Reflection essay OM2 «Exercise tutoring»

The case video I’ve seen is about a learning assistant leading an exercise group. The students are doing their own exercises individually and not in groups. They have questions and raises their hands. The learning assistant helps them one by one. In this essay I will reflect over my own experiences of exercise tutoring as a student and what I would like to change in the case video.

It’s easy to see, for anyone actually, even those who are not taking LAOS or is a learning assistant themselves, that the learning assistant in the video is doing a bad job. If we first look on the surface of the video, we see that the learning assistant is getting angrier and angrier when everyone has the same question, and no one is getting it right. He is skipping people to help (they have their hand raised, and he ignores them), he is constantly checking what time it is, and he does not use the blackboard. If we go a little deeper, and match the video with the literature I’ve read, we see that he is not following the INSPIRE model. The INSPIRE model is a model that identifies seven characteristics of effective learning assistants. I mean, yeah, he almost got the first one; “Intelligent”, which states that the LA should have “superior knowledge as well as pedological content knowledge”. He does have superior knowledge in the subject but lacks pedological content. Moving on, he does not establish and maintain personal rapport and empathy with the students, more like the opposite. He gets angry at them. I won’t go through all of the characteristics, you should just take my word for it; he lacks all of them. Okay, one more example. The third one states that the LA “provides almost no facts, solutions, or explanation, but elicit these from tutees by questioning”. In the video, whenever he gets the question “So X is 14, right?”, he says “No, you have to multiply here”.

Okay, over to my experience as a student and exercise tutoring. Two semesters ago, I took a math course, that had three different lectures. One where the lecturer would just give us plenty of information, one where an LA solved exercises on the blackboard, and the third where we sat in groups and solved exercises together and could ask the LAs if we needed help. I found the last one very motivating and important for my learning. Just to be put in groups, helped my learning significantly. I could see how others were thinking, and I could share my own thoughts and teach other people the things I knew, and they didn’t. In the literature I’ve read, they are stating exactly this. Group work and talking about your exercise helps learning.

So, with my own experience and the video, what would I like to change about the video? First off all, I would like to have the students sit in groups. This way, the weak students can get help from the stronger students, and the stronger students learn by explaining their work. Second, I would tell the LA to not just give the students the answer but ask them questions to help them reflect over the exercise and coming up with the answer themselves. This goes under “Reflective” and “Socratic” in the INSPIRE model. I would also ask him to at least act motivated to teach, and not keep checking the time and sigh when someone needs help. I would also suggest he could try to get to know his students at a more personal level, and start the “lecture” with something more motivating than “Okay, so start on your assignments and raise your hands if you have any questions”, which goes under “Encouraging” in the INSPIRE model. Another thing he could do is to use the blackboard to explain the exercise all the students seems to keep getting wrong, instead of becoming angrier and angrier every time someone asks him about it. So, in conclusion, I would more or less make the LA follow INSPIRE.