Ketcham, 2015; Miller, H. 2008; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). There are further studies which have found flexible seating to decrease oppositional behaviors and unwanted sensory seeking behaviors (Burgoyne & Ketcham, 2015; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). In addition to the quantifiable academic, behavioral, and school readiness benefits, flexible seating fosters the needed 21st-century skills of participation, cooperation, creativity, collaboration, and problem solving skills (Al-Eisa, E., Buragadda, S., & Melam, G. R., 2013; Chen, V. Leger, A. & Reil, A., 2016; Lewington, J., 2012; Miller, H. 2008).

Flexible seating is one strategy teachers have used to reach the goals of enriching students' academic, social, behavioral, functional, and psychological growth (Buli-Holmberg, J., & Jeyaprabhan, S, 2016; Burgoyne, M.E. & Ketcham, C.J.2015; Miller, H. 2008). The seating options and arrangements of the classroom are modified with ever-changing student needs, as often as necessary, to accommodate all lesson types: students working individually, working in pairs, small group work, and whole group lessons (Lewington, J., 2012; Miller, H. 2008; Wierman, M, 2016). The concept of flexible seating propagates 21st-century personalized teaching, which allows teachers to design and implement lessons individualized to the needs of all students (Lewington, J., 2012; Miller, H. 2008; Wierman, M, 2016).

Research Question

How will implementing flexible seating during circle time in a preschool special day moderate/severe classroom affect the number of off-task behaviors exhibited by students?

Teacher Actions and Methods

This research took place in a preschool moderate/severe special day class, in a suburban area of central California, during the Spring of 2017. During the study, the classroom had a total of 12 students, 2 paraprofessionals, and 1 teacher. The students in this classroom usually begin attending shortly after their third birthdays, and are able to continue in the class until they reach kindergarten age. The students in the classroom most commonly have educational diagnoses of intellectual disabilities, orthopedic impairments, speech/language impairments, and/or other health impairments. While all of the students in the classroom were provided with the same flexible seating options, 3 students were randomly selected as participants for the study. The research participants were made up of 2 male students, both of whom have intellectual disabilities and speech/language impairments, and 1 female student, with a diagnosis of other

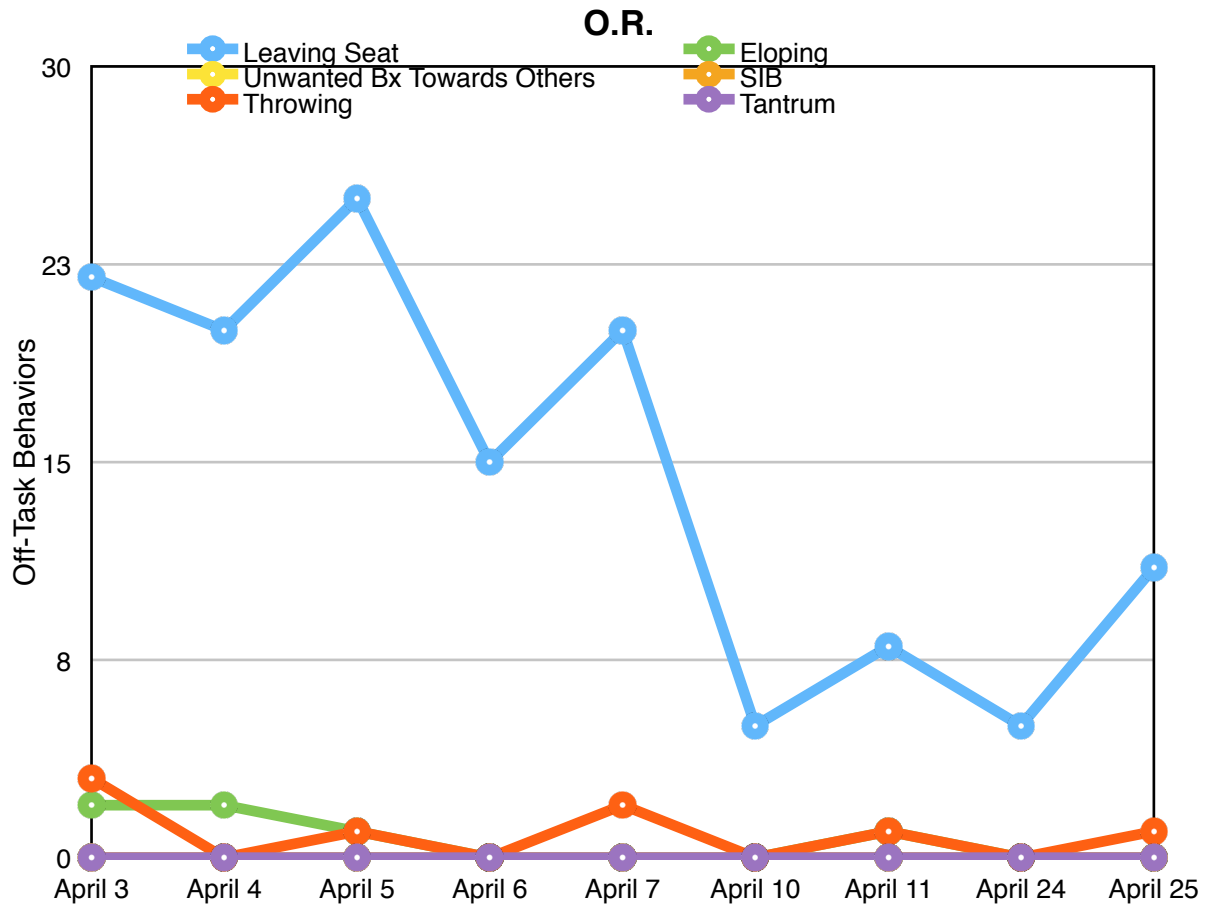
health impairment (fetal alcohol syndrome) and a speech/language impairment. The students were all between the ages of 3 and 4 years old.

