

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING SUSTAINABILITY

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

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We need to consider two things: the life of Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) as a “project” and the life of PLTL as an idea. To survive the next stage in the life of the PLTL project and the absence of NSF funding it is necessary to distribute the responsibilities of keeping the project alive to a wider group of individuals. Decentralization of the project needs to involve decentralization of the administration as well as further development and dissemination of the PLTL model of teaching. In the last proposal to NSF a model to decentralize the project was proposed and an effort was made to decentralize the administration, development and dissemination activities of the project by creating regional centers. We have had experience with this model for distribution of activities for almost two years. The effectiveness of this initial effort to decentralize the project needs to be examined. We need to consider factors necessary in order for these centers to function well.

The PLTL idea has spread across the country, although it is unclear how deep its roots are. It remains to be seen where it will end up as it finds its place in the area of educational reform. There are many faculty at a variety of institutions who know how to incorporate PLTL into their courses successfully. It is their turn to educate others in doing so. Even if each current practitioner of PLTL assists implementation by only one other colleague at his/her own institution or at another institution the number of implementations will double to over 300. Without major funding, dissemination at the local and regional level is the only practical approach.

The PLTL idea has a good chance of surviving because it makes intuitive sense, it is relatively easy to implement and it produces results. It does not need sophisticated technology to be successful but sophisticated technology can be used in a PLTL setting to do significantly complex projects. When done well it has something for each of the stakeholders, it does no harm and has the potential to do enormous good: Better grades for students, better understanding of content for students and peer leaders, lower attrition rates and a role for the good students. The new adopters will decide what to do with what they have learned. They may adapt it to their own environment and perhaps blend it with other models such as Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Chemistry Connection, CPR etc. We should welcome such hybridization. Some might even introduce it in distance learning courses. How people incorporate PLTL in their courses will depend on the problem they are trying to address. PLTL has a sound theoretical background and can be used as a vehicle for bigger changes in the entire course or department.

It provides a path for rethinking the course content and pedagogy, the role of the students and the relationship of the students to the department and their role in the educational enterprise as a whole.

Each of the senior faculty in the PLTL project needs to make the commitment to the following: help new faculty with the implementation at all levels by providing materials, leader training, a sympathetic ear, and

constructive comments when things don't work as expected. Faculty who were part of the "Workshop Chemistry Project" (the parents) can do what good parents usually do – nurture new administrative structures, pursue other sources of funding so we can keep the website functioning, provide funds for travel and publishing of the Newsletter, perhaps even support for the WPA program and training workshops.

We could work on developing more effective and efficient ways of doing leader training. Think of new ways of using the PLTL model such as for introducing research at all levels of the curriculum or teacher training. Most of all we will have to be patient. The next generation is usually better than the first but we have to give them time, support and their own space to allow them and PLTL to reach their full potential.

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