

“Lecturing to 15 students is much the same as lecturing to 90”

(Dr. A, Professor of Biology, personal communication, 20 March 2014).

The above quote was remarked by Dr. A during a classroom observation of his course applying Flipped Classroom strategies, which utilize the higher levels of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy during course meetings. While a class of 15 students is arguably more amenable to the construction and maintenance of student-instructor relationships than a 90 member course, the lecture method precludes the advancement of this rapport. One of the most instrumental components of enabling active learning is the establishment of a relationship between an instructor and his or her students, an achievement much more easily realized through effective use of the classroom space.

There are four differently defined spaces in the contemporary classroom: Authoritative, Supervisory, Surveillance, and Interactional. The Authoritative Space refers to the position (generally located at the front center of the classroom) from which the instructor conducts formal teaching and facilitates student activity. This space is also the furthest from students, which is one of the primary hindrances to student-instructor interaction (Lim, O’Halloran, & Podlosov, 2010). The Authoritative Space is typically utilized for the dissemination of information via lecture, an activity that fails to stimulate the higher cognitive levels of analysis, evaluation, and creation, while also preventing students from establishing a personal connection with their instructor.

When departing from the Authoritative Space, an instructor may choose to “patrol” the space between and around the class members, observing, but not interacting with, student activity. When the instructor “pace[s] alongside the rows of students’ desks as well as up and down the side of the classroom,” this activity transforms these sites into the Supervisory Space (Lim, O’Halloran, & Podlosov, 2010, p. 238). While the Supervisory Space physically locates instructors nearer students, the purely observational function of this space does not facilitate the construction and maintenance of student-instructor relationships.

Within the Supervisory Space is the Surveillance Space. This space serves roughly the same function as the Supervisory Space, but involves stationary observation. Similar to Foucault’s Panopticon, the utilization of this space involves the implicit assertion of authority over the observed individuals through an “all-seeing” monitor, in this case positioned at the rear of the classroom (Lim, O’Halloran, & Podlosov, 2010). The function of this space unfortunately precludes the development of a community of peers, as instructors constantly exercise their authority over the members of their class rather than actively facilitating interactions within and among student groups.

The most helpful for the purposes of establishing instructor-student rapport is the Interactional Space. This space can be utilized by the stationary positioning of the instructor “alongside the students’ desks or between the rows of students’ desks” (Lim, O’Halloran, & Podlosov, 2010, p. 238). Interactional Space is most commonly used during student activities, whether individually or in groups. This space represents the closest proximity between instructor and students and “facilitates interaction and reduces interpersonal distance” (Lim, O’Halloran, & Podlosov, 2010, p. 238). This interaction may

include personal consultation regarding classroom topics, clarification of previously disseminated material, or even personal interaction, developing student-instructor rapport.

In order to effectively engage students in their learning processes, instructors must take care to utilize their classroom space to enhance student-instructor rapport. An awareness of one's activity in the classroom can contribute to an enhanced learning environment and can mean the difference between reserved, withdrawn students, and students who actively apply material and participate in a community of peers. When determining the most beneficial use of one's classroom space, instructors must consider the impact of their use of physical space on the interpersonal distance between students and instructor.

Resources:

Berrett, D. (2012). How 'flipping' the classroom can improve the traditional lecture. *Education Digest*, 78(1), 36-41.

Lim, F. V., O'Halloran, K. L., & Podlasov, A. A. (2012). Spatial pedagogy: mapping meanings in the use of classroom space. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42(2), 235-251.
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