Teaching Excellence:
Implementing the SAB vision

College of Business
Foreword

Embedded in RMIT’s Strategic Plan 2011-2015, Transforming the Future (2010) is the goal to “create a world-class learning environment for students by offering opportunities for collaboration, team work, a sense of belonging, a creative culture and opportunities to excel...”

RMIT is well placed to achieve this goal since the College of Business moved into the Swanston Academic Building (SAB) in July 2012. The SAB’s new generation learning spaces have opened up a diverse range of teaching and learning possibilities, offering unprecedented opportunities for collaborative learning and student interaction underpinned by the latest educational technologies, including the extended use of mobile devices. The Academic Development Group has worked with academic and teaching staff to encourage them to reimagine their teaching practice.

The case studies in this booklet exemplify the transformation in teaching resulting from academics and teachers recognising and responding to the potential of the SAB learning spaces. They reflect the efforts of high achieving staff whose excellence has been recognised at course, college or university levels. Each study describes teaching strategies that have challenged, stimulated and motivated students through a combination of room types, pedagogies and technology to create student-centred learning events. We thank the authors for their contributions.

We look forward to witnessing continuing innovation as we become more familiar with the potential of these exciting new spaces, our “world-class learning environment”.

Dr Cathy Hall
Senior Manager · Academic Development Group
College of Business
RMIT University

Acknowledgements

Contributing authors
Cathy Brigden, Jason Downs, Kathy Henschke, Ingo Karpen, Zlatko Muhvic, Siddhi Pittayachawan, Sue Reynolds, Arthur Shelley, Maurice Sheridan, Hazel Sims, Marion Steel, Meredith Tharapos, Alex Wong.

College of Business Academic Development Group
Sathiyavani Gopal, Tass Katsoulidis, Lila Kemlo, Dale Lin, Rod McCrohan, Carmelo Ortuso, Tom Palaskas, Philip Quealy, Lesley Riley, Susan Trigg.

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Unlocking critical and creative thinking in the discursive space

Ingo Karpen

School Economics, Finance & Marketing

Course: Strategic Marketing

I teach a strategic marketing course which is a hands-on, business-focused course that uses case studies and collaboration with industry partners to develop context-relevant strategy solutions. Many of my students are mature aged students who are working full time while doing their Master’s degree and have a lot of experience in the workplace. I have about 40 students each semester. One of the key elements of the course is that we engage closely with industry partners, using real life industry cases and problems. At the start of the semester, I invite the managing director of a company to give a presentation so that the students can familiarise themselves with the organisation, the type of brand, what it stands for and to experience personal engagement with the company that they’re going to be working with for the next 10 to 12 weeks.

The industry partners present one of their organisational challenges or opportunities to the class and the students develop alternative solutions to tackle these. It becomes really hands-on because students use the frameworks and theories discussed in class and apply them to the context of the industry partner. This creates a unique environment for students to learn because they are exposed to a variety of models, challenges and industries, and at the same time they are required to think about how they can use the models and frameworks within a specific context.

In addition to the live case or industry activities, we also use Harvard cases, or any other case study approach that enables us to discuss different scenarios. Students have to read and prepare these cases before they come to class. This preparation is vital so that we as a learning group can engage in deep context-related discussions. After jointly identifying and prioritising specific issues and opportunities that are embedded in the case, we then work towards finding solutions which creates a much more contextually immersed learning experience.

I start most classes with a student presentation where a group of students deal with a case study and present their ideas. The other students are then asked to challenge the presenting students for about half an hour. This is a ‘grilling’ about the problems and opportunities that they have identified and the solutions they have developed. In the second half of the class I facilitate discussions regarding the integration and development of the learning frameworks, the theories required to explain and manage issues/opportunities, and solutions and topics that were uncovered as part of the case study discussions.

I teach this course in the SAB discursive space. I can see everything and can connect with everyone, standing right in the centre of the small U-shaped theatre. The design of the space makes it very easy to get the students to interact with each other and for me to facilitate interaction with everybody else in the room. It also helps me to create an interactive teaching environment where students feel comfortable to talk with each other, where students loosen up and feel secure enough to play with their creativity, test their ideas, provide answers and start to discuss and debate.

The discursive space for me is all about interaction, debate, and arguments in a constructive sense. It’s all about getting my students engaged with each other. I think the notion of engagement is what makes a big difference to the students in terms of their willingness and openness to learn, and the discursive space really brings these aspects to a new level.

The discursive space has all the necessary technology that we need and we use it to make the whole learning process more interesting along the way. For the students it is very important to make the most of the technology that they can use. On the one hand, their presentations need to get a simple message across. On the other hand, students are encouraged to use technology, movies, sound or any form of sensual stimulation that helps to engage with the audience. I use remote control devices (mouse, ipad), which makes it easy for me to walk around the space. I like to be close to the students, rather than having a sense of distance.

