

Issues around students' proficiency in partnership

Context: 1. Partnership in Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Curriculum OR 6. Theoretical and conceptual challenges to Partnership

In recent years, the University of Liège (Belgium), like many other institutions, has been coping with an ever-increasing number of first-year students, not compensated by an equivalent increase of supervisory capacities. This situation has resulted in both a rather impersonal first-year experience for freshmen and a worrisome level of drop-out and failure, especially in difficult entry courses. To tackle these issues, ULiège has decided to run several SI-PASS (Supplemental Instruction - Peer-assisted study sessions) schemes (Verpoorten & al., 2021). In a few courses recording year after year a high level of failure, groups of freshmen are formed. They meet every week with a "leader", that is an older student who went through the difficult course and succeeded. Leaders have been trained not to teach (faculty's role) but to stimulate conversations on the material covered during the previous lecture. The schemes generate a fair level of satisfaction and effects on performance have been observed. However, from feedback surveys, it comes out that some participants blame their leaders' insufficient deep knowledge of the material while leaders are trained to... activate deep knowledge. This is the paradox we bring to discussion. To what extent is it possible for a student to be considered as a partner while one knows that his/her mastery is lower than faculty's one? Isn't it there some form of "pedagogical romanticism"? This paradox has already been pinpointed by Nilsson & Luchinskaya (2021, p. 95): "Many of the SI-PASS leaders felt that there could be more subject-specific preparatory courses for the new leaders". However, we run here into another paradox. If a university, in addition to regular "process-wise" training (how to stimulate and maintain conversations about the topic?), must start delivering "content-wise" training to the leaders, so that their proficiency is warranted, it becomes heavy for the course leader and the program coordinator and expensive for the institution (leaders are paid) to set-up the program. Another related problem is the role of the course leader in these schemes. On the one hand, it is nice to announce to overbooked faculties that the program that does not require much time investment from them. So, the "partnership" is deliberately kept limited. However, if content-related problems occur, their investment should be revised upwards. The "student-as-partner" aspect would increase (actually, can PASS supplemental instruction be labelled as Sap?) but the program might also simply disappear this reinforcement would be both more time-consuming and expensive!

It is possible that we are trapped here in a dilemma between an ethic of "care" and an ethic of "collaboration" (Matthews et al., 2018).

Matthews, K. E., Dwyer, A., Hine, L., & Turner, J. (2018). Conceptions of students as partners. *Higher Education*, 76(6), 957-971.

Nilsson, G., & Luchinskaya, E. (2021). *A Reflection on Using Two Models of Supplemental Instruction in Teaching Mathematics for Engineers*. In A. Strømme-Bakhtiar, R. Helde, E. Suzen (Eds.), Supplemental instruction. Volume 2: Student learning processes (pp. 83-102). Münster, Germany: Waxman.

Verpoorten, D., Parlascino, E., & Colaux, C. (2021). *SI-PASS in a Belgian university: a pilot showcase*. In A. Strømme-Bakhtiar, R. Helde, E. Suzen (Eds.), Supplemental instruction. Volume 2: Student learning processes (pp. 123-139). Münster, Germany: Waxman.