



THE PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
PROCEEDINGS OF THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE
MAY 17-19, 2012
NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY OF
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
BROOKLYN, NY 11201-2983

**San Jose City College Peer Leaders Share Their Expertise
in Leading and Evaluating Effective PLTL Workshops**
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Abstract

The PLTL program at San Jose City College has transformed the culture, resulting significant gains in student success and retention. Indeed, the culture has revitalized the students in the chemistry department as demonstrated by their positive and enthusiastic attitude toward chemistry and instructors. Peer leaders from San Jose City College discussed the implementation components of the PLTL program, including peer-to-peer assessment, evaluation, as well as strategies for implementing a variety of pedagogies. We also summarized program assessment data and shared highlights of weekly leader meetings as well as our spring 2012 semester two-day orientation workshops.

Introduction

In 1999, Dr. Madeline Adamczeski founded Peer Led Team Learning (PLTL) program at San Jose City College. A variety of methods have been used over years to maintain strong student enrollment records. In the Spring of 2011, the collaboration between the Metas Program was established through the U.S. Department of Education's Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutional Grant and Peer Led Team Learning. New protocols were established in scheduling and collecting attendance in order to capture trends in student enrollment. Our PLTL leader community consists of a group of many students who did extremely well in chemistry courses. We also work closely with professors who are involved with the PLTL program as well as the Learning Community. The Learning Community is a unique program at SJCC; it requires students to take two classes which have a similar theme. For example, students who enroll in Chemistry 15 or Chemistry 32A are required to take Math 13 at the same time. Since the math class is at the same level and related to the chemistry class, statistics has shown that students who are involved with the PLTL Program and Learning Community at SJCC have higher success rates than students who are not enrolled. Being directly involved with these programs, PLTL leaders are very familiar with the method of teaching and exchanging scientific knowledge, in this case chemistry. Therefore, PLTL leaders work well with others and know how to engage workshop students in doing group discussions, an essential part of the PLTL Program. Many PLTL leaders have done a couple independent scientific researches in the past due to their great interest in science. Thanks to this passion, it is effortlessly for them to transfer that passion to workshop students.

Peer Leader Recruitment

The Peer Leader recruitment process for our current PLTL model has many strengths and some weaknesses. Until Spring 2012, a total of 132 unduplicated (?) students participated in weekly PLTL

workshops; a total of 34 workshops were scheduled on a weekly basis for a period of 14 weeks. The weekly attendance for workshops averaged 134 visits per week and the total number of workshop visits for the spring term was 2115. Prospective Peer Leaders are selected from within the student PLTL workshops who exhibit great success in group communication, enthusiasm, and have a strong grasp of the subject matter. The student will be offered an invitation to apply for a position as a Peer Leader based on the Peer Leader's recommendation, the instructor's recommendation, and the student's overall productivity and success in class (each student must complete the course with at least a B). Once a student is invited to apply, they are subsequently invited to attend the weekly Peer Leader Continual Training meetings to gain a better understanding of what it means to be a Peer Leader. The next step in the process is the application process. Currently, the application process for perspective Peer Leaders is lacking a formal foundation. Without a strong foundation, the application process is vulnerable to possible bias or discrimination. With a better developed process, the program may be able to minimize these negative attributes. Conversely, the positive points within our recruitment process include our method of information gathering regarding perspective Peer Leaders. At the moment our application process is in transition and we are developing stronger application and interview requirements.

Training

Biannual Leader Orientation

On the first day of training, we will talk about pedagogies such as: how to implement various group learning exercise techniques, set rules, guide group learning, establish a comfortable learning environment, and construct workshop activities.

On the second day of training, we will talk about logistics, how to fill out all required documentation, how to familiarize oneself with the Metas Center, and other opportunities available to PLTL students and Leaders.

Weekly Training

The Weekly Continual Training meetings for Peer Leaders are one of the most beneficial aspects of our growing PLTL program. These meetings provide the Peer Leaders with new concepts and pedagogies in group learning with a strong emphasis on identifying and understanding communication barriers within the peer group. The weekly content allows Peer Leaders to explore and implement the best techniques to effectively nurture a group learning environment. A large portion of the lesson plans for these meetings come from several leading peer learning textbooks, including, but not limited to: Learning in Groups by David Jaques and Peer Learning. Additionally, these meetings allow for the constant analysis of current practices which encourage self and program improvement on a continual basis.

SJCC-PLTL Retention and success, Cohort Data

Qualitative data is collected through student surveys for PLTL students and non PLTL students to better inform PLTL practitioners of effective instructional practices and provide information that could be used to help evaluate the effectiveness of the PLTL program and to make improvements to it. Comparing the success and retention percentages between all Chemistry students and the PLTL cohort at SJCC shows how our PLTL workshops has improved achievement gap. The retention percentage means students get any letter grade at the end of semester, including a W for withdrawal. Success means students get A,B,C letter grades. Based on our data, we can see both the success percentage and retention percentage increasing. For example, for Hispanic students, the success percentage was increasing from 52% to 69% and the retention percentage was increasing from 75% to 88 %. Moreover, the aggregate

total was increasing from 65% to 82% for success rate and increasing from 78% to 94% for retention rate. So, we have reduced achievement gap. The second point was to analyze our workshop participant survey data to see how students think about our campus and our workshop. Based on our data, there was more than 92% of students who described SJCC as a friendly and supportive environment. Also, there was more than 90% who felt attending PLTL workshops was academically for them to prepare for their class. Lastly, more than 60% of PLTL students said “attending PLTL workshops inspired them to become a peer-leader. Thus, not only could our workshops help them to improve their knowledge but also it encouraged them to become a peer leader in future.”

