

Concordia Classroom Configuration Addresses Trend

Ed Classes' Flex Seating Mirrors Real World

By DEIRDRE NEWMAN

Walk into one particular School of Education classroom at **Concordia University Irvine**, and this is what you'll see: individual student seats that have six wheels on a wide, round base, a type of seating that allows them to swivel and be arranged in various configurations. It's key in what's known as an active-learning classroom.

The seats allow teachers to change up the classroom based on the learning strategy

they're using at the time. It also removes them from being the center of attention all of the time. And teachers can oversee multiple activities.

Active-learning classrooms are important because the students, whether getting a credential to start teaching or a master's to enhance their skills, are being trained with the latest classroom environments for K-12.



Schumacher: main goal for teachers to teach their way

Many classrooms in Orange County have or are in the process of being fitted with the new student seating, including in Laguna Beach and Irvine, in a reflection of a national trend. Seeing active-learning classrooms in Laguna Beach inspired Concordia's desire for one of its own, said **Tim Schumacher**, assistant professor of educational technology.

Business-Education Connection

The Concordia classroom was facilitated by Michigan-based office and school furniture supplier **Steelcase Inc.** The university received a "significant" discount, and Steelcase helped it design the classroom space, Schumacher said.

The challenge for Concordia is that the one classroom isn't just for education classes, Schumacher said. Space is tight all over campus, so the registrar assigns the use of the room, and the majority of classes that get to use it are in the school of theology. It's also half the size of a normal classroom, he said.

The classroom nevertheless got high marks in a survey of students, who said it helped them do a better job of being creative, connecting, communicating ideas and collaborating.

Goals

In addition to the swiveling seats, there's typically a media space with tables, a TV and computers. Another part of the active-learning classroom may be a quiet space for reading.

The primary goal is to give teachers the freedom to teach in the manner they see fit, Schumacher said.

"We heard teachers say they battle with their classroom," he said. "They know how they want to teach and interact with their students, but [a typical] classroom doesn't allow it."

The second goal is that the classroom live up to its name and be an active environment. An active classroom can seamlessly shift from a teacher-focused environment to a student-focused one.

It's all about the swivel: The tabletop part of the seat rotates, as does the seat and the wheels. Plus, there's enough room on the base for students to place their backpacks to avoid blocking seats when they're moved to different parts of the classroom.

Schumacher emphasized that teachers typically choose a learning strategy first and then arrange the furniture, instead of doing it on the fly.

Irvine Project

At the Irvine Unified School District, **Stanley Machesky** oversees elementary schools as executive director of elementary education. He also teaches in Concordia's education school.

"Over these past few years, we have been imagining new spaces with the schools that are being designed and constructed, and reimagining spaces we currently have in our existing schools," Machesky said.

The district got voter approval in June 2016 for Measure E, which will provide a maximum bond issue of \$319 million for facility improvements at 28 of its aging schools.

During construction, a number of schools'
➔ Active 20

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Active

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classrooms and collaborative spaces will be fitted with flexible furniture options that provide movement, Machesky said.

“Students are provided choice as to where to sit based on their natural preference or preference for that day,” he said in an email. “These furniture options also provide the teacher with the ability to regularly flex the

learning environment, allowing for reorganization of students throughout a single school day.”

That has inspired an “intentional conversation around instructional shifts, and in many ways has inspired staff to make these shifts and truly strengthen the educational experience our students receive daily,” he said. “The momentum of this work will continue as we relentlessly reflect on our work and strive for continuous improvement.” ■