The two generic skills that I care about most are creative thinking and critical thinking. For me teaching does not mean simply providing a lecture or theoretical frameworks. Teaching is about co-creating the student experience. I want to respond to and collaborate with my students. I want to bring out the best of their thoughts to generate and share insights, to develop their personal thinking, and emotional and cognitive engagement. I believe the design of the Discursive Theatre helps challenge my students to go above and beyond the application of theoretical models. On average, my classes have over 90 per cent attendance and that is a very good sign that students like to spend their time in the space as well as working toward achieving important learning outcomes. They have a lot of knowledge and it’s great to unlock that.
Increasing engagement in large classes

Meredith Tharapos

School of Accounting
Course: Management Accounting and Business

It is not uncommon for RMIT Accounting courses to have classes of up to 300 students. An ongoing challenge for teaching staff is effectively engaging such large, diverse cohorts.

The course had previously experienced high fail rates and low overall satisfaction scores in student course experience surveys. Given that all Power Point slides and lecture illustrations were available on Blackboard prior to the lecture, and recordings available after the lecture, the teaching team I am part of wanted a different offering to entice students to attend and contribute to lectures. It was intended that they have a value-added experience so that they would leave feeling that the experience was worthwhile; a pedagogical activity not to be missed. We all wanted the lectures to be interactive so that they were a place where knowledge was constructed, rather than just transferred. The challenge was accomplishing this goal with large numbers of students!

The solution was to first present the lecture in the SAB enhanced lecture theatre and to follow with an interactive activity based on the lecture material just presented, to be completed in groups of 4 or 5. This activity contributed toward group assessment for the course. Students were firstly required to attend the lecture and secondly, to actively engage with the lecture material as it was being delivered. It was observed that students listened and took notes more carefully because they would be immediately required to do an activity based on what had just been presented.

Lecture Activities: In undertaking the activity students form groups and collaborate with those sitting immediately around them. The activities are based on one-page, double-sided handouts requiring calculations, theory, or both. A real buzz is created as students discuss the activity and then write up their group response. It is particularly rewarding for both Gillian Vesty (the Course Coordinator) and I to see students considering and discussing the issues raised and then collaborating together to come up with a group response. During these activities we rove around the lecture theatre and address student queries through guidance rather than providing answers.

The group activities are marked and returned to students in tutorials the following week. Students need to attend tutorials in order to obtain the feedback on the previous week’s group activity, and be involved in the rich discussion that follows as each group members put forward their views.

Tutorial Activities: Tutorials (comprising approximately 25 - 30 students) are held in either interactive or project spaces, and further facilitate collaborative learning as students are seated in pods of six. Further group activities (completed on a per pod basis) are also undertaken within these tutorials. The design of the space enables instructors to move between pods and engage with each group. The application of concepts to different scenarios in an open-book environment is the focus of the group activities. The group activities may involve case studies and the manipulation of data in an excel spreadsheet downloaded from Blackboard. Students use the technology available at each pod, or their own devices connected wirelessly. Students download the spreadsheet and work on the issue prior to the group activity. I provide prompts as I move between pods and the lively interaction that follows is a delight to be part of.

The SAB’s unique facilities used during these activities facilitate students achieving the course outcomes of:

- analysing, reasoning logically and conceptualizing issues,
- identifying, understanding and interpreting basic concepts,
- applying basic management accounting concepts to different scenarios, and
- employing written communication skills.

The feedback to date from students in these large classes has been excellent. They particularly like the fact that the lecture activities provide an incentive for them to attend lectures and to remain focused by drawing on the material presented in order to complete the group activity. The fact that it forms part of their assessment is further motivation to undertake the activity to the best of their ability. Students also recognize the benefit of receiving immediate feedback on their level of understanding of each topic as the material is being presented. The provision of the opportunity for further clarification of any ‘muddy points’ in the following week’s smaller tutorial class is very welcome. Some group activities are deliberately written to draw out the challenging aspects that students, in the past, might have considered aspects to ‘trick’ them in an examination. In this way students are alerted to concepts and have the opportunity to discuss applications in a tutorial environment.

Moving between all the student groups in the enhanced lecture theatre up and down the stairs is great for physical fitness! However next semester we plan to use the interactive lecture space to enable students seated in the first row of each tier to be able to work with students sitting immediately behind them, providing a user friendly environment for student group activities.
Using flexible spaces to facilitate learning in professional communities

Arthur Shelley

Graduate School of Business & Law
Course: Knowledge Management

The new learning spaces in the SAB have taken professional development to a new level. The combination of open spaces, flexible layout and embedded technology enable learning facilitators to perform a range of action learning activities that are difficult to achieve in traditional classrooms.

Professional development (for willing adults who want to participate in stimulating activities that engage them in experiential learning, leading to enhanced capabilities) works far better as student-centered than as teacher- or content-centered processes. The principles of action learning and andragogy are more easily merged when the space in which the learning is done is flexible and more enabling of creative participation. Rounded tables, room to move between tables, the ability to draw upon content for any sub group within the room and share more widely, mean that the combined knowledge of the space can be more easily leveraged by all. Having technology to support these activities is an advantage, but not the focus. When designing action learning interventions, one starts with the desired learning outcomes, considers the actions learners will participate in and the space and physical resources they have available. Then a decision can be made on the best way forward. Flexibility of spaces in the SAB enables a wide range of interventions that are simply not possible in a traditional class room. The range of spaces in the SAB available also allows choice as to which space is best for which activities.

