

2-6E Developing a Strategy for Supporting Active Pedagogies

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In spring 2017 academic and support staff from four North American universities were interviewed about how they had introduced active learning spaces, and how they had supported and developed staff who teach in them. The LTDF-funded Active Pedagogies Project aimed to learn lessons from their experience, as we introduce active learning spaces to the Learning and Teaching Hub and other buildings. The project report makes seven recommendations which are being fed into University planning. The interviews also provided valuable information about institutional strategies in introducing active learning spaces, staff reactions (positive and negative), different approaches to active learning, room design considerations, and the role of graduate teaching assistants.

Support in pedagogical development was deemed crucial for academic staff members intending to teach in active learning classrooms, as the spaces lend themselves to an active way of teaching that involves a paradigm shift. The form of support varied, with some institutions providing support through formal courses, while another established a fellowship programme which supports staff throughout the year and helps build a sense of community. The scale of curricular change is significant, so it is important to identify 'thought leaders' and gain support from managers early. For adopters of active pedagogy, the most important aspect of active learning spaces is a layout that encourages conversations. Active learning approaches can be used in a traditional layout, but are less effective there. Challenges included a preference for traditional methods, uncertainty about how to change, lack of time for curriculum development, and concerns about loss of authority and student participation. It was thought advisable to allocate the spaces to people who can really make good use of the rooms. Those who are unfamiliar with active pedagogies may feel uncomfortable teaching in such spaces, leading to a poor experience for students and staff.