



Supplemental Instruction: New Visions for Empowering Student Learning

M. E. Stone, & Jacobs, G., Eds. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, No. 106. Jossey-Bass. 2006.

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As an experienced manager of Supplemental Instruction [SI] and related student-support programming, I was pleased to learn of an updated *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* volume on the topic. The last, published in 1994, was in need of revision given the growth of Supplemental Instruction and the changing higher-education context.

Supplemental Instruction is a system of course-linked student support intended to improve grades and student retention. Student leaders plan and facilitate weekly study sessions for students enrolled in “historically difficult” courses. They engage the students in active and collaborative learning strategies to review the weekly course material. With the ample training and supervision built into the model, student leaders learn to avoid answering questions and re-teaching the material. Instead, they focus on getting participants to use effective study strategies to review the week’s work with their peers. In the thirty-odd years since it was launched at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, the SI scheme has been successfully implemented in hundreds of colleges and universities in the USA, Canada, Australia, Sweden, South Africa, and elsewhere.

For people unfamiliar with SI, this volume provides a brief but useful introduction to the model. In the first chapter, McGuire introduces the learning theories that inform the SI model. In chapter two, Hurley, Jacobs, and Gilbert expand a bit on this theoretical introduction and describe the model’s structure and administration. They offer a summary of “lessons learned,” touching on the roles of various program stakeholders, planning the study sessions, student-leader training, program assessment, and the most effective learning strategies used in SI. A chapter by Ship Zaritsky and Toce describes the program’s successful implementation at LaGuardia Community College and offers concrete advice about administrative issues like hiring and training student leaders and getting faculty members more involved in the program.

For people already familiar with SI, the real benefits of this volume begin with chapter four, in which Lipsky describes a credit-bearing course used for screening and training SI student leaders. This is one aspect of the program that was not covered in the UMKC training for SI Supervisors when I attended in 2001. Lipsky describes both the content and delivery of the course, including how future SI leaders learn the course material using the same strategies they will employ with students who attend their SI sessions. This hands-on approach is always recommended for training SI leaders, and it was interesting to learn that it can be successfully extended to a credit-bearing course in which students are being introduced to new material with far more substance than a two-day training session.

A chapter on video-based SI [VSI] by Hurley, Patterson, and Wilcox provides an excellent introduction to a modification of SI that has proven successful with students who need more learning support than weekly SI sessions can offer. In this scheme, small groups of students watch their course lecture on video with a VSI facilitator present. Students stop the tape as needed and the VSI facilitator guides them to employ effective strategies for previewing, processing, reviewing, and polishing the information presented. Although I had attended a short session on VSI following my SI supervisor training, this article solidified my understanding of VSI and how it differs from the standard SI model.

Chapters 6 and 7 describe the benefits of the SI program to student leaders (Stout & McDaniel) and to faculty and institutions (Zerger, Clark-Unite & Smith). The latter chapter's sections on leveraging SI for informal and formal faculty development were especially interesting, and its themes are picked up by Painter and colleagues in chapter 8, which examines how SI can be implemented in teaching and learning centres. Painter and colleagues also discuss how SI can be used in learning communities and in online education, and they present their experience of an online SI pilot project at Oxford-Brookes University in the UK.

In chapter 9, Muhr and Martin describe a Swedish innovation called TeamSI, designed to help medical students retain their basic science knowledge as they move from the classroom into clinical practice. Experienced SI leaders from the medical school led weekly review sessions with over 100 advanced neurobiology and neurology students. Leaders received more training and closer supervision than is typical, as one of the project's goals was leadership development among future physicians. A year or two after they had begun their careers as physicians, the TeamSI leaders reported that their experience had provided skills they used in their professional lives, including leading groups to a consensus and conveying complex information to patients.

Jacobs, Stone, and Stout end this volume by looking into the future of SI. They proposed that businesses could adapt SI to improve employee training, team development and problem-solving sessions. By adapting VSI for the Internet, international businesses could meet these objectives across great distances. In education, SI has recently expanded its reach by certifying trainers in Mexico, South Africa, Australia and Sweden. These trainers will prepare SI Supervisors to run programs at their home institutions. Finally, the authors note the potential for further expansion of SI into developing countries. They suggest that the SI model is flexible enough to be adapted to different contexts, affordable enough for widespread use, and pedagogically sound enough to address the challenges faced by students with limited exposure to formal education.

Overall, this volume provides a brief but satisfying overview of the Supplemental Instruction model and many of the innovative ways in which it has been, or might be, applied. The major gap in this collection is a thorough review of the empirical research on SI's effectiveness in improving student grades and retention. The interested reader can consult *How College Affects Students*, where Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reviewed the available evidence on SI. They estimated that across hundreds of institutions and thousands of courses, SI participants earned an average final course grade roughly 15 percentile points higher than non-participants, usually regardless of student characteristics such as standardized test scores, rank in high school class, age, gender, ethnicity, and work responsibilities. They characterized the findings from SI re-

search as “extensive and consistent” (p. 399) when it came to course grades; however, they called for “more—and more rigorous—studies of SI” (p. 400) in terms of its effects on long-term persistence and graduation rates. Perhaps this volume of *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* will spur researchers to undertake and publish such research. As our colleges and universities continue to look for ways to improve student retention, such research could be an invaluable aid to institutions trying to choose the most effective student-support programming.

References

Pascarella, E. & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How College Affects Students*.



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