Motivating participants to engage in changing their practices is the biggest challenge - and is the key for success. Action learning literature supports the concept that “learning by doing” results in better retention of the ideas and a greater propensity for people to change the their practices when back in the workplace. Provision of creative problem solving activities, followed by reflective conversations to share perspectives is a common base formula for many activities. Neuroscience research shows that the impact of learning activities is greater when they are supported by a blend of learning stimulants (read, listen, watch, do, interact, reflect, challenge...). In my experience, people simply enjoy the experience more, resulting in them taking more in, and at a deeper level.

Many of the interactions that I facilitate take the form of games, active puzzles, role plays or challenge discussions. Typically the interaction is done in pairs or small groups first, and then the diversity of outputs across these groups is discussed by all participants in the space, along with discussions about the diverse range of findings. This highlights the multiple perspectives in the room being influenced by the range of opinions, experiences and knowledge of the participants exemplifying the complexity of human interactions and learning.

Although many of these activities could be done in traditional classrooms, the ability to blend all of these approaches into the one activity is much easier in the new learning spaces. This helps to keep everyone involved, enhancing the experience for everyone.
Bringing the outside in: Inclusive learning for online students

Sue Reynolds

School of Business IT and Logistics
Master of Information Management Program

A persistent observation of students studying online is that they feel isolated from their teachers and their peers. Even when offered tools designed to include students in learning activities via a learning management system – blogs, discussion forums, group spaces – students studying remotely from a physical campus often say that they don’t feel connected to other students or their tutors. Desktop software is now readily available to enable a teacher to record and upload videos aimed specifically and directly at students studying online. This is a one-to-one type of interaction which does not give a sense of community.

The Master of Information Management program offers its entire program online and has included a variety of activities which are aimed at being inclusive of online students to mitigate some of the isolation they say they feel. Activities include a community of practice designed to be a practical demonstration of virtual professional engagement (using a blog), the use of Yammer for students to help each other through questions, discussion and the sharing of information online regardless of whether they are on or off campus, and the introduction of social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook into the learning program.

The SAB learning spaces have extended the capacity of lecturers and tutors to help online students to feel part of the entire cohort of both on and off campus students in a way that has not been possible in the past.

The first example of this is within the usual lecture format. When this is delivered in a Lectorial or Lecture space enabled with Echo360 the lecture is video recorded and uploaded to Blackboard for students to watch. Students who attended the lecture are able to watch and listen again if they wish and students who were unable to attend the actual delivery can choose to access the lecture when it suits them. The video format gives the lecturer the ability to invite students who are “outside” the campus to be part of what is happening inside the building. A greeting directly focused on students not in the room can be made and students can also be purposely included whenever an artefact of any kind is shown in the classroom or a demonstration given. Students are also able to be involved in fun activities such as “Guess the mystery object” by being able to see the object in 3D, just as if they were in the room.

Secondly, as a specific example, the interactive and project spaces are very effective for learning the art of the “virtual reference interview”. The reference interview or consultation is a basic skill for information management students to learn; that is, how to determine a client’s information need through questioning and then provide the information required. One real-life form of the reference interview is when it is conducted virtually with library staff connecting and interacting with library clients remote from the physical library. This can be replicated by students simply using online chat. All students involved in this particular class activity engage in the virtual environment and have no idea whether their “client” is in the room or somewhere else entirely. Online students are invited to be part of the activity in real time and everyone available to participate is equally present. The activity also enables students to introduce themselves and then perhaps to “meet” again via Yammer or the online community of practice. In the same spaces, using Google docs in real time is another way of including online students in group classroom activities and sharing classroom learning with those learning remotely.

Problem
Online students feel isolated from face to face cohort

Solution
Echo360 facilitates inclusion and participation for online students

Example
“Virtual reference interview” allows live online interaction and initiates ongoing communication
Three C’s: Collaborate, contribute, be challenged

Zlatko Muhvic

School of Business TAFE


One of the best aspects of teaching in the SAB is that I can teach an engaging activity in different spaces - interactive tutorial, project or workplace-enabled spaces.

This activity requires students to review questions and concepts by first individually using resources and then contributing collaboratively to both small group and whole class comprehensive discussion. Critical to the success of this activity is the requirement for students to follow a step by step sequence of activities, easily transferable, and outlined as follows:

1. Organize students in groups of 4-6 subject to the class size and number of tables.
2. Outline the lesson topic, learning outcomes and main concepts. (10-15 min)
3. Allocate a different question to each member of the group. Questions should address issues relevant to the concepts and learning outcomes.
4. Ask students to individually review their allocated question using all available resources: textbook, blackboard, internet etc. (20-25 min)
5. Have students from different groups with the same question congregate around a classroom whiteboard to share and discuss their individual findings and prepare a short summary of their research results to present to the rest of the class. Encourage them to write or draw their answers on whiteboards. (15 min)
6. Students return to their original table groups and each explains in a one minute briefing what they will present. (10 min)
7. Ask students with the same research question to go back to “their” whiteboard. The entire class moves towards the same whiteboard to listen to the presentation. Each student in the presenting group must contribute. Encourage the class audience to ask questions or give comments. (5 min per presentation)
8. After the last presentation, form a ‘roundtable’ and guide conversation, discussion and critique about the topic concepts and achieved learning outcomes.
9. Advise students to continue discussion and to reflect on the same questions in the virtual space on the Blackboard discussion board.

