

RESEARCH SUMMARY

IMPROVED TEACHING PRACTICE AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

**P.K. Yonge Developmental
Research High School**
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

*Steelcase Education Active
Learning Grant Recipient,
Cycle 1*

Teachers at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research High School have long endeavored to promote engagement and active learning. When the school received an Active Learning Center (ALC) Grant in 2015, educators discovered new possibilities for this pursuit. P.K. Yonge used the grant to create a dynamic new space for 11th-grade English 3 Honors and AP English Language courses.

According to Lynda Hayes, director of P.K. Yonge, these advanced English courses “depend on creating [learning mode] changes for students about every 20 minutes – from group to individual work, from teacher presentation to reading, from writing conferences to whole-class discussion.”

STUDENT-CENTERED INSTRUCTION

The grantee team at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research High School reported that the ALC space allowed for more creative, student-centered instruction. In year one, the school shared this classroom observation:

On an essay-drafting day, a student writing group used laptops and document-sharing to evaluate each other's drafts. Two tables, when pushed together, easily accommodated a writing group of five to six students and their materials. One student in the group used a whiteboard to record group questions, and whiteboard notes on easels and brackets around the room gave reminders to writers, such as keyboard shortcuts,

outline tips and sequences, and fixes for common spelling or mechanics errors. All of these processes could have taken place in some form in a traditional space, but not nearly so seamlessly. In the ALC, these tasks were accomplished with minimal loss of time and students' attention.

By year two, the school experimented further with classroom configurations. During informal discussions, students became accustomed to moving chairs away from tables and using the personal dry-erase boards as lap tables. The shifts allowed a respite from “desk work” postures and dynamics, and contributed to an atmosphere of student-centered cooperation.

**“It was comfortable in
a way that brought out
a little more creativity
from me, personally.”**

*Student, P.K. Yonge Developmental
Research High School*

"This furniture is very helpful to class warmups and discussions," said one student. "When someone else is talking we are able to give them our full attention and turn our whole body comfortably. It allowed us to reorient ourselves to the situation as needed, meaning if we were writing something that is only for your [instructor's] eyes we could roll away from others, and if we needed to share with a friend we could roll over to that friend."

ENGAGED AND MOTIVATED LEARNERS

Within the ALC, student engagement with content and learning activities increased, academic achievement improved and educators were able to incorporate better support for social/emotional learning needs.

Both students and instructors credit the classroom with the improvements. Among students surveyed, 94 percent shared positive comments about the impact of the space on their learning.

Instructor Eric Lemstrom, M.Ed., identified the following ALC benefits as important to this progress:

- Flexible arrangement of chairs and tables for various modes of discussion, instruction, assessment and group or individual reading and writing
- Ample individual student work space, particularly important for learners who are using laptops, notebooks and books or photocopied readings simultaneously

- Dry-erase boards to facilitate drafting, brainstorming and student-group interaction
- Student-centered learning space
- Physical comfort

PLANNED AND SPONTANEOUS ARRANGEMENTS

During the second academic year in the ALC, students were provided with a curriculum intended to strengthen their research skills, particularly more explicit instruction and practice with online research.

Angela Kohnen, assistant professor in the University of Florida School of Teaching and Learning, conducted an observation of student working methods. She noted that students' online work benefited from their ability to work freely in their learning space, and that both her direct observation of their behavior and teacher instruction were facilitated by the flexibility of the space.

Kohnen also suggests students' work on the particular task of developing and narrowing research topics, "usually through conversation with a peer group or the instructor," depended on the conditions made possible by the space.

While earlier observations reinforced the importance of thoughtfully arranged classroom environments, this second-year research also underscored the value of supporting spontaneous arrangements. For example, according to the year-two

report, "A student faced with a problem can easily move with her laptop to a group who may have a solution, or a teacher or facilitator can quickly convene a mini-lesson for students in one area of the classroom while other students work independently."

94%

**OF STUDENTS SURVEYED
COMMENTED POSITIVELY ABOUT
THE ALC'S IMPACT ON THEIR
LEARNING**