THE ROOM ITSELF IS ACTIVE

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CELT ACTIVE LEARNING CLASSROOM

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> "I'd say added connectivity [makes the CELT ALC effective]. **It allows the student to interact, not just with his peers, not just with the instructor, but with the room itself,** to make use of its various facets. It seems like there's more there, more available to you."

BACKGROUND

Active learning has become an integral part of the undergraduate experience. According to NSSE (2013), 44% of first-year students and 52% of seniors engage in active and collaborative learning in class. Iowa State University has a need for higher quality classrooms to maintain the quality of the student learning experience due to record enrollments. As a result, the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at Iowa State has committed resources to the re-design an existing classroom to an "active learning classroom" (ALC) resulting in an integrated, student-centered learning space.

PURPOSE

Conducted as part of a campus-wide evaluation of learning spaces, this assessment of the CELT ALC investigated how instructors utilized the physical and technological attributes of the classroom's design to promote active learning, and how the classroom design enhanced learning from the students' and instructors' perspectives.

DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

This qualitative study was utilization-focused and responsive, with a cross-sectional design. Data was collected through focus groups and interviews on intended and actual classroom use by participants' descriptions of active learning experiences in the ALC. A phenomenological approach to data analysis focused on capturing significant statements of active engagement in learning in the classroom. A multi-stage coding method investigated relationships between various codes to create themes on the use, effectiveness, and impact of the classrooms' design in creating an active learning environment.

FINDINGS

The instructors utilized the various classroom features, such as the chairs/desks, portable whiteboards, supplemental monitors, and other learning tools to promote active learning. The classroom design (a) enhanced student learning through its flexibility to adapt the classroom space to accommodate various learning strategies, (b) allowed for students and faculty to easily move in and around the ALC maximizing the use of the space, and (c) allowed for enhanced visibility of course content. Students felt they were part of a community of learners in the classroom, and stated they felt more accountable and motivated to learn. The increased adaptability, flexibility, and openness of the design of the CELT ALC allowed students to feel more connected to their classmates and their instructors. Instructors also demonstrated a willingness to change their instructional strategies, focusing on more "integrated" teaching and incorporating technology into their lessons.

CONCLUSION

This assessment demonstrates that flexibility is a key attribute in promoting an active learning environment. The design of the CELT ALC created a learner-centered space which promoted students' motivation to learn and gave them a sense of control over their learning environment. The design also influenced instructors' behavior in utilizing active learning strategies. The findings in this study reiterate that re-designing more classrooms into active learning spaces like the CELT ALC creates high-quality classrooms that enhance the student learning experience at Iowa State.

> "**I got to a point in the semester where the discussion starts to take off like a fire.** ...I see this, there's this moment when it moves across the room which is very exciting, because I have these students who start out so unsure and just not confident. I think that this, **everything about this room really enables that kind of outcome.**"

> "For Iowa State to do something like this to take this model and to create other classrooms and other areas on campus to really lead... I think in order to progress forward and to produce leaders in the community, and whatever discipline or academic field, **being able to do something like [the CELT ALC] is powerful, a powerful statement.**"

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