These collaborative and interactive steps are designed around a broad range of teaching principles and techniques including Bloom’s taxonomy (1956) revised by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001); diverse learning styles and preferences; memory; individual activity; dialogue; group discussion; teaching others; presentation; repetition and reflection.

My design of learning activities has been informed by the diagram below. Originating from Dewey (1933) the diagram illustrates how memory is influenced by different learning activities.

My teaching methodology is a work in progress, requiring flexibility and adjustment to class size, course learning outcomes and audience readiness.

My students report that they enjoy the classroom movement and changing class dynamics. It keeps them engaged and they learn from each other. The SAB spaces provide for and indeed encourage creative interactive movement for learning.

REFERENCES


Student-centred learning in the simulated business space

Hazel Sims

School of Business TAFE
Diploma of Business Administration

The office environment of the simulated business space on level 6 of the SAB provides the context for a flexible learning and teaching approach culminating in a successful eConference project. The simulated business space provides break-out meeting rooms, a full suite of software, smart boards, and teaching areas where we collaborate as a group.

My practice, focusing on equity and inclusiveness stemmed from my desire to help students to identify and achieve their learning goals. I developed an approach based on my preference for action learning. A flexible and student-focused approach to teaching was a decisive step on the road to the entire class achieving successful outcomes while developing their social selves and the concepts of citizenship.

With the support of industry stakeholders, I set my students the task of planning and organising an eConference using Google Sites. The eConference works simply by a participant entering the web address presented on an invitation and engaging with the site content for a pre-determined period of time.

Students were required to convert their activities to online and to capture them as dynamic web content. This approach involved learning how to communicate effectively online, having a contingency plan, and working cooperatively with others to make the website the new platform. Students organised themselves into web-oriented roles to perform the tasks required to populate the site. They worked collaboratively to source data for the website, ‘themed’ the event, using new project management tools such as MS Project 2010, organising speakers, creating marketing collateral, taking photographs, writing and editing webpages, uploading files and seeking publishing approval. The students demonstrated the required skills in the competencies, gaining valuable confidence, problem-solving skills and benefiting from the creative opportunities.

The eConference was an overwhelming success, having an impact for both students and staff. Teaching staff saw that the simulated business spaces allow for visually and physically pleasing spaces which encourage dialogue and equity. Tables are grouped in flexible arrangements such that the facilitator moves freely amongst the students - in a democratic manner, rather than teach from a fixed point at the front of the classroom. For students this arrangement reinforced the importance of engagement with their tasks, resulting in the development of their capacity to design, deliver and use flexible learning strategies.

Staff noted that the benefits of the eConference project included enhanced opportunities for students to work collaboratively. The project also revealed to staff the educational possibilities of using Google sites for student-centred learning that covered four competencies, in an asynchronous manner. (My colleague was a volunteer e-learning mentor.)

All students participated with an extraordinarily high attendance rate. At the end of the semester, students told stories of their positive experience, unimagined at the start of the semester. This unifying experience was retold on the website!

Students reported that the best aspects of their learning experience were:

- flexibility in learning
- developing skills, including time management
- planning and running meetings as well as the conference
- achieving the required end result.

I have learnt to adjust my teaching techniques to accommodate learners' needs and I am looking forward to helping develop the eConference as a platform for 2014 and as a blended delivery project for a flexible learning business audience.
Process learning and assessment: Developing strategic maps in project spaces

Jason Downs

School of Management
Course: Strategic Management

I teach a Strategic Management course as part of the Bachelor of Business (Management). The course is offered in the Engineering/Management double degree and is also available as an elective to students across the university. It is a third year course and I teach it with the understanding that many of the students in my class are about to graduate.

Each semester students are asked to develop a five year strategic plan for a partner organisation. We invite representatives of the organisation into the learning spaces to discuss their needs with the class. During the semester, students work in teams on the development of their plans. At the end of semester five student teams are invited to present their findings to the partner organisation.

The key to developing learning activities that engage students is to tie the activities to assessment in a meaningful way. My course assessment asks students to develop a ‘strategic map’. This map is a graphical representation of the strategy that they are designing, representing the main features of their recommended strategy in a complete, coherent and comprehensible manner. The value of the map-drawing exercise lies in the iterations that students undertake to get to their final version. Each version challenges them to find the best way to represent what they know and what they think is most important. In each workshop the students are asked to present their maps to their peers, who are asked to critique, comment and seek further clarification through questioning. Since the map represents the work the students have done so far, peer feedback may indicate areas for improvement.

