

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

IS LEADERSHIP TRAINING ESSENTIAL?

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The Workshop Project's summative evaluation has identified *leader training* as one of the PLTL model's Critical Components, but in a 1996 survey (Gafney, 2001), when leaders were asked if they were taught theories of learning and related methods of teaching, about 50% of the leaders responded "no" or "little." Leaders were also asked if training was helpful, and 69% of the workshop leaders strongly agreed that it was and only 5% disagreed. This study also found that without leader training, workshop leaders tend to default to what they know best - recitation.

Some of us who have trained leaders over the years have identified several of the critical components for effective leader training. It starts with the selection process. Vicki Roth and Jack Kampmeier, the University of Rochester, developed a protocol for the selection of leaders, which was adopted at the City College of New York (CCNY). The first step is a *recruitment event*, held late in a semester/term, where students apply for the position. They are then *interviewed*, undergoing a similar selection process as when applying for a job. Once the leaders accept the position they must *commit, on a weekly basis*, to leading a *two-hour workshop session*, and participating in *leader training meetings* that deal with content, pedagogical practice, and issues of group leadership (which, at some institutions, is a *training course*). At CCNY, students requested an introductory seminar before the semester begins, which is the beginning of a one-hour, one-credit course. We have found that a two-day seminar allows students to reach a certain comfort level to begin as a leader.

The leader training meetings, (or training course) continue throughout the semester and include the following elements:

- group dynamics (e.g., cooperative learning)
- pedagogical tools (e.g., ice breakers, concept maps)
- basic learning theories (e.g., learning styles)
- equity issues (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity issues, as well as access to multimedia)
- developmental theories (e.g., Vygotsky, Perry)
- skill and leadership development (e.g., reflective writing and exercises)
- assessment (informal and summative)

Leader development is not a natural, intuitive process: it has to be disseminated as an integral part of the Peer-led Team Learning model. As John Goodwin from Coastal Carolina University stated in our first newsletter (Fall 1999), "I think that as we adopt the critical components and train our leaders better, the program is working better." Yet not all colleges can provide a learning specialist. Here at CCNY we are piloting a distance learning course with one of the WPA grant recipients, Dr. Pamela Brown from New York City Technical College. Her two leaders participated in our two day seminar

at CCNY, which provided the personal contact between workshop leaders at CCNY and New York City Tech, and supplied some basic training, including an introduction to the on-line course.

We are using the *Blackboard!*® course information system, a template-driven application that allows a dynamic and interactive course web site to be set up by faculty without significant technical support and is relatively easy to use for novices to the Internet.

Making leader training an integral part of the PLTL Workshop model at all campuses strengthens not only the effectiveness of the peer leaders in facilitating team work, but gains them the opportunity to view learning and teaching in a more global and more strategic sense.

To strengthen leader training there is further need to assess the components of format, course content and practice. To do this effectively an ongoing forum must be established where discussions focus on leader training and practice. The conference on *Training Peer Leaders* at the University of Rochester from June 18-20, 2000 affords the opportunity for the beginning of such a discussion. Other means of communication and dissemination of ideas on effective peer-leader training must also be developed and implemented.

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Reference

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