

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

A MODEL OF PEER LEADER TRAINING

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At the City College of New York, new peer leaders are trained for their role with a two-day Orientation session before classes begin, which is the beginning of a one-credit course, listed as an Education class. Many elements that are used in PLTL training on many campuses are included in this course, including weekly journals, introduction of various techniques, and readings. The Education course helps students in their academic careers as well. They learn to present, to talk before a group, to design a poster, to use theory in practice. On most campuses using PLTL, having a one-credit course may seem to be a luxury, especially if institutional issues make PLTL courses a shaky proposition. Training the peer leaders is often seen to be focused on the necessary course content, leaving the leaders to learn about pedagogical issues from the *Handbook for Team Leaders* (Roth, Goldstein, Marcus, 2001). But making training a serious proposition has far-reaching consequences, providing science and engineering students with alternative views of learning that are also based on research. They can experience a shift of perspective from “teaching” to “learning,” and peer leaders have helped to make this shift for hundreds of students.

In the Education class, peer leaders are introduced to various learning theories by first experiencing an activity, then reading about the theory. Peer leaders are encouraged to write their journals as a reflection on what they did in workshop, and how the class activities and the readings helped influence their thinking. Through their writing, they begin to become reflective practitioners, facilitators to learning. The course ends with a presentation by each peer leader on a problem they encountered or topic of interest and their exploration of the topic through learning theory. These presentations use a poster format.

As the first class session deals with communication, using pair problem-solving as a technique few leaders have explored this topic in their posters, I suspect because it is at the beginning of the course. One leader who did, however, was Alice Chu, and she offers some tools that can help leaders in conducting discussion in workshop. Roxanne Cheung, Alex Ramirez, and Mila Susnjar combined their poster presentations into an article on “Checking Assumptions” which explores Action Science theory by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon, and demonstrate how the theory can be used in workshop. Jasmina Nikolov conducted a survey of peer leaders and professors, and examined the developmental impact of lecture using William Perry’s developmental theory in “Ideology and Practice.” Pavel Mukhin suggests that inquiry methods might be explored as an alternative to lecture, or perhaps as a means of introducing inquiry into laboratory sessions in “May I Inquire About...?” Karen Les Pierre-Frazier felt comfortable in workshop, enough to discuss the usually undiscussable topic of stereotype threat, Claude Steele’s theory, in “Hypothesis: The socialization process affects students of color in their ability to learn.” Geoffrey Newman considers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory in “Are internally motivated students more confident?” Dwight Williams, a former peer leader at Coastal Carolina University, now a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University, compares PLTL with POGIL, Process-Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning,

developed by Rick Moog and colleagues. And Carol Slater and Mark Cubberley, faculty from Alma College, MI, suggest that Carol Dweck's work can be helpful as an additional theoretical base in training peer leaders.

In what ways are your peer leaders trained? What further insights do they have about this unique role of peer leader? We look forward to sharing and expanding the knowledge base for peer leader training.

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Reference

Roth, V., Goldstein, E., Marcus, G. (2001). *Peer-Led Team Learning: A Handbook for Team Leaders*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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