While there are many different types of flexible seating options available, this study chose to implement 4 types: scoop rockers, bean bags, pillows, and cube chairs. The students were provided with non-structured time to explore the new seating options and try them out prior to the first data collection time. Students were encouraged to try out different seating options, but were each able to independently choose his/her seating option, as long as it was used safely. The previously used traditional preschool classroom chairs continued to be available to the students as well.

For the purposes of this study, data was taken during the approximately 20 minute morning Circle Time, although the flexible seating options were implemented throughout the school day. Data was collected by the researcher and 1 paraprofessional using quantitative off-task frequency data sheets during the morning Circle Time. Off-task behaviors were operationally defined beforehand by the researcher and discussed with the paraprofessional to provide clarification. An example data sheet is provided (Appendix A). The researcher also took qualitative journal data at the end of the school days throughout research project. The journal data sought to provide insights regarding students reactions, student engagement, student behaviors, and student interactions, as well as researcher and staff thoughts on the flexible seating. Sample journal entries are provided (Appendix B). The researchers took baseline data for 5 school days, from April 3-7, 2017. Flexible seating was then implemented, and data was taken for 5 days, from April 10-14 and from April 24-25. The researcher was unable to attain more post-implementation data, due to the school’s Spring break during this time.

Data



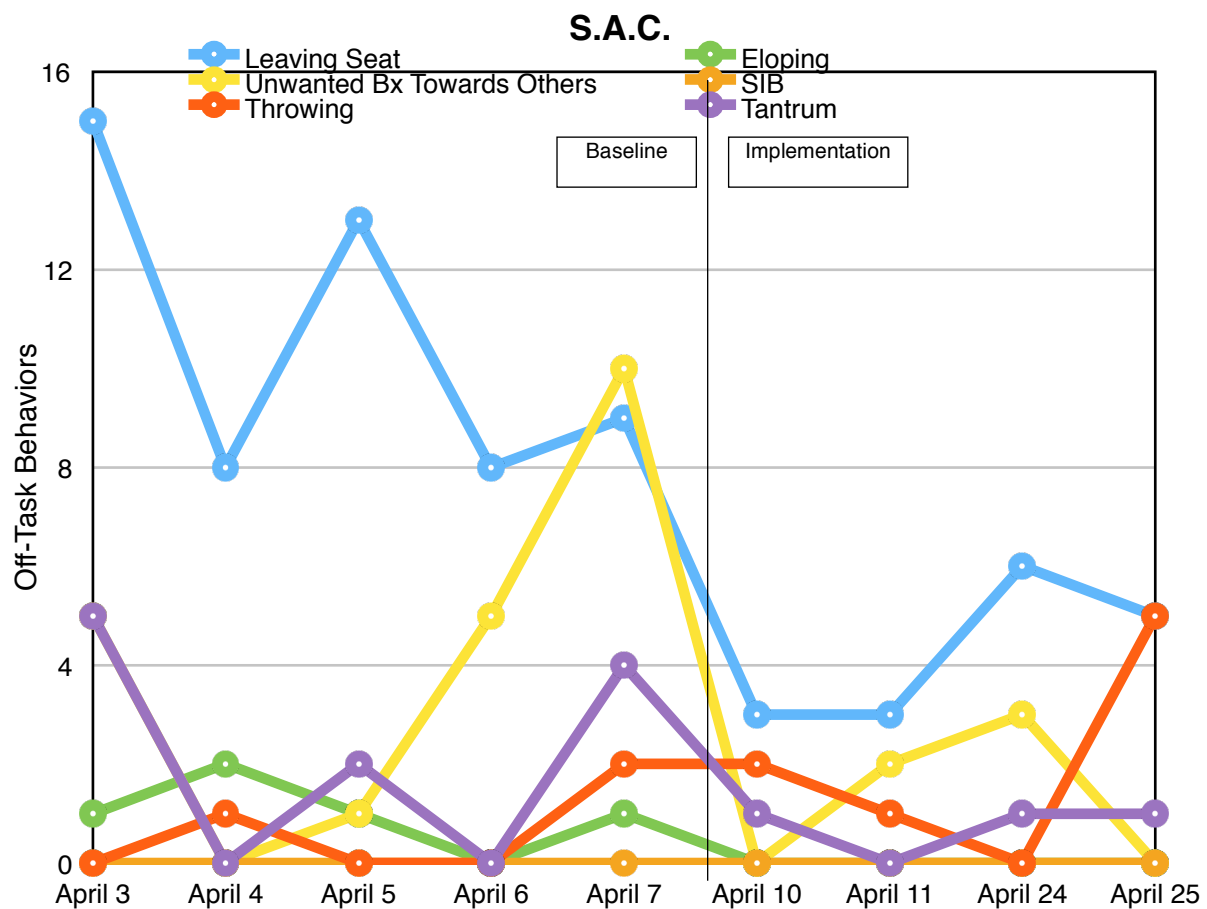


Data Analysis

