

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT & SPACES

Linda Hodges, Director of the Faculty Development Center –
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

(LSC Braintrust)



My interest in how learning spaces affect learning began when I was a faculty member teaching chemistry at a liberal arts college in Georgia.

Inspired at an AAC&U conference on active learning back in the 1990s, I started to incorporate more interactive methods in my classes—specifically group work.

Although in general I had the luxury of small class sizes and rooms in which the tablet armchairs (then so prevalent and called one-arm bandits) could move, I still had to struggle in setting up groups. It was both a physical struggle to move the table armchairs into groups and a psychological struggle in getting students to embrace the process of learning in groups.

Further, the room I was assigned to use actively conspired against my plans for promoting deeper student learning.

The room said to the students that I was there to talk and they were there to listen (or not, depending on their mood). The room told the students that I was the one doing the work in this space. I was determined to rectify this situation. Although I knew that positive group process is not automatic simply because students are seated at a table, I knew that it is extremely difficult without it.

There was no money for classroom renovations nor an understanding at that time on the campus of the need to explore interactive methods in the classroom, but I was able to salvage some discarded wooden tables and chairs from a library renovation. What a difference! Those tables and chairs and how they were arranged sent the obvious signal to students that I was not the only focus in the room.

Now I am involved with faculty development at a major public university, responsible for helping faculty achieve their goals for student learning. Often that means that I am helping them devise ways to work around the impediments of the room.

It is possible to have students talk to one another meaningfully in any space, but the percentage of students who are willing to invest in the effort it takes to do so when they're seated in a lecture hall with fixed chairs, staring at a stage and a screen, is small. And, the wear and tear on faculty who try to encourage students to do so is large. Thus, faculty often give up and let the room determine pedagogy.

Research on human learning and pedagogical practice is making it clear that one key element in learning is social interaction.

Information is easy to come by—we no longer need faculty to play the role of textbook. We need our spaces to allow faculty a myriad of options in how they demonstrate disciplinary thinking and engage students in the skills required for their fields. One of my passions is to help make this happen.

Until all faculty have that option, I will work to help faculty maintain their energy and commitment to more active approaches even when the room works against them.



RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- Hodges, L.C., Anderson, E.C., Carpenter, T.S., Cui, L., Feeser, E.A., & Gierasch, T.M. (2017). "Using clickers for deliberate practice in five large science courses." *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 47(2), 22-28. http://www.nsta.org/store/product_detail.aspx?id=10.2505/4/jcst17_047_02_22
- Hodges, L.C. *Teaching Undergraduate Science: A Guide to Overcoming Obstacles to Student Learning*. Stylus Publishing, 2015.

