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Major Components of Successful Leadership Training

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Abstract

Undergraduate leadership training is an integral factor to incorporating the Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) Model into the department of an institution. The University of West Georgia's Chemistry Department utilizes the student-influenced leadership training, which involves two primary sections. The first section encompasses a three-day training section before the beginning of scheduled classes. The second section incorporates a "retreat" meeting, which usually occurs four weeks into the semester after the new leaders have had the opportunity to lead three or four workshops. The incorporation of weekly journal entries, leaders meetings, and midterm observations allows for the constant training and improvement of the student leaders throughout the semester. Our primary goal is to always have our leaders evolving and improving the way they lead a workshop and the overall success of the PLTL Model.

Chemistry workshop new leader training at the University of West Georgia (UWG) begins with a three-day session prior to the start of class each semester. Other components include weekly journals submitted by new leaders, weekly pre-workshop leaders' meetings (for all leaders), a "retreat" after the third week of each semester, observations of new (and veteran) leaders as they conduct workshops, and discussions based on feedback presented by mid-semester and end-of-semester surveys completed by workshop students.

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – Overall Agenda

After a welcoming statement on the first day, training starts with an icebreaker. New leaders are introduced to each other in a human-body icebreaker activity; other activities throughout the agenda illustrate some of the features in the PLTL model. Several of these are described individually in this paper.

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – Human Body Icebreaker Activity

In this activity each trainee draws an outline of the human body. with footsteps leading to the body (leader's past) and footsteps leading away (leader's possible future), then writes next to the corresponding body part, as follows. Head: dreams and goals; eyes: how you want people to see you; shoulders: problems you have to face; hands: things you like to make or do; heart: things you feel strongly about.

To help leaders better to get acquainted with each other, groups of two or three come to the front and each introduces and explains the drawing of one of the others. (See Figure 1.) Drawings are collected as each group sits down and are posted on the wall for the duration of the training.



Figure 1. A group of three new leaders introducing each other vis the human body activity.

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – Introduction of the Workshop Model: Pre-Test and Traffic Jam Activity

Upon their acceptance of a position in the workshop program, toward the end of the previous semester, new leaders are given a copy of the handbook (Roth, Goldstein, Marcus, 2001) and assigned to read especially the first three chapters before reporting for training. After the introductory icebreaker, they are given ten minutes to write out their answers to the following questions, based on their own experience and their reading in the handbook.

1. From your own experience what aspects of traditional chemistry course(s) impress you as “turn offs.”
2. List the critical components of a successful workshop program.
3. What are five features that do not describe a workshop?
4. What justifies the “no answer key” policy?
5. Describe what you think students should get from workshop. If you were in a workshop, write at least one thing about the way the workshop was run that you think helped and one thing you think hindered students getting what they should from workshop.

After each new leader has completed and handed in the Pre-Test, a PowerPoint is presented to go over the background and brief history of PLTL, the six critical components, and some of the results at our institution, the University of West Georgia (UWG). Responses to questions 1 and 5 of the pre-test are discussed. Then, to illustrate the application of PLTL principles to a non-chemistry activity, the new leaders are divided into two teams to see which can first solve the “Traffic Jam” problem. This is a game in which each team is split into two sections, each lined up single file so that the two sections are facing each other, with one open space between the two sections. The object is to get all players to switch sides by moving in accordance with a set of specific rules (e.g., http://www.teampedia.net/wiki/index.php?title=Traffic_Jam).

After the game has concluded each team discusses questions such as

- How did your group approach this activity?
- Did your group change strategies before you were able to complete the activity? If so, what was the change?
- What aspect of this game posed the greatest challenge and what methods did your group use in order to tackle this challenge?



Figure 2. New leaders working on the “Traffic Jam” challenge, with a veteran “referee”

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – The Art of Questioning and Famous Person Activity

New leaders are given information on closed questions, which require only a “yes” or “no” response, and open questions, which require an explanation can be probing, clarifying, challenging, refocusing, prompting, or requesting a summary. They then play a game in which a sticky note with the name of a famous person or character, real or fictitious, is placed on the back of each new leader. The object for each person is to identify the name on his or her back by asking questions of the others in the game.