Implementation on SJCC's PLTL Program

SARS GRID is being implemented this Spring 2013 term to track workshop attendance. PLTL and other programs can benefit from SARS training and technical support to maximize other sophisticated features. We also pass out flyers to provide scheduling information and the names of the leaders. They also include expectations for the leaders and the students. These flyers also serve as a recruitment tool.

Every Friday morning we have workshop leader meetings for one hour. We will share highlights of the workshop including: content, pedagogy, study skill, group size, planning sheets, and attendance. We perform reflective and interactive exercise where we reflect on this past week's workshop. We also discuss different pedagogies, for example, collaborative learning strategies, learning styles, group dynamics that we want to apply in the next PLTL like textbook scavenger hunts, and assigned discussion leader. Leaders also communicate with the instructors to get the workshop workbook exercises and we share previous week outcomes and next week planning.

At the beginning of every week, we have to fill out planning sheets and attach documents and quizzes using in PLTL. The planning sheet includes the objective for this week, content to be covered, and workshop agenda. We need to select what kind of collaborative learning we will be using like group discussion, clusters, and assigned discussion leader; what study skills we will be using like mnemonic device, note taking, time management, notecards, reading textbooks, informal quiz; what assessment techniques we will be using such as: empty outline, one sentence summary, word journal, focused listening; and what tools we will be using like concept mapping, flowcharts, molecular models, periodic table.

Every semester, each of our PLTL leaders will come to other leader's workshop to observe, give comments, and learn how other PLTL leaders lead their workshop. We evaluate each other based on: opening organization, facilitation, study skills, communication, and closing organization. After the observation, we get into pairs and discuss the attributes and ways to improve our own workshops.

Student participants vs. Peer-Leader Perspectives and Perceived Benefits of Participating in the PLTL Program

PLTL gives students a chance to monitor their own learning, gain a degree of self direction, such as taking progressively greater responsibility for their learning by clarifying their own goals as learners, and independence of the tutors, as well as in their studies. PLTL also helps encourage students to have a desire to give a full and informative answer, help students to consolidate and enhance their understanding of a subject or discipline by clarifying concepts and testing their understanding through examples, cases, and informal quizzes. Students are also supported with dedicated counseling services provided by Metas program. Students gain benefit from training both in the group skills of discussion and project teams and in learning how to conduct the self and peer assessment of these skills. They learn from each other, pool

resources, make decisions, and share ideas. PLTL helps students to develop and mature as individuals by clarifying attitudes, articulating and reappraising values, developing in self confidence and self esteem, evolving a sense of responsibility and commitment. Moreover, PLTL helps students to learn how to communicate effectively with others by refining listening, questioning, and explaining skills. Students learn how to present and defend a position clearly and cogently, receive and provide feedback. PLTL helps students to learn how to collaborate and work as an effective group of team by setting, allocating, and monitoring tasks. PLTL also supports and encourages other members of the group or team; initiate, direct, and lead tasks.

Our PLTL groups may or may not have formal leaders, but the model of leadership is likely to be very different from that of the more traditional seminar leader who controls the activity of the class in such a way that students learn to feel little responsibility for what happens in the group beyond doing required background reading, solving problems, and copying notes from the board. PLTL is designed to develop further the understanding of group processes, planning and communication through a challenging series of practical, team based exercises offering leadership opportunities to all participants, including reviews, reflection, and action planning. PLTL leaders develop their understanding of group processes and the elements of leadership through a series of exercises and reviews. PLTL helps leaders develop communication skills in a variety of situations and know how to handle conflict in a constructive way. PLTL leaders learn from each other, pool resources, and share ideas. They also gain opportunities for conferences and workshop participation, and scholarships and internships.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The relationship between peer leader and instructor further strengthens, becoming less of an instructor-student relationship resembling more and more like one of collegiality. Many peer leaders go above and beyond what is expected. They participate in extracurricular activities in ACS and SACNAS clubs, co-present with faculty and conferences, and etc. Peer leaders also serve as superb role models who, in turn, inspire their students to become future excellent peer leaders. Peer leaders and faculty also participate in the On Course conference to explore more about student success strategies, professional development, networking, and visibility for the college. PLTL is undergoing a revenue analysis to estimate the revenue that can potentially be generate from workshop attendance and increased retention, success, and persistence rates. Under careful evaluation, we are considering developing curriculum for a leadership credit based course to provide training for peer leaders. Peer leaders would be required to enroll in the leadership course.

Conclusion

Our goal is to create an institutionalized and sustainable PLTL program, to narrow the achievement gaps between ethnicities, and decipher areas of possible improvements such as the recruitment process, workshop materials, promoting, and disseminating information about the program. Institutionalization of PLTL will help strengthen and sustain the practice of small group peer assisted learning which proves to be an effective learning model. Collecting apportionment will help offset the cost of the program. A curriculum based leadership course will eliminate paid training. We will do our best to enhance and solidify the PLTL program at SJCC, grow our program to reach and assist students in multiple disciplines.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following for their support: Associated Student Council SJCC, Barbara Kavalier, Ph.D., SJCC President; Jose Cabrera, Ph.D., Department of Chemistry, SJCC; Madeline Adamczeski, Ph.D., Department of Chemistry, SJCC; Robert Gutierrez, Director of the Metas Program, SJCC.

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Cite this paper as: Hong, N.K., Ford, A., Nguyen, T., Huynh, P. (2013). San Jose City College Peer Leaders share their expertise in leading and evaluating effective PLTL workshops. *Conference Proceedings of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society*, May 17-19, 2012, New York City College of Technology of the City University of New York, www.pltlis.org; ISSN 2329-2113.