The off-task behavior data showed similar trends for all 3 participants. The researcher found that all 3 student participants exhibited a noticeable decrease in the number of times he/she

left his/her seat. The number of times the 3 student participants engaged in eloping also tended to decrease. The data showed that A.F. exhibited fewer tantrums after using flexible seating, while the other facets of his off-task behaviors stayed about the same. The flexible seating implementation appeared to provide positive affects for O.R., in that she showed a marked decrease in the number of times she left her seat, but it did not seem to affect other off-task behaviors. Lastly, S.A.C. not only exhibited fewer leaving seat and eloping behaviors, but he also showed fewer unwanted behaviors towards others and fewer tantrums.

The researcher noted that A.F. explored the scoop rockers and the cube chairs immediately after they were presented. He chose to sit in the scoop rockers during each data collection period and appeared more comfortable than in the previously used traditional classroom chairs. He was able to sit for longer periods of time and appeared to enjoy being able to slightly rock back and forth. O.R. explored each new type of seat, and wanted to try out each



type on different days. She appeared to especially prefer the scoop rockers and the bean bags.

The researcher noted that she was able to sit for longer periods of time when sitting in the scoop rockers and in the bean bag chairs than in the previously used traditional classroom chairs.

S.A.C. did not immediately appear to notice the new seating or want to try them when he was offered a choice. The researcher was able to prompt him to try sitting in the different types of seating, and he eventually chose to sit in the bean bag chair. Once sitting in the bean bag chair, he left his seat fewer times than when sitting in the previously used traditional classroom chairs.

