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Ups and downs for SoTL development in a collective project targeting feedback practice enhancement

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ABSTRACT: The “Feedback First-Year Project” (FFYP) was designed by IFRES (Institute for Training and Research in Higher Education) and the Study Guidance Service at the University of Liège (Belgium) to support First-Year professors’ efforts to think and act upon their current teaching and assessment practice, and possible improvements.

FFYP involved a group of teachers from two Faculties. Participants were methodically acquainted with feedback-related issues (quantity, quality, type, frequency, purpose, etc.), through structured moments of personal reflection, pedagogical coaching, and collegial meetings, fed by the provision of information, procedures, and illustrations reflecting state-of-the-art literature on the topic. Among the theoretical resources, Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick’s “Principles of good formative assessment and feedback” [1] served, in different versions, as a major reference.

Although not labelled as a SoTL project as such, FFYP turned out to convey different SoTL traits, as given in Potter and Kustra’s definition [2] : “SoTL is the *systematic study of teaching and learning* using established or *validated criteria of scholarship* to understand how teaching (beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and values) can maximize learning, and/or develop a more accurate understanding of learning, *resulting in products* that are *publicly shared* for critique and use by an appropriate community”.

The presentation precisely intends to highlight, based on different data sources (interviews with teachers, minutes of meetings, tallies and descriptive templates of implemented applications, information from pedagogical advisers), how the project enacted

SoTL traits, as “by-products”, so to say, of professors’ practical work on their courses. Besides these overall SoTL “fringe benefits”, the project evaluation also shows strong variations in perceptions, engagement, and achievements among professors, even within the same Faculty. These observations raise some doubts about an optimal cohesion of SoTL development for all participants.

Amongst lessons learnt, the presentation pinpoints three major risks that a collective project like FFYP might encounter. Recommendations likely to mitigate these risks are proposed, in case others would like to replicate the experience.

(The presentation draws on an upcoming chapter, to be released, early 2018, in *Applying the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Beyond the Individual Classroom Level*, J. Friberg and K. McKinney, editors).

REFERENCES

- [1] Nicol, D. J., & MacFarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning. A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 199-216.
- [2] Potter, M., & Kustra, E. (2011). The relationship between scholarly teaching and SoTL: Models, distinctions, and clarifications. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 5.