I have found that students value the opportunity to present their work in project spaces using either the whiteboards or digitally through collaborative software. This is a valuable experience because each team receives feedback from other students about areas of their work that are unclear, unexplained or not being communicated effectively. The maps evolve over the semester and students can see their ideas coalesce. Often they take photos of their maps and compare between workshops. I try to keep a photographic record too.

Next semester, I plan to post the maps presented in previous workshops onto the digital screens so that the whole class can compare. It will be valuable for students to see where and how each team’s thinking has developed. I’d like to digitally capture and compare the progressive changes and use the comparison as a trigger to encourage students to reflect on their work and on the ways in which their thinking has changed/is changing. It might also provide a means through which students can demonstrate what and how they have learned.

Each class is different and each responds to the tasks in their own idiosyncratic ways. My approach to the SAB learning spaces is to demonstrate the affordances offered by the technologies and the physical aspects (including the spaces themselves and the design and location of the six-seat pods).

I actively support student engagement. I encourage students to walk around the space, to look at other students’ work, to collaborate with other teams, to draw on the whiteboards. This has an immediate impact on their understanding of what activities will best support their learning. I encourage them to challenge their expectations of ‘what learning looks like’ and to take advantage of whatever they can in order to get the best learning outcome possible.
Interactive tutorial spaces enabling transformative learning

Siddhi Pittayachawan
School of Business IT & Logistics

Courses: Research Methods and Data Analysis

My teaching practice is especially designed to enhance interaction and collaborative learning in the SAB interactive tutorial spaces. I use transformative learning methodology in my Postgraduate Research Methods and Data Analysis courses. This is pedagogically challenging since there is no universal method or process for tackling different research issues and data across business disciplines. Transformative learning focusses on change through problem solving and critical reflective activities (Mezirow 1997).

To address different issues in business research methods and techniques, my students are required to develop new skills where needed, have a high level of critical thinking and become independent learners. To enable transformative learning, I designed a series of in-class applied learning activities that are combinations of:

- instrumental learning (calculation activities with evidential reasoning)
- communicative learning (discussion activities with dialogical reasoning)
- demonstrative learning (demonstration of how things are done)
- scaffolding learning (a series of activities where one activity builds on another)

These all allow students to quickly learn a number of theoretical concepts and complicated research processes through their group actions. I purposely use an interactive tutorial space for my teaching since it automatically splits students into groups of six that easily facilitates collaborative activities between students and me. In-class activities that I normally use include:

- conceptualising hypothetical models
- establishing research plans
- developing questionnaires
- validating measurements
- exploring and analysing quantitative and qualitative data
- interpreting analytical results

With these activities, I am able to evaluate how much my students already know and how much they have learned. This, in turn, enables me to tailor my formative feedback dynamically based on the level of their understanding and achievements. These activities also intrinsically engage and motivate students to create different types of artefacts including drawings of conceptual models, written research plans and measurements, and analytical reports.

My teaching approach involves research-informed narrative learning using examples of real-world problems and how they were addressed. I use my publications as teaching artefacts which are available on academia.edu, (http://rmit.academia.edu/siddhi).

Formative assessment is spread over a variety of student produced work. After the in-class activities are completed, I provide oral feedback to students, especially on what they have done well and what can be improved. I subsequently relate those activities to actual research methods and processes. This approach enables students to learn complex, lengthy research processes quickly. In addition, I use critical reflection as part of summative and formative assessment to encourage students to reflect on their learning experience.

Several challenges are present when I adopt transformative learning. First, I need to secure a suitable space for such collaborative activities. Ideally, it would be an interactive tutorial space, although they will also suit a project space or a conversational space. Second, while I encourage students to voice their own opinions in their assessment tasks, students with backgrounds from hierarchical cultures may find it difficult to undertake critical reflection. I understand this quite well since I am originally from Thailand. Third, students in the courses may be from any school in the College of Business doing research in a variety of topics using different methods. To address these challenges at the beginning of the semester I spend time to ensure that the shared in-class activities will support their respective research.

Most students respond positively about their transformative learning experience including the way I design the curriculum, deliver the course content, engage them with a variety of in-class activities using the collaborative grouping of an interactive tutorial space, and assess their learning outcomes. With these approaches, my good teaching score and overall satisfaction index have increased between 10%-40%.

Reference
Addressing different learning styles for diverse learners

Cathy Brigden

School of Management
Course: Occupational Health and Safety Management

I designed these course activities in response to changing learning and teaching needs for a course in Occupational Health and Safety Management. First delivered in 2005 as a small course primarily comprising students from both business-based and engineering-based programs, it always had mixed cohorts of students undertaking double degrees. Since 2005 an increasing number of students have come from non-English speaking backgrounds. That made me think about the needs of students with different learning approaches and language and literacy levels who would benefit from having more than text-based activities. I sought resources to facilitate the engagement of visual learners with their course material.

The activities I designed ‘OHS Body and Risk mapping’, incorporate a balance of theory and practice. The methodology uses different learning approaches to accommodate my students’ different learning styles. Importantly, the activities have transferability and can be used flexibly in a learning space, at home, in Australia or in Singapore.

