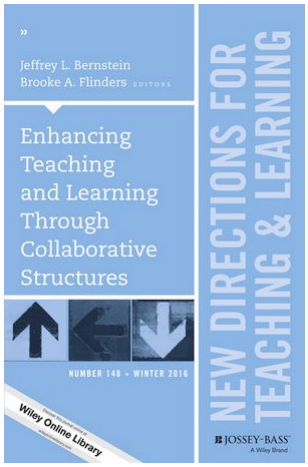


Enhancing Teaching and Learning Through Collaborative Structures (New Directions for Teaching and Learning, Number 148)

Bernstein, Jeffrey L., and Flinders, Brooke A., eds.
Jossey-Bass Wiley, 2016

Book Review

Tags: collaborative learning | engaged learning | learning community

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Date Reviewed: November 30, -0001

This volume of collected articles provides snapshots of collaborative teaching and learning in action at US universities. While the authors describe a range of techniques and structures, there is an emphasis throughout on intentionally building and sustaining communities composed of teachers, learners, and even community partners.

Richard A. Gale (“Learning in the Company of Others”) and Jeffrey L. Bernstein, et al. (“How Students, Collaborating as Peer Mentors…”) illustrate the positive effects of collaboration in college courses. Gale succinctly articulates numerous benefits of collaborative teaching, from increasing fruitful ambiguity that can inspire critical thinking, to providing teachers with opportunities for “the systematic investigation of student learning” (21). Bernstein’s experience working with students as peer mentors shows that a collaborative approach to class leadership can embolden students to take risks with low stakes, improving their participation in brainstorming and creative activities.

The majority of authors convincingly demonstrate that collaborative learning offers students benefits far beyond the immediate course or program experience. Ellen G. Galantucci and Erin Marie-Sergison Krcatovich (“Exploring Academia”) emphasize that their experience as undergraduate collaborative learners helped them prepare for their later work in graduate school and as educators. These authors note that the mentoring they received contributed to their professionalization and enabled them to discuss pedagogy confidently on the academic job market.

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Multiple articles address the potential for fruitful collaboration with community partners beyond the university. “Collaborative Structures in a Graduate Program,” by Robyn Otty and Lauren Milton, describes a multi-year Centralized Service Learning Model (CSLM) that combined the work of two graduate courses and several community programs. In their article “The Development of a High-Impact Structure: Collaboration in a Service-Learning Program,” Brooke A. Flinders, et al. illustrate students’ internalization of high-impact learning outcomes, including “participation in meaningful work” (44).

One important contribution of this text is the collection of students’ testimonies. A number of the authors asked course participants to complete some form of self-assessment. Overwhemingly, students who worked as peer mentors or group leaders reported gaining confidence, independence, critical thinking skills, and practical experience that could be used in the professional world. In Flinders, et al., “The Development of a High-Impact Structure,” young professionals in the nursing field provided feedback about ways their participation in the service-learning program helped them prepare for clinical work.

This volume offers a wealth of suggestions for designing learning communities; Milton D. Cox’s contribution (“Four Positions of Leadership…”) identifies traits that administrators and facilitators have found to be essential when organizing faculty learning communities. Each article clearly explains its authors’ methodology, making this a helpful resource for teachers who are looking for direction in implementing collaborative learning strategies. While it might have been helpful in some cases to learn more about how community partners assessed the contributions of university teams to their work, overwhelmingly the articles demonstrate that collaborative learning is beneficial for students and teachers. For those looking to build more collaboration into their courses, this set of articles provides inspiration and concrete guidelines

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