For the first five minutes, only closed questions may be used. Those who have not identified their character then are allowed open-ended questions, but not of course direct questions such as “Who am I,” “What is my name,” etc...

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – PowerPoint Presentation from Previous New Leaders

New leaders are required to submit a paper or project at the end of their first semester as a leader. These often contain useful tips that are worthwhile to share with the next group of new leaders. An example of these tips, appropriate as a follow-up to the art of questioning, is how to use silence effectively. Leaders need to be aware that it is better not to jump in immediately when no one in a workshop groups responds to a prompting question, but to wait at least fifteen seconds. Then, if no one speaks up, they can repeat the questions and wait again. The trainees are cautioned to remember that they are the leaders because they already understand the principles at work and that it may take more time for others to figure it out.

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – Invited Speakers

Each training session includes three or four speakers from campus or community who are not otherwise involved with the workshop program but are invited to give insights into their profession that would benefit the new leaders being trained. Usually, one of these is a retired psychologist who brings thoughtful information on conflict resolution. Another is a veteran teacher who has worked with groups ranging from kindergartners to college athletes and whose message is on learning styles and on how to be both a peer and the person in charge (a leader). A third speaker concentrates on managing time and stress and on resources available on campus to which struggling students can be referred.

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – Practice Workshops

The practice workshops are the single most important component of the three-day leader training. At the heart of leader training is actually practicing being a leader. There are two of these practice sessions, one during the second day and one on the third day of the initial training. The trainees are divided into four or five groups, and those in each group get the same question at the end of the first day. During the second day, each group is allowed thirty minutes of preparation for sharing their ideas on group presentation. What were considered to be the stumbling blocks students might have with this material? What leading (prompting) and what probing (checking for understanding) questions were suggested? How many different levels of Bloom's taxonomy are addressed in the leading questions that were thought of and can these be revised toward higher levels of thinking and learning?

The trainees then practice on each other, each being a leader for fifteen to twenty minutes at each practice session. At each "round" of a practice session, those in one group split up to practice on other groups. During the practice sessions senior veteran leaders and superleaders observe and compile notes for a follow-up discussion time during which trainees go over what worked well and what didn't. (See Figure 3.)



Figure 3. A trainee (seated, in cap) practices being a leader with other trainees as "students" while a senior veteran (standing) observes.

The second practice session is similar to the first except that each trainee is given a personality to portray while being "students" (not while leaders) in the practice workshops. Example personalities are class clown, know-it-all, totally-clueless-deer-in-headlights, or one of the personalities described in Chapter Three: Getting a Group Started, Keeping It Going of the leader handbook (1). This gives the new leader some experience in dealing with various personality types that might be met in an actual workshop setting.

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – Scoring Criteria

All leaders must fill in and submit a report after each workshop meeting. This report lists the students present and gives points for attendance (being there on time, not leaving early), preparation (having done both assigned online problems and those printed in the workbook for that module), participation, attitude, and performance on a ten-minute summary quiz at the end of the workshop. The maximum is 10

points, but this requires outstanding participation, more than simply responding when called upon. The standard for satisfactory performance in workshop 9 points. (See Figure 4.)

Workshop Report

Course 1152

Workshop # 17

Workgroup 17B

Date Jan 17, 2011

Leader Calvin Coacher

<u>Students</u>	<u>At-tend</u>	<u>Pre- pare</u>	<u>Ppn/ Att.</u>	<u>Sm ary</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Comments</u>
<i>Abigail Adams</i>	1	2/2	2/1	2	10	<i>Very helpful. Willing to pitch in on every problem</i>
<i>Bobby Baseline</i>	1	2/2	1/1	2	9	
<i>Daffy Duck</i>	1	1/0	1/1	2	6	<i>Missed white pages HW problems #1-4, no online HW</i>
<i>Albert Einstein</i>	1	1.75/2	1/1	2	8.75	<i>Missed white pages HW problem #1</i>
<i>Greta Garbo</i>	1	2/2	0/1	2	8	<i>Said she just wanted to be left alone</i>

Figure 4. Portion of sample report form submitted after each workshop meeting

Three-Day Pre-semester Training – Finalizing Schedules and First Leaders’ Meeting Practice Workshops

The last item on the training agenda is one that all leaders, returning veterans as well as the “newbies” attend. Leaders may swap assigned workshop times if mutually agreeable. Leaders for each instructor meet together to prepare for the first workshop and to decide on a time for the subsequent regular weekly leaders’ meetings.

