Collaborative Teaching Assumes Collaborative Learning

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ABSTRACT: There is a tendency at universities that numerous scholars are involved in teaching a more general, introductory course. This system is certainly a positive approach, as each specialist contributes in terms of their research areas. However, as each university teacher is responsible only for their part of the course, the team often finds it challenging to guarantee the entity of the course so that the students would perceive it as a coherent discourse continuing from one class to another. More importantly, no one feels entirely responsible for facilitating the students' learning.

Our research is motivated by the experience of teaching an introductory MA course in the principles of foreign language learning and teaching at the University of Tartu, Estonia. The course is taught by several methodology lecturers, majoring in different foreign languages. For several years, students' feedback showed that lectures tended to be repetitive and it was difficult for the students to switch from one instructor to another. To address the problem, we organised numerous team meetings, discussing the content of classes in detail and trying to minimise the possible overlap. Nevertheless, the students' feedback still pointed at the lack of collaboration between the teachers. A similar problem has been pointed out by Nevin et al (2009, p.572), claiming that professors often focus on developing research and knowledge bases, while neglecting interaction with their students and the colleagues with whom they co-teach a course. Being inspired by the approach of the Professional Learning Community and encouraged by the peer review (Gosling, 2002), we decided to attend one another's classes within the course. As a result, each of us could be an active participant of the entire teaching and learning process, contributing to each class and constantly being approachable for the students.

The paper attempts to explore how the type of collaborative teaching described above improves student satisfaction with the course and their deep learning, as reflected in student feedback and course results. At the same time, we also address the challenges faced by the university teachers involved in the course, which we have explored through a focus group interview.

REFERENCES

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