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Impacts of the inadequate studio space.

The report examines the physical studio teaching spaces on the Central Saint Martins Foundation Course. I am an associate lecturer in the Communication Design curriculum area, but my role also extends to that of a print technician. I am a physically active white male from a working-class background, and I do not have any physical impairments.

My working-class background has greatly influenced me, instilling a philosophy of craft and physical labor as the epitome of "real" work, success, and accomplishment. However, as I educate myself about the impact of neoliberalism and workers' rights, I have become aware of the exploitative nature of these systems on people. Consequently, my teaching approach has been shaped by this. I encourage a high level of self-initiation, determination, and responsibility among my students, fostering a curiosity-driven approach to examining an emerging design practice.

The Foundation course consists of three units and two study modes: diagnostic and specialist. In unit 1, both modes follow a diagnostic path. While the specialist communication group sample communication specific briefs, the diagnostic groups explore all pathway areas before choosing a specialism. By unit 2, students are a mix of diagnostic and specialist students, having progressed to a specific pathway.

All teaching takes place at Elthorne Road, Archway. For Unit 1 of the specialist communication course, a single room considered a "double teaching space" is used. In the academic year 2022/23, the specialist communication group for Unit 1 had an intake of 74 students, with 32 of them being international students and 42 being home students. 4 students later withdrew for reasons unknown to me soon after the course commencing.

In Units 2 and 3, the communication curriculum area accommodates a total of 148 students, divided across three specialist pathway areas and taught in four different spaces. Many of these spaces are awkward in shape, do not have their own doors and have obstructive architectural features that negatively impact the delivery of sessions.

As a result of the increasing number of students in the cohort, I have observed that these teaching spaces have a significant impact on both student learning and the teaching experience for tutors. Engaging and capturing students' attention is challenging, and students are limited in the scale and ambition of the work they can produce. Furthermore, tutors' health has been affected, and the layout of the studios disrupts effective teaching. The relationship between the size of the student cohort and the capacity of the studio space is crucial in ensuring an inclusive learning experience.

The considerations for choosing the artefact were based on a conversation with a colleague, my personal observations while teaching in these spaces, and the artist reference provided by the inclusive practices unit, Sun Kim. During the conversation with my colleague, a woman, she initially expressed challenges in accessing basic utility equipment such as an electrical plug socket. This had never been a problem for me due to my height. The discussion then expanded to other challenges arising from physical differences, raising questions about ableism and what constitutes an inclusive teaching

space. The purpose of selecting the studio spaces was to identify and improve the working environment for both staff and students, even through a small gesture.

To identify experiences of working in these spaces beyond my own and to explore potential small changes to implement or develop strategies, I have drawn on a series of key sources. These include student feedback collected through a questionnaire, anecdotal conversations with colleagues, and texts related to universal design.

The first student questionnaire I referred to was sent out at the end of the second unit titled Developing Specialist Practice. This source was highly beneficial in gaining insights into the studio culture throughout the course. After reviewing the responses from students in each of the curriculum areas, it became apparent that overcrowded studio spaces were a significant problem, impacting their learning experience and compromising student health. Additionally, I conducted my own questionnaire with a group of students from the Foundation Plus course, which takes place during the summer. This year, there are 24 students enrolled in the course, and I asked them three simple questions regarding the studio spaces. The overwhelming majority of responses were positive, with only a few minor cosmetic suggestions for improving the space.

During a conversation with a colleague who taught the specialist communication design group during the first unit, he shared his adapted teaching approach with me. He expressed that due to the large cohort of 74 students, he often felt like he was addressing an audience rather than a class. As a result, he found himself delivering sessions more in line with a lecture model rather than a dynamic interactive session, or as he described it, "a class that can shape itself."

The inevitable consequence of this approach is a drop in student attention. (Haynes et al., 2012) "levels of attention and rates of learning fall off fairly rapidly during lectures. Passive attention, in particular, is prone to a sharp decline over even quite a short period. Evidence suggests that after about 20 minutes, students are taking in very little." The lecture model of teaching also implies a power structure that is suggested by Freirean pedagogical theory as a form of oppression.

Speaking to another colleague from the Graphic Design pathway, I posed the question, "In your opinion, what makes for a good studio teaching space?" Her response covered several points: a good level of natural light, non-obstructive architectural structures such as pillars, studio entrance doors, and the adaptability of the space to accommodate various types of teaching sessions. She also mentioned the positive impact of displaying student and professional work on the walls of the studio. These visual elements were frequently referenced by students during the sessions, contributing to a positive studio culture.

In my opinion, the available options to staff to ensure an improved learning environment is limited and I don't believe I have identified any innovative strategies beyond what my colleagues are already implementing. The key aspects within our control primarily involve organising furniture in the room, determining the tutor's position during sessions, devising strategies for punctuality, and potentially exploring the idea of half-taught group sessions (although this may violate the legal requirement for a set number of taught hours that foundation students must receive per week). However, the findings, observations, and anecdotal evidence gathered could be used in a more comprehensive report to make a case to the dean and heads of the college regarding the impractical nature of the studio space and the issue of oversubscribed course numbers.

The most successful aspect of the study was utilising student feedback and engaging in conversations with my colleagues as research tools. They provided valuable insights into the experiences of those who actually use the studio space. However, upon reflection, I believe my choice of artefact was flawed. I recognised the solution before I even began any of the research processes. This is in part due to a lack of engagement with the unit and mental burnout. It appears I chose the topic as a means to have a ready-made resolution for the unit assignment requirements. Nevertheless, I believe further study can be conducted to explore the relationship between students and studio space. I recognise that I approached the subject with a relatively narrow solution focused perspective, without delving deeply into the complex and intersectional experiences between students and the studio space. This calls for a more extensive study involving observation of various teaching scenarios and employing additional research methods to better understand the dynamics at play. However, when considering intersectionality, the number of aspects to explore becomes exponential, making it challenging to contain within a single study. In this context, determining the scope and limits of the study and research becomes a difficult task. In my opinion, there are numerous psychological and human factors to consider, making it a complex process.

The process I have undergone has left me dissatisfied and questioning the sustainability of developing a teaching practice in the future. I have a design-oriented perspective that is challenging to detach from. While the intention of the report was always to identify small changes for implementation, I find those gestures to be futile in the face of the larger problem. The university proudly claims to be a top-ranking institution, yet it fails to address obvious and fundamental issues that hinder effective learning. This raises concerns about the suitability of the foundation program and whether the imposed mass learning model intentionally undermines the course's philosophy or shapes designers who will not engage with making physical work.

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