Making Class Time Count:
Introductory Management Accounting in a Collaborative Lecture Theatre

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study describes the 'semi-flipped' redesign of an undergraduate Introductory Management Accounting module with a large cohort, using a newly refurbished 'collaborative lecture theatre' at a large English research-intensive university. The chapter outlines the affordances of the collaborative lecture theatre and explains how these were used to promote the active application of theories and techniques in small groups during redesigned lecture sessions. The case considers the approach, design, practice, and space, and includes pedagogies readily transferable to other disciplines. The chapter considers the evaluation of the collaborative lecture theatre and the module redesign from staff and student perspectives. It identifies current challenges relating to the topic in the institutional context and concludes with recommendations and solutions for other institutions wishing to reconfigure spaces to promote active learning approaches.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about the redesign of a first-year undergraduate module with a cohort of more than 100 students, in a vocational discipline, accounting, in a large research-intensive university. The redesign was not prompted by poor student feedback or academic performance, but rather by the author's unease about the module's existing design, and the possibilities afforded by a large institutional investment in collaborative lecture theatres. Both staff and student perspectives informed the redesign.

The chapter may be of interest to institutions considering similar investments, demonstrating the practicalities of aligning module design to affordances of learning spaces. It may assist other instructors

across a range of disciplines to develop their own practice by taking inspiration from some of the design features described in this case study.

ORGANISATION BACKGROUND

The University of Leeds is a large research-intensive university on a single campus near the centre of Leeds, a major city in the north of England. The university was established in 1904 (University of Leeds, 2020b) and has over 38,000 students and approximately 8,700 staff (University of Leeds, 2020a).

In 2016, the university invested £2.8m in redeveloping three traditional tiered lecture theatres of different sizes as 'collaborative lecture theatres' (University of Leeds, n.d.a). These rooms were due for a cyclical refurbishment, but the design chosen was more radical than anything previously attempted at the university. The redesigned rooms won an audiovisual award (University of Leeds, 2018) and have been visited by delegations from other universities considering redeveloping their teaching spaces.

The redevelopment was part of a wider blended education strategy designed to develop pedagogies and teaching practices at what was then a largely traditional institution in educational terms. The institutional definition of blended learning is 'the considered, complementary use of face-to-face teaching, technology, online tools and resources to enhance student education' (University of Leeds, 2013, p.2). Other developments, such as the provision of lecture capture, the establishment of the Leeds Institute of Teaching Excellence and the development of the university as a leading provider of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), have provided impetus to develop further the facilities, affordances and pedagogies for on-campus instructors and students. The university was awarded the highest 'gold' level in the inaugural UK Teaching Excellence Framework (University of Leeds, 2017b), and its Digital Education Service has won several awards (University of Leeds, 2017a; 2020d).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The University of Leeds' investment followed trends in other institutions that are altering teaching spaces to promote active learning in their classrooms (Alexander et al., 2019; Elkington & Bligh, 2019; European Universities Association [EUA], 2019; Finkelstein et al., 2016; Martin Clement, 2018). This has accelerated recently (Alexander et al., 2019) and, according to some authors (EUA, 2019; Radcliffe et al., 2009; Sfard, 1998), aligns with constructivist and participative educational approaches in which the instructor's role changes from imparting knowledge to largely passive students, towards being a facilitator of student engagement in activities such as group problem-solving (EUA, 2019). Although facilitation approaches may be possible in traditionally designed tiered lecture theatres by the adoption of pedagogies such as paired peer instruction (Schell, 2016), some institutions have decided that they need to reconfigure their physical classrooms.

There are alternative explanations for the institutional interest in teaching space projects. Jones, Sutcliffe, Bragg and Harris (2016), in their investigation of capital expenditure at a UK research-intensive university, suggest that "buildings alone do not improve university teaching" (p. 486) and are concerned that the purpose of investment in teaching spaces is to support promoting the university to potential applicants and parents in a marketised and competitive system. Martin Clement (2018) explicitly links the