There are two stages to the use of the activity. First, I introduce students to a body and risk mapping activity using an interactive web page linked to the course Blackboard site. They are introduced in a tutorial-based space on the large screen. The students who bring their laptops or devices are able to open it independently and can use it whenever they want to. This is part of the flexibility aspect that can be used in a learning space. The Body Map is self-applied to each student, eliciting details about how they ‘feel’ as a student, health-wise. Individuals share in small group discussions, easily managed with the SAB flexible learning spaces, then expand to whole class discussion, so the whole class is interactive. The body map is most commonly used as a collective tool, to identify hazards in workplaces for workgroups.

Next, students apply the body map tool to a worker in an OHS setting as part of a hands-on, work-based assessment task. In groups, students identify a worker in a workplace and complete a body map of that person and a risk map for that person’s geographical area. Student engagement is reflected in the use of creative, visual methods for group presentations using the affordances of their space. They:

1. give an oral presentation with a poster developed by each group;
2. submit a group written report covering points in the group presentation, and
3. contribute an individual written component that includes a reflection on the value of using the body mapping and risk mapping tools.

The tools have been used in three different types of learning spaces: in a traditional flat-floored classroom, a large tiered lecture theatre in Singapore, and in the SAB interactive tutorial spaces. The tools were deliberately designed to be flexible, in terms of the spaces in which they can be used, but also flexible in that they include online materials across locations. SAB learning spaces certainly enhance and enable the effective use of this activity.

I have previously tried to create interactive spaces in more traditional classrooms. Now the SAB interactive tutorial spaces align more closely with the design of my teaching practice: the physical layout is much more conducive to the practical learning I want to provide for 20-30 students and there is no need to ‘reshape’ the classroom. There’s a much better fit. For the mapping activity in particular, the students are already grouped so they are focused and concentrated in cohesive pods of six. More convenient group formation and ease of teacher movement around the tables (rather than between rows) assists classroom management, Teacher-student interaction is enhanced in the SAB spaces.

My promotion of the overall value of using visual tools is positively reinforced by student feedback. All students, comprising a diverse body including international students, like using tangible tools and enjoy the challenge of using group posters for presentations. They find value in unpacking information as well as having web access to links to articles and other resources; for example, articles describing how trade unions have used it and other resources reinforcing that its common use in health and safety training.

Using this activity in the last five years has reinforced my awareness of how students interact in terms of group formations and emphasized how conducive the SAB interactive tutorial spaces are to collaborative, group-based learning. It will be interesting to implement the activity using collaborative software in the SAB project spaces next year.
A practical case study approach to teaching business students

Alex Wong

Graduate School of Business & Law
Course: Company Law

My learning and teaching activities are designed for the interactive lecture theatres and interactive tutorial spaces in the SAB.

I developed a course based on a real world case study of Company Law that builds on course topics and activities as the lectures progress and relates to situations that business students will encounter when they start work. This helps them to develop an appreciation of the subject taught and also enhances their value as accountants and business apprentices to future employers.

The case study commences with a client coming to see the students for advice in their role as future accountants. In seeking advice the client will ask a series of questions. Answers to the questions are developed based on discussions of lecture content and subsequently shared in groups in the SAB interactive tutorial spaces.

The reason that I use this approach when teaching Company Law to business and accounting students was to demonstrate in a practical manner how the theory and legal principles relate to what they will do in the commercial world. The case study raises issues connected to other subjects that students are studying, for example, tax law, accounting, financial planning and auditing. Besides addressing company law concepts my underlying intention was to demonstrate that all subjects in their degree are interrelated in the commercial world, not just Company Law. In other words, that students should not just see company law in isolation. As each week went by, the case study was developed further. This approach allowed the questions designed for tutorial sessions to be based on the case study.

The course outcomes require students to understand the principles of company law and their application to real life. They need to know why clients ask the questions they do. Students need to be able to know the basics of Company Law and to explain its application to clients. Another course outcome was for students to consider whether the law was adequate and what changes or improvements they might suggest. To help explain concepts it was important to give students alternative and more easily understandable meanings of terms. Overhead cameras were used to project images to explain some of the legal principles.

In the SAB learning spaces that I use, the non-fixed oval tables (‘pods’) allow for movement around the room and are useful for students to discuss issues and provide answers without being “in front” of the class. I allocate a number to each pod of six students. White boards are used to write up group points. Then students at each pod are asked to discuss and report on a particular question. Traditional tutorial rooms that I have used have rows of desks which made it difficult to group students. These pods make small group work so much easier.

In the past, lectures would be delivered and then a tutorial would look at different case studies. My new case study approach provides an avenue for relevant tutorial questions thereby tying lectures and tutorials together through the use of interactive SAB spaces.

