
**Categories**: Student-Centered Learning, Student Partnerships, Institutional Reform

**Summary**

The article examines the experiences of faculty and student participants in the Students as Learners and Teachers program (SaLT) at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. The SaLT program, which involves semester-long, one on one partnerships between faculty and students, focuses on analyzing pedagogical practice. The authors argue that when faculty and students engage in the program they also engage in a complex process of translation that transforms not only the traditional roles of faculty and student, respectively, but also way that both experience teaching and learning.

More specifically, the SaLT program involves the placement of students in courses that they are not taking for credit to serve as consultants for the given faculty member. As one student participant put it, the consultant takes on “multiple roles- student, peer, colleague, partner, facilitator, observer, researcher....” Any student may apply to participate in the program, regardless of grade point average or other academic criteria. While consultants and faculty receive guidelines for developing their partnerships, they serve only as suggestions, and there is only a brief orientation, rather than a formal training, prior to the start of the program. Student consultants are paid a stipend for the semester and are required to work approximately six hours a week attending their faculty partners’ classes, writing class observation notes, and meeting with their partners, other consultants, and the program director.

According to the authors, participants in the program gain insight into the educational experience and engage in two primary forms of “translation.” The first involves the ways in which the partnerships “change faculty members’ and student consultants’ perceptions of classroom interactions, alter articulation of those perceptions, and, in turn, translate those into more effective practice.” In other words, through the process of taking observation notes on techniques/pedagogy, discussing those observations, and then translating them into action (alterations in the delivery or style of teaching and learning), both faculty and consultants are helping to redefine the classroom, the role of student and teacher, and the nature of the educational experience. The second form of translation at work in the partnerships involve changes in the “student consultants’ and faculty members’ selves into new versions of those selves.” In this sense, the program has often led to radical changes in the way that faculty members perceive of themselves and their role in the classroom: including redefining their relationship with their students, refocusing their pedagogy so that classes became more student centered, and ultimately, reshaping the essential nature or atmosphere of their classrooms. Similarly, student consultants experienced profound changes in the ways that they thought of themselves and their roles as students/learners; students noted that their participation led them to feel like leaders, made them active change agents engaged in shaping the nature of the education that were receiving, and radically altered the way that they looked at/experienced the classroom environment.
Conclusions

Overall, the authors view SaLT as a highly effective form of reforming higher education. While they noted some potential drawbacks, namely that students often find their critical/analytical approach to future classrooms highly demanding and subject to challenges when faculty are less receptive, they regard the benefits of program as far more compelling. In part, this assessment reflects the long-term impact that participation seems to have on both students and faculty. In each case, the participants found that their experiences in the program continued to shape their attitudes and experiences long after their partnerships had ended. For faculty, this transformation tended to manifest itself in the creation of classrooms that were more collaborative, student-centered, and engaging. In an even deeper sense, faculty noted that participation in SaLT had led them to change their basic view of students from passive receptors of information to ‘experts in learning and essential partners in the task of creating and developing new courses and refining existing ones.’ Student consultants also seemed to embrace this version of their role as partners in the learning process. They also found that participation in the program had led them to apply a far more rigorous approach to their classes, and gave them an sense of empowerment and ability that allowed them to communicate with their professors more effectively.

Applications

In both conceptual and practical terms, the program discussed in this article seems to offer real promise for U.D.C. In the larger sense, creating student-faculty partnerships would serve as a means of engaging students in an innovative manner and would serve the broader purposes of reshaping the University as a leader in the field of advanced teaching and learning. It would do so because of the multiplicity of ways in which it would potential alter the nature of learning and the educational experience at U.D.C. In a more practical sense, developing a program along these lines, even on a test level, would offer three readily accessible benefits: the opportunity to galvanize student leadership, voice, and engagement in the process of reforming the University; a means of evaluating current courses and the educational environment at U.D.C in a collaborative manner; and, the chance to develop student and faculty created data for both analysis and potential publication ( another factor in reimagining U.D.C. as a leader in this field).

Citations of Interest

