

Learning and Teaching Conference 2012

Abstract 3A

An investigation into attendance at, experience of, and views towards Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) in level 1 psychology students.

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Peer assisted learning (PAL) is run by students for students, whereby students in higher years mentor groups of students in lower levels on difficult topics including coursework writing, statistics and study skills. Previous research testifies to students' perceived benefit from this, including developing writing skills, and feeling less intimidated in the small informal setting (Longfellow et al., 2008). PAL has been running in Psychology for several years. It would seem particularly beneficial here where the Level 1 class size is large as it can reduce anonymity and provide opportunities for informal conversation with fellow students, thus easing their transition into university and all the difficult social and academic challenges accompanying this. Furthermore, Tariq (2005) highlighted how student confidence can be low in courses involving numerical components, a central component of psychology where statistical analysis is core to experimental design and scientific reports, and where additional support is required. However, despite these potential benefits of PAL for L1 students in particular, attendance is low, thus either students do not perceive these benefits or else are missing out for some other reason. Our investigation aimed to address this issue by asking the 2011-2012 L2 class why they did or did not attend PAL in their first year. A brief questionnaire was completed which focussed on attendance at, experiences of, and views towards PAL, including whether students ultimately trust the help offered by fellow, albeit more advanced, students, or would ultimately only trust staff. The results are discussed in light of implementations to improve PAL uptake and enhance the student learning experience and skill development in a more sociable and less formal setting. The implications are also discussed in relation to how peer learning can provide both academic and social support to students and so ease the transition from school to university.

References

Longfellow, E., May, S., Burke, L., Marks-Maran, D. (2008) "They had a way of helping that actually helped": a case study of a peer-assisted learning scheme. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(1): 93-105

Tariq, V. N. (2005) Introduction and Evaluation of Peer-assisted Learning in First-Year Undergraduate Bioscience. *BEE-j*, 6

Outcomes

Understand/discuss the utility of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) and how to maximise student uptake and its effectiveness in offering peer support for learning.