XIDS Course and New Leader Journals

At the University of West Georgia, the designation XIDS indicates an interdisciplinary course. The 2-semester-hour course in which all new leaders are enrolled is XIDS 2002, ‘What Do You Know about Leadership,’ which carries credit in part of the Core Curriculum. The course requirements include attending the three-day training, attending the weekly leaders’ meetings, properly conducting workshop meetings, submitting a 200-to-300 word journal each week describing how leadership skills were applied, and preparing a final paper or project at the end of the semester.

Weekly Leaders’ Meetings

All leaders, new and veteran, are required to attend weekly meetings to prepare for upcoming workshops. Annotated copies of the module for the week are distributed to leaders ahead of time. The annotations include references to appropriate text material and suggestions for strategies that might be applied to particular problems in the module. At the meeting, leaders go over the problems, discuss possible strategies, and decide what might be best for their own groups. If a demonstration or exploration is to be done, this can be practiced at the leaders’ meeting.

Leaders are required to have completed the problems in that week’s module prior to the leaders’ meeting, or at least at least attempted them all and come up with good questions. Each leaders’ meetings is conducted

by a senior veteran leader or “superleader,” who is responsible for consulting with the course instructor about material to be emphasized in workshop and for preparing a suitable summary quiz.

Observations/Evaluations

Observations work two ways for new leaders. They are both observers and “observees.” During the third week of each semester they are to sit in on the workshop of a veteran leader and record in their journal for that week what ideas they picked up.

Also during the third or fourth week of workshop the leaders are observed during one of their workshops by a senior veteran or superleader. An evaluation is prepared and shared with the leader. It is usually in SII format, for Strengths, Insights (about the group in general, how the students responded to the leader, etc.) and suggestions for Improvement.

Both types of observation help to ensure that the workshops are proceeding properly and that the students are obtaining maximum benefit.

Retreat

Approximately four weeks into each semester, new leaders have a retreat, which veterans are encouraged, but not required to attend. This takes place on campus on a Friday afternoon and lasts about three hours. The new leaders’ journals have highlighted any difficulties they are having and these are addressed at the retreat. Each new leader is given a chance to “vent” and veterans provide their perspectives on how these issues could be constructively handled

There is usually a speaker at the retreat, such as person from Health Services who can discuss how to deal with different learning disabilities and personalities and can lead the group in helpful activities.

Midterm and Final Evaluations

Midway through each semester, at the time of the second in-class exam in each section, students are asked to fill in a short survey on their workshop experience. There is one multiple-choice question, “How helpful have workshops been up to now in learning chemistry?” The choices are (A) a big help, (B) somewhat helpful, (C) OK, but not as helpful as I thought they’d be, (D) more confusing than helpful, and (E) I can’t say; I’ve missed most of the workshops. There is then a free-response, “Please add any comments you care to make on the workshop concept, your first impressions of what it would be like, your leader, the group interactions, the workbook questions and activities and their relevance to test material, value of the time spent, and your general overall reaction to workshops.”

Although anonymous, at the bottom of the survey the student is asked to fill in his/her workshop day, meeting time, and leader’s name. Leaders are then given copies so that they can benefit from thoughtful comments made.

A more detailed evaluation form is administered at the end of each semester, at the same time as regular course evaluations. These are, in fact, modifications of the standard course evaluation forms used through UWG. The front side has 27 statements with Likert-scale responses to be bubbled in while the back has several open questions about the student’s reaction to workshops. These are also copied and given to leaders.

Acknowledgments

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Reference

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