



Emily Sposeto

Languages & Literatures Department

LESSONS FROM A STUDENT PARTNERSHIP

The Challenge

The main aim of the Student Faculty Partnership for Teaching is to give teachers insight into the classroom experience from a student perspective. Through discussion, reflection, and troubleshooting as a team, teachers are able to better align their objectives with student learning outcomes, while student partners develop an awareness of the thought processes, strategies, and effort that goes into teaching. At its core, the student faculty partnership for teaching aims “...to bring students’ insights into discussion about learning and teaching practice in meaningful ways...that make teaching and learning more engaging and effective for our students and for ourselves” (Cook-Sather, Bovil & Felten, 2014).

The Approach

Throughout the course of the partnership, which took place in Spring Quarter of 2017, my student partner observed two sessions of my Elementary Italian class each week. She took detailed notes, and we met once weekly to discuss what she observed, what my intentions for each class period were, and to reflect together on any areas in which my plans seemed to diverge from how the students experienced a particular activity in class.

How it Went

It was a truly amazing opportunity to work with a student and explore together the lived experiences of teacher and learner. The access to such detailed, consistent and targeted feedback allowed me to really hone in on key aspects of my teaching and develop a new awareness of my impact in the classroom.

One outcome has been a greater attention on my part to opportunities for differentiated instruction within the classroom to promote student success and engagement. I am much more in tune to my individual student's strengths, areas of difficulty, interests, and the type of activities that they enjoy. I have also been making a more purposeful and sustained effort to enhance certain aspects of the classroom experience for students, notably through the integration of copious amounts of visual aids and multimodal forms of input, as well as a deliberate attempt to expand opportunities for kinesthetic learning.

I was also surprised that my own perceptions of my teaching strengths and weaknesses didn't always bear out in what my student observed. For example, I had the impression that I tended to speak too much English in class, straying from a goal of 90-95% of class conducted in the target language (Italian). However, my student partner kept a very detailed account of when, and for what purposes, I used English, and I consistently met or exceeded my target. My ratio of teacher talk to student talk, however, was less optimal than I perceived, and I am continuing to strive to decrease the amount of time I spend speaking in class.

Advice for Others

If you have the opportunity to participate in a partnership like this, don't pass it up! Keep an open mind and embrace the chance to engage with students in a true partnership!

"...If we wish to see greater recognition and reward attached to teaching, we must change the status of teaching from private to community property" (Shulman, 2004).

Works Cited

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). What Are Student Faculty Partnerships. In *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching* (pp. 1-14). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shulman, L. S. (2004). *Teaching as Community Property*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



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