

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

SOME BEGINNING TIPS FOR PEER LEADERS AND TUTORS

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Leading a Workshop

Here's a typical beginning-of-class dialogue:

Peer Leader: What are you having problems with? (You should know where the lecturer plans to be from the weekly preparation meetings.)

Student: I don't know yet.

Peer Leader: Did your professor cover moles?

Student: Yeah, today in lecture (with a confused look).

Peer Leader: Okay, I want you to come up with a definition collectively. Let's go around and hear some ideas of what a mole is.

Student: It's like a dozen.

Peer Leader: Okay, good, {student's name}, why don't you write that up on the board.

What else? Can anyone else suggest some ideas?

[Continue asking probing questions, and have the ideas written on the board so that everyone can see. At the conclusion of the steps assign a relevant problem and ask the group to work in pairs or small groups to find an answer.]

Peer Leader: What answers did you get?

[The person at the board writes all the answers given, and each student is asked to explain how they got each answer. Then ask the whole group which one they think is the right answer and why. Allow discussion.]

Be a facilitator. Never give an answer, just prod the students toward it. If they need a definition ask them to look it up in the book or have another student explain it to them. The leader's insights are important, so advice is good: "you could think of it this way..."

Handing out chapter outlines or study guides shows the students that you care and give them a good idea of how to study and what is important, especially in the few weeks before the test. You are an experienced student and this is one of your greatest assets that even the professor can't offer. Make sure that you show

these sheets to your professor or at the very least to your group leader and coordinator on Thursdays' prep session. You don't want to give out false or irrelevant info.

Learn all of your student's names. Don't you want them to know yours?

Don't be afraid to say that you don't know. In some ways being a peer leader is the easiest teaching job there is, because you don't really teach. The students should teach themselves with your prodding. If you don't know the correct answer to a question then you will probably do a better job as a facilitator and you won't act as a lecturer. When you don't know the answer for sure, you will be searching just like the students, and you may even let them see the thought process of a more experienced student.

One of my favorite memories as a peer leader was the day when, after going over the group's solution, I told my group that 90% of the time I didn't know the answer to the questions that we did ahead of time, or even exactly how I should do them. They all stared at me in disbelief as I went on to explain that by learning basic principles and remaining flexible, I could figure out just about every problem that we had. I told them that especially on tests I had seen problems that I didn't really know how to do, but by thinking and using good problem solving skills I could still come to an answer. For me, thinking takes precedence over memorizing (although this may not be the case for every student). I feel like this really gave them hope for figuring out their own problems, and I wish I had said it earlier in the semester.

Quizzes: Here's an idea. Hand out a quiz at the end of class and have the class complete it and hand it in. Then give them a copy to take home. At the beginning of the next class, hand out a blank copy of the same quiz, and this time have them hand it in and then grade it. This lets you: 1) see if they learned anything during the session (from the results of the first quiz) 2) it encourages them to find the right answer at home (reinforcing learning and encouraging homework) 3) it gives them a chance to improve their grade and sense of accomplishment.

This plan can be altered, but giving the students a new copy of the quiz in class each time will prevent copying of answers outside of class.

These are some ideas. There are many more in issues of Progressions, the Peer-Led Team Learning Project's newsletter. Look at the Spring 2001 issue, written entirely by peer leaders from around the country, as well as the Spring 2004 issue.

There are also some tips for peer leaders in the tips for tutors on the next section.

One-on-one Tutoring

Because serving as a Peer Leader prepares you to be a great tutor, it is not uncommon for Peer Leaders also to serve as tutors. In this situation, the tutor must be aware that his/her every facial expression and mannerism will be picked up by the student. This can cause students to feel shy or embarrassed and so one must be careful not to give the wrong impression to the student.

Ask the student what they are having problems with and what they want to do with their tutoring time. Once you know your student then you can suggest or lead them to areas that you think they need help in.

Don't be afraid to try alternative tutoring strategies with different students. Give short quizzes to help a student solve problems under pressure if they seem to choke under pressure.

Keep up with the student's progress. Ask for test scores. If the student isn't improving there's a good chance that it is your fault, and you should try everything you can to see an improvement. The student's own work ethic is important of course, but your job as a tutor is to help bring the student to a level of understanding of the material that they are having trouble attaining through their own hard work.

When problem solving, do nothing but ask questions. Even when a student gives a correct answer make sure to ask why—there can be a lot of blind guessing (which isn't always bad). Don't give in on asking questions, even though some students can make this very difficult by delaying answers or saying "I don't know." If you simply dictate answers to some students, they will learn almost nothing. Again, try not to look as exasperated as you may feel, because your student *will* pick up on this which can lead to feelings of shame or worthlessness.

Keep up with the student's schedule. Since you are a student as well, you will be very busy sometimes, so knowing about your student's upcoming test ahead of time will help ensure that you can cover test preparation even if you are busy or miss a tutoring session.

Above all, remember that each person learns differently, and that your own method of learning might not help another student very much. Always search to find the method that seems to work best for your tutee. Remember, it might seem like a student can't understand a concept, but it is usually your explanation that is lacking, not the student's ability to learn.

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