For examination revision purposes the case study process has made it easier for students to revise important concepts. They need to demonstrate they could answer the questions from the case study; that they understand the topic, the relevance of the principles to the questions asked and how it applies in practice. Previously, students were assessed on a presentation in class. In semester 2, 2013 students were required to come to tutorials prepared to discuss a problem allocated to them a week before. The rationale for this is that in the business world professionals are judged more on their verbal skills than their writing skills. In the real world, a client will come to meet them and tell a story. Therefore, in the meeting, they need to develop the skill of providing an immediate verbal response to the clients’ questions. There was no formal assessment or grade for the business conversation but it was important for their own development to learn how to deliver information and speak about something important or useful in an interactive group setting.

At the end of the course students reported that the incremental activities using a case study including questions practiced in tutorials, helped them to understand the principles of Company Law and how it related to what they will face in the commercial world.

In future, I will extend the use of the SAB interactive spaces to enhance the scope of learning from the case study by including more practical applications; for example, completing forms and calculating specific numbers. I will reinforce to students that this activity is designed in particular to promote collaboration and interaction. To this end, as part of the assessment process, students will be asked to demonstrate evidence of group effort and collaborative involvement.
Business to Business Marketing is a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) course where all components link together to reinforce the learning experience for students. Rather than focusing on job-ready skills, this course takes the long term view that Marketing students need to be ready for their professional career and the emerging challenges that will face them. It is designed as an experiential learning class where students are helped to co-create their learning.

The SAB lectorial spaces are suited to experiential learning as they allow for the formal presentation of new material in a lecture style. Lectures can be followed by in-class activities based on the new material for students to gain experience resulting in a more collaborative approach to sharing knowledge and reflecting on the outcomes.

Students become active participants in co-created learning experiences. Each class is divided into three segments. The lectorial space means that I can teach in one hour blocks of 30 minutes formal lecture followed by 30 minutes of class activity.

Each week, new concepts are learnt and practised through class activities linked to assessments. The results and outcomes of the activity are shared and discussed in class. Students can then apply new learning directly to their assessment task.

Each session starts with the delivery of new knowledge or concepts using Powerpoint materials, videos, and websites to illustrate applications. This is immediately followed by a class activity to apply the new concept to analyse a component of a case study or a WIL project. Students work on the analysis in groups. The layout of the spaces supports an interactive environment and provides an avenue for teacher feedback. While analysis is going on, it easy for me to walk around the room and engage with each group two or three times per class.

The results, learning and insights developed by the class are then aggregated at the end of each one hour block using whiteboards, a document camera or onscreen with word documents or spreadsheets. The flow of information follows a clear path:

1. Formal delivery using traditional methods.
2. Students work on the class activity at the group tables developing knowledge and applied understanding. My role changes from lecturer to facilitator providing immediate feedback to enhance the student experience.
3. Newly developed student knowledge is collected from the groups into a central point and shared with the class.

The long-term outcomes are designed to support students as they develop higher-order learning skills, moving from acquiring and memorizing knowledge, to applying knowledge, and then to critically analyzing information by selecting and applying relevant models and concepts. These skills link directly to the course objectives of understanding and applying concepts to critically analyse market situations and events.

My role in the process is as a facilitator and enhancer as students engage with the material, apply the concepts and develop new knowledge and skills. It feels like directing a musical score as each layer of the production is added, leading to students developing complex knowledge and analytical skills over a twelve week period.

This course design was trialled using collaborative rooms in Building 56. The move to the SAB allowed me to choose spaces that were much more effective as I had the use of visual media and whiteboards. For me, the best lectorial spaces are those with a dedicated white board or screen per table. The flow of information from me to students and back again is enhanced and reinforced when I can move from online media to static media like white boards and back again. The static media allows analysis to be built up by the students and shared in a very visual form. This also enhances the learning as each group is physically applying the concepts to analyse a situation in a very concrete fashion. Students take a keen interest in the outcomes developed by other groups in the class. A serendipitous outcome is the sharing or insights amongst groups because of the whiteboards or screens.

Student feedback includes comments like: “The course is perfectly designed to match actual industry research and analysis. The practicality of the course is the best aspect” and “This course really challenges me to give my best efforts and try new things.”

A major piece of assessment is an Industry Based Project with an external client who provides the case, offers support and access to meetings during the semester and receives and evaluates the results through formal business presentations at the end of the semester. The process of “teach, learn by doing, then apply in a real life case” works very well in WIL courses, where students need to be career-ready, as it focuses on experiential learning leading to great outcomes for the students and the industry clients.
Taking the classroom anywhere: The benefits of document cameras

Maurice Sheridan

School: Business TAFE
Course: Accounting in Organisations and Society, offered in the Associate Degree in Business, Diploma of Commerce and Diploma of Accounting

It is common knowledge that learning doesn't just happen in the classroom, nor are students ready to learn on demand. Utilizing the technology of document cameras in the SAB, I designed and developed successful activities using video recordings of the exercise demonstrations that I used in class. These video recordings were used for students to access outside class time to support their learning.

Previously, teaching in a classroom, where video recording wasn’t available, I had a retest rate of 70% for one particular course. This rate dropped to 15% when I implemented the use of video demonstrations. Teaching in the SAB one year on, I have had continued success with this practice where the pass rate on exams for another course rose from 56% to 87% in one semester.

