Interactive Active Learning

The Active Learning Model is best compared to flying an airplane. You need both wings to fly and make it to your destination. The Active Learning Classroom success is due to the balancing act of the right technology with the shift in pedagogy to let students soar and ultimately reach heights we could not imagine.

This can be accomplished by paying close attention to the following "wings" of your plane as you implement your Active Learning Classroom environment.

Technology -

1. Realize it's not about the technology - What? Coming from an audio and video integrator. Yes! The real revelation came when we implemented our first ALC at CSU Long Beach and found that while the students and faculty loved the technology where students could sit at huddle tables of 8 with their own flat panel and the professor was in the center as in the theatre in the round, students responded most about the "Idea Paint" on the walls! The Idea Paint was on all of the surfaces of the walls so that students and the professor could write on them with a write on marker. Many times students would be up on their feet (and the des) writing on the walls, working out their ideas for the table or the whole class to share.
2. Technology - Don't get me wrong, the technology is beneficial, and a well thought out design can stand the test of time as technology changes and evolves. The most "successful" ALC's that we as a company have been involved in, came from a collaborative design approach with input from the key stakeholders in the school. For instance, input from the IT or network folks, "innovative-minded" professors, campus technology support staff, facilities and instructional designers (to name a few key ones). Each campus is different, and there are different priorities, different support options, and different funding models. These all should be taken into consideration when designing an ALC. From our work with one of the leading universities, we found that after we were awarded the design/build contract for the ALC, the time we spent discussing options with the key stakeholders paid off in spades for the final product. Our work was richly rewarded when we found that our initial ALC implementation was adopted as the campus standard after a few minor changes.
3. Redundancy - Wired and wireless - Yes, some wireless technology is up to speed and reliable, and some is still not quite there. Right now, the

transmission of audio and video signals for sharing content to the displays is not foolproof. Granted, the technology is advancing leaps and bounds, but for now, as we bridge this chasm we highly recommend providing both wired and wireless options within the ALC system design. This could mean providing simple wall or table inputs strategically around the classroom, for the "just in case", and provide the wireless gateway solutions for the majority of students and professor.

4. Support - After Installation on-going, trained technical support required. This is necessary since there is usually multiple technology devices, multiple connections and multiple questions that need be addressed and answered in a timely manner.
5. Security - Often times we hear that technology needs to be available, but not removable. This becomes a problem when the technology is by nature mobile and accessible. What we have found is that while it is important to build in the safe guards and protection, it is also necessary to provide ease of use and flexibility. Can the two exist in an open campus type environment? Yes! There are several considerations and several ways to skin this cat, so again it is important to bring all stakeholders to the table to discuss implications and support. The more that these rooms are designed to treat the users as adults and expect the respect, the more we have seen the respect in return.
6. Consider future options - Sometimes budgets do not allow for all the capabilities to be built into a room or standard design. It is helpful to dream about what the future could hold for the capabilities and uses of this room, and build in the infrastructure now. LEt's say, you could foresee that these rooms could become distance learning capable in the future, then add in power and conduit in the wall for future cameras. What about bandwidth for multiple devices per student? How about adding a document camera or microphones?

Pedagogy

1. Noise - Get used to it, when students are collaborating and connecting, it can get noisy. Th is a hard reality to get used to, when shifting to ALC models.
2. Students helping students may be the best teacher. I have personally seen it when a student is at their huddle table and asks a question just posed by the professor and their peer explains to the student in "student speak" and the student now gets it. It can be rewarding and exciting to see and at the same time humbling and insulting!
3. Professors and support staff need training to shift to ALC models. They need opportunities to experiment and practice before showtime. They need to experience the ALC as a student in the environment they will be teaching (or facilitating as we like to call it).
4. Deep Learning takes place. Think like a giant think tank and think about what kind of results you can expect.

5. Most professors summarize their rewards with teaching in this type of environment. More than once, we have heard professors comment that the ALC provides the interactions and student exchange rewards that they envisioned when entering this profession.

The Active Learning Classroom environment provides a great case for the brick and mortar of an institution. It provides for the value of being face to face and present (vs. on-line) AND is a dynamic, learning-rich experience for all who attend. Flying is possible and can carry you to learning and infinity and beyond! (Make sure you wear your seatbelt!)

What should you do next?

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