

Creating a New Teaching Space: Team Based Learning Lab

Himendra Ratnayake
University of Auckland

Himendra Ratnayake is General Manager – Operations for The University of Auckland Faculty of Business & Economics, a post he has held for the past five years. This role includes managing all operational activities including Facilities, Teaching Technology and Business Services.

Himendra has a strong interest in emerging teaching technologies. He has scoped and managed a number of special projects for the faculty including the installation of the new Team Based Learning Laboratory.

Commencing work at the University in 2000, Himendra has held various positions in the fields of management, technology, operations, facilities and multimedia. Prior to joining the University he worked for 10 years in the private sector.

Himendra holds a Bachelor of Science degree and a Diploma in Operations Management. He is also a holder of an MBA from The University of Auckland.

This paper addresses the innovative application of advanced technology together with smart integration of Team Based Learning Pedagogy at The University of Auckland Business School.

In 2010 The University of Auckland Business School reviewed its curriculum to mainly simplify the structure of its core courses and streamline some of the papers that were being offered. This review helped to create two new papers namely Business 101 and 102. The focus was to move away from traditional teaching methodology and place a higher emphasis on real world "business".

To accomplish this goal a team based learning approach was selected. This new method has dramatically changed the traditional teaching pedagogy with increased level of interaction between the lecturer and the student, more importantly between student groups.

Team based learning (TBL) was developed by Larry Michaelsen at the University of Oklahoma. This new teaching technique has now been widely used since its development. TBL has been suggested to help students who have little interest in the theory and thus find it difficult to understand the subject in a normal lecture theatre setting. This type of learning can develop vital skills and abilities that are important for businesses, organizations, careers, and industries where many projects and tasks are performed by teams. Learning how to learn, work, interact, and collaborate in a team is essential for success in this kind of an environment.

Lectures that shift from the traditional teaching methods to team based learning style were required to adopt some changes. The Lecturer is no longer a person who just dispenses information but will have to actively manage the overall interactive process, that is to say that facilitator will be more involved in the multi-dimensional teaching environment. On the other hand, students (instead of being passive recipients of information) will need to work collaboratively with the other students to learn how to use the content that has been given to them.

This system of learning was trialled and evaluated in various forms and configurations within The University of Auckland. However it was clear that the usual lecture theatre setup that was used in other courses would not be sufficient to maximise this approach of learning. This meant that a new customised learning space had to be created to facilitate this team based learning approach.

Active participation of the whole class of 120 students is enabled by the innovative configuration of a number of interactive boards, voice activated ceiling suspended microphones, strategically placed six projection screens and the use of twin high definition cameras and multiple projectors. The facilitator is always moving from one group of students to another with the remote (I pad type) control panel where they can access the main switch to manage the AV system in the class. The whole class can participate on advanced "clicker" type question answer session with real time marking available for them.

Although this room is set up with Wi-Fi, a floor box with power and data has been provided under each learning pod as a secondary source. All of this AV equipment was installed to enhance the team based learning experience to students and also to help the facilitators to better present their material.

In addition to AV integration, there were some important requirements that needed to be met in choosing the right type of furniture for this learning area. Students in this learning laboratory would sit facing each other as a group (as opposed to traditional front facing lecture theatre) and therefore a creative design was needed. Initially the requirement was to accommodate 120 students with a group of 6 per table but no sooner the work began the group size was changed to 8 per table / pod. This created a new requirement of flexible pod size which meant that the work spaces needed to be spaced in such a way that it maximised the room between each group but still allowed the lecturers and tutors to get access to each group with ease.

This area was also created in mind that functions & events could take place during non-teaching period and therefore a cinematic experience had been incorporated with a capacity to record and broadcast a live events.

During the conference presentation, the author will take the audience through a journey from concept design of this dedicated Team Based Teaching Laboratory up to the completion stage. It will also include some video clips with real life class –recorded using the inbuilt system and some interviews with students who have shared their experience.