

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

BUILDING AN EMOTIONAL BOND: PART OF A PEER LEADER'S ROLE

ARLEEANN SANTORO

Ginny was a non-traditional student with time constraints due to being a single mother of two children. She lacked the course prerequisite and was clearly very nervous when I first met her in my workshop for general chemistry at the University of Montana. How could I help her to do well?

According to Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D., “Bonding is the process of forming an attachment. Just as bonding is the term used when gluing one object to another, bonding is using our ‘emotional glue’ to become connected to another. Bonding, therefore, involves a set of *behaviors* that will help lead to an emotional connection (attachment) between one person and another.”

Let's examine the set of behaviors that peer leaders can use to create an emotional bond with their workshop students.

Making decisions: The PLTL leader, prior to the first workshop, needs to decide . . .

- How much time do I have to devote to my workshop?
- When will I be available to give my time?
- How involved can I be? Do I want to initiate or be invasive?

Initiating the bond

Students need to feel comfortable and safe on the first day.

a) Room setup! Arrange the chairs so that everyone can see each other.

b) Icebreakers: Using an Icebreaker is the best way to get the workshop started, so that everyone meets and gets to know each other in the group. It is a quick way to learn the students' names.

Icebreakers can include such ideas as each person being asked to:

- State something unique about yourself
- Describe what you would take if stranded on a desert island
- Tell a personal story: Why am I here?

(Perhaps you wish to reveal that: - I was scared my first day also; or - I didn't make it the first go-around)

c) On a piece of paper collect each student's name, phone, e-mail, major, and (yes) hobbies

d) Answer Keys: After the icebreaker, be sure to stress that you are a leader, not an answer key; however, as a team we will find the answers. Remember, as a workshop leader:

- Be professional
- Be on time and prepared
- Smile :) Be enthusiastic
- Be the last person to leave the room
- Set boundaries

Setting boundaries—Time management

This is an issue that you should discuss with more experienced leaders as well as your peer leader colleagues. Here are some suggestions that are not too invasive—of your time and your students', yet are intended to show them your support:

- E-mail the students intermittently, e.g., wish them good luck on the test;
- Allow students to e-mail you with questions;
- Help the students set long-term, short-term, and intermediate goals;
- And if you are so inclined, provide treats (cookies, candy): the personal touch shows that you care.

Other suggestions that peer leaders have used to support their students include the following which may be more invasive of your time and boundaries:

- Outside study sessions: Be sure to include *everyone*;
- Let the students call you at home (or on your cell phone) with questions;
- Share study tips from successful students;
- Obtain quiz and test scores: Be aware of confidentiality. This depends on the structure of the
- local PLTL program and the responsibilities given to peer leaders.

Folks, as noted above, these suggestions may be invasive.

- Possibly approach students one-on-one to offer help (if you feel you have the time, inclination, and the offer is made to every student in the same situation);
- Take an interest in each student individually. This may lead to friendship. Be aware, however, not to play favorites at any time.

Maintaining or flourishing the bond

The professors have the responsibility to make sure that the leader is supported and motivated. Professors should talk regularly with the leaders about the workshop material and give leaders ideas and ways to solve problems. This support will motivate the leaders who will then motivate students in their workshops.

The three critical times during the term are at the beginning, mid-semester, and at the end. To be sure that students remember earlier material, the leader should re-visit handouts throughout the semester.

Methods

Leaders should employ a variety of techniques in the workshop, including “Round Robin,” assigning problems, letting the students pick the problem, using paired problem solving, brainstorming, using concept maps, assigning problems for competition at the board, having one student write what another says, or having each student do a step of the problem, using concrete models or manipulative, as well as flashcards, and games, such as “Jeopardy.”

Also useful is ensuring that students are free *always to question*. Rewards include giving out small treats (depending on budget) such as CANDY!!!

Signs of a non-bonded leader

There are several telltale signs of a non-bonded (and hence not very productive) leader. Behaviors that betray a group’s lack of cohesion, include no visible group work, or the leader comes in *late* and unprepared (“Sorry folks, let’s skip that problem.”). Worse, students do not question the leader. The effect of such behaviors usually is: “What do you mean, no one shows up anymore?”

How do all these suggestions lead to an emotional bond? The techniques employed in the workshop allow a structured way to make a safe place to give a wrong answer, while at the same time teaching teamwork and trust.

What happened to Ginny? Beginning in September 2002, she will be entering her first professional year in the Pharmacy program at the University of Montana.

Arleann Santoro
Peer Leader
University of Montana

Reference

Perry, B. (N.D.) Adapted in part from: *"Maltreated Children: Experience, Brain Development and the Next Generation"* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, in preparation). Online at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/bonding.htm>.

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