The SAB whiteboards are designed and placed for collaborative use by student groups rather than for teaching demonstrations. Document cameras project onto screens for maximum visual access. So I decided the cameras, the projector and a book of exercises would be my new whiteboard. An added bonus was that the cameras have a record function, so I can record, then post the lecture and example demonstrations to Blackboard which students can view outside class time thus expanding the learning space from just the classroom to anywhere.

Critical to the success of the activity is developing the exercise question and the worked answer to be viewed in the video. Textbook examples are formatted onto a single page so that they can be viewed on the document camera screen. Once the demonstration is completed the flexibility of movement in the Project Space is beneficial as I can walk around easily and check on individual and group progress, and give assistance to those who need it most.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the activity, I compared student results from two semesters. In the first semester no video recording was used, and in the second, document cameras and recordings were utilised. Results indicated that the presence of cameras with the ability to record helped to improve student performance.

Having gained experience with the cameras, the technology and their operation, I am more prepared with my artefacts before coming to class. I feel more at ease now that I am aware of what the technology in the learning spaces can support. Next year I will dispense with the experimental nature of the presentations.

I feel encouraged that the students found the exercise to be beneficial. In a traditional classroom I had a smaller window of opportunity to support the students’ learning. Now students say that the use of the videos is great because they can review course content at any time. Students have encouraged me to keep using these technologies as it has made their learning easier. That’s what I intend to do!
The rolling chair model for active workshop learning

Kathy Henshke

School of Business IT & Logistics

Courses: Business Communications, Business IT Professionals

Last year Patrick Poppins and I combined two courses and redesigned their content and delivery to promote a self-directed, proactive approach to learning and skill development. The class included students from first to final year across a number of undergraduate engineering and business programs. One of the collaborative project rooms in the SAB was the setting for weekly two-hour workshops. There were no formal lectures as such, new topics were introduced in short bursts during the workshops with further information presented online through a variety of resources including videos, pre-reading, quizzes and exercises. Students were expected to come to the workshop prepared to discuss the answers to pre-set questions with a small group. For the first six weeks students were encouraged to form groups with students with whom they had not worked before. In week 7, students could nominate colleagues from the class they wished to work with for the remainder of the semester for the team project. Assessment was tied to learning objectives: increasing awareness of self, of others, of their profession (by maintaining weekly learning journal), developing career planning skills and job readiness attributes (through building a professional e-portfolio) and increasing their knowledge of technological issues impacting businesses and society (through delivering a team-based project).

Each workshop started with small group discussions, the findings of which each group documented on their whiteboard or screen. Each group’s contribution was then viewed by the class. It was clear which teams had individuals who had completed their preparatory work. As the semester wore on we found that peer pressure forced students to prepare before coming to class so they could contribute to the team discussions. After the “show and tell” session we (the teachers) gave the class some feedback, supplementing knowledge where needed. We distributed a further problem-based activity for the team to work on. Each team was then required to discuss, prepare and present their findings to the class. Towards the end of each workshop students were asked to individually evaluate their own and their team’s performance during the workshop. Students were also asked to report on the most challenging and interesting aspects of the topic content. This feedback helped us to tailor subsequent learning activities.

At one of the workshops we organised a “speed interview” scenario. We invited alumni, final year students (post co-op) and HR personnel to conduct 2 minute interviews with each of the students. The “interviewers” were located at tables around the room with the interviewees (students) seated in the centre of the room. On the buzzer, students went to an interviewer and introduced themselves and answered the question “Tell me about yourself”. At the 2 minute mark the buzzer sounded and the interviewer gave the student feedback until the buzzer sounded and students moved either to the next interviewer or back to the centre of the room. With each “speed interview” the student’s introductions improved and their confidence increased. It was also a lot of fun and enjoyed by all parties involved! It was a very exciting experience with lots of positive student feedback.

In designing these workshops our intent was to minimise “teacher talk”, to provide opportunities for active participation and to engage every student in their learning. We achieved this by designing each workshop to utilise the various facilities offered in the SAB collaborative spaces: the whiteboards, the collaborative team software and the rolling chairs! Chairs were rolled into various configurations throughout the workshop, including:

- a semi-circular configuration around a speaker;
- a circular placement around tables for small group discussions;
- a semi-circular formation around each team’s whiteboard for presentations; and
- an individual space to complete their workshop evaluation and feedback.

Each project team presented their research endeavours in the final workshop in an innovative, exciting production that informed and engaged their peers. These final presentations used iPads, videos, quizzes and role plays to name a few.
Resources

For more information about these innovative approaches and other useful resources see the following:

Learning spaces in SAB

Good Teaching Practice in the College of Business

Academic Development Group - SAB Resources
www.rmit.edu.au/bus/adg/teachingspaces

Designing Excellence: Examples of Good Teaching from the College of Business

New Learning Spaces - Library Subject Guides
rmit.libguides.com/newlearningspaces

Welcome to the Swanston Academic Building
www.rmit.edu.au/propertyservices/sab