At the end of the study, all of the student participants were choosing the new flexible seating options over the previously used traditional classroom chairs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions from this study show flexible seating implementation to reflect an overall decrease in some off-task behaviors for students in a preschool moderate/severe special day classroom. Each of the 3 students had fewer incidents of leaving his/her seat, and each student decreased in at least one other off-task behavior as well. While the flexible seating did not reduce all off-task behaviors, it does show itself to be a valuable strategy to decrease the number of times students leave their seats during instruction times. The researcher recommends that future studies use a greater number of participants over longer periods of time, in similar classrooms. It is also recommended that similar research be conducted in a wider variety special education populations, especially a wider variety of moderate/severe populations. The researcher also recommends future researchers to investigate the outcomes of a wider variety of flexible seating options to determine what the outcomes are. Another recommendation of the researcher would be the effects of flexible seating across a whole day in a preschool moderate/severe special day classroom, in order to learn if there are differences in its

effectiveness during different activities. Lastly, a research study could be conducted which examined the growth of IEP objectives/goals in relation to the implementation of flexible seating.

Reflection

This action research has forever changed the way that I will set up my classroom. I am now a firm believer in using flexible seating to decrease some off-task behaviors with my preschool moderate/severe students. While it is not a fix-all for everything, it is one way in which I can reduce the number of times students leave their seats, lower eloping behaviors, decrease unwanted behaviors towards others, and limit tantrums. I noticed that my students were more relaxed, comfortable, and engaged when using the flexible seating, than they were during baseline data collection. It was interesting to observe each student investigate the new seating options and then show a preference for one or two seating types. I will continue to use flexible seating not only during circle time, but throughout my whole school day, and would encourage all teachers to do the same. There are minimal if any harmful effects that I can see from using it, and flexible seating will very likely decrease some off-task behaviors, which will then lead to more engaged students. I am interested to see how flexible seating will continue to impact my students, as I will be using for the the rest of the year and the years to come. I hope that my students will continue to become more comfortable and engaged, which will allow them to learn as much as possible.

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Appendix A- Sample Data Sheet

	A.F.	O.R.	S.A.C.
Leaving Seat			
Eloping			
Unwanted Bx Towards Others			
SIB			
Throwing			
Tantrum			

Appendix B- Sample Journal Entries

April 3rd- Today was a little crazy, with extra people (the psychologist and APE teacher) coming in and out of the classroom during circle time to pull students to assess. Other than that though it was a pretty normal day. I ended circle time a little sooner than I usually do, since everyone seemed a little antsy. I did notice that it's very difficult to take data while I'm leading circle time, but it's also hard for J.S. to take data while he is prompting students. I think that our data will be ok, but next time I might think about video taping rather than taking data during class time.

April 5th- Today was a little more crazy than normal, although I'm not sure why. I think we're all (staff and students) getting kind of burnt out and are ready for spring break... It was interesting to see how many times the students really do exhibit off-task behaviors (although part of that is having such a full class this year).

April 10th- The students were so excited about the new flexible seating today! I wasn't sure what to expect, but almost all of them not only noticed, but definitely wanted to try out the new choices. I can already see that certain kids have definite preferences. O.R. hardly moved once she sat in the scoop rocker. A.F. also loved the scoop rocker and I noticed a big difference in him as well. S.A.C. was more unsure than everyone else (which I expected). Once I convinced him to try out the bean bag, he seemed to like it quite a bit and did not want to get up like he was previously doing.

April 24th- Still noticing big difference in the kiddos with the flexible seating. I can tell (by watching and by the data) that it does not really help things like throwing or hitting others too much, but it definitely helps them to stay in their seats for longer periods of time, and therefore remain engaged longer. The most surprising one is O.R. who is probably my highest energy student. She absolutely loves the scoop rockers and the bean bags, but especially the scoop

rockers. She not only sits in one during circle time, but will go get one and carry it around to wherever she goes. There have been a number of other students who have done the same thing with the other types of seating too. The scoop rockers seem to be the most popular so far, but I'm wondering if they will continue that way once the novelty has worn off. Hard to say... Overall I am definitely a fan of the flexible seating.