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# Peer-leaders' Perceptions of Learning after a Semester of Peer Facilitation

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# Peer-leaders' Perceptions of Learning after a Semester of Peer Facilitation

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## Abstract

The study examines the perceptions of a group of new peer-leaders of their learning during a semester of peer-leading training and experience working with a group of students. Data will be collected through individual interviews in the beginning of the semester and through administering a survey at the end of the semester. The data will be organized, analyzed and presented at the poster session.

## Introduction

PLTL (Peer-led Team Learning) is a form of group learning that has gained popularity at undergraduate level. Typically the focus is on the student results in PLTL. The purpose of this study is to examine the peer-leaders' learning and more specifically the PLs perception of their learning during one semester of training and practice as such.

## Literature Review

The practice of PLTL is diverse enough to be applied to various fields throughout STEM. The effects of PLTL can be seen to improve grades (Gaffney, 2005), to keep a student from failing or even push a student to overachieving, and contribute to significant critical thinking gains (Duranczyk, Higbee, and Lundell, 2004). Additionally, PLTL may increase other student outcomes like student persistence towards graduation, for example (Duranczyk, Higbee, and Lundell, 2004).

However, not only the students benefit from PLTL support. Research studies have found that the peer-leaders also benefit from the peer-facilitation experience. A study from Micari, Streitwieser, and Light (2006) reports that the peer-leaders perceived themselves to have improved in three areas: cognitive, personal, and instrumental. In this study we are particularly interested in examining peer-leaders' expectations and their perceptions of what they learned during one semester of peer-leading and training.

## Acknowledgment

The project is supported by the Emerging Scholars Program at the New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

## Research Questions

- 1) What are the PLs expectations of what they would learn during their semester of PL training?
- 2) What are the PLs perceptions of what they learned during their semester of PL training?

## Data Collection

Data was collected at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

In the beginning of the semester the author conducted individual interviews with 12 of the new peer-leaders, each of whom worked with groups of students enrolled in math classes.

At the end of the semester, data was collected through administering a survey to the peer-leaders.

## Data Analysis

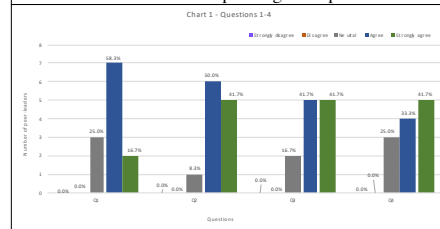
Based on the individual interviews, we found that during the training the PLs expected to:

- \* Improve their communication skills.
- \* Improve their ability to scaffold students' thinking by giving hints.
- \* Improve skills to facilitate the group work.
- \* Gain confidence.
- \* Improve their ability to diagnose strengths and weaknesses of students.

The data from the surveys has been analyzed, and is reported here in groups of four questions.

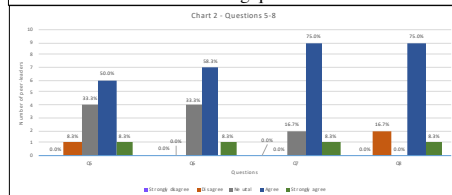
### Questions 1 - 4:

- 1- I have become better at creating comfortable work environment.
- 2- I have built positive relationship with students.
- 3- I have become better at listening to students.
- 4- I have become better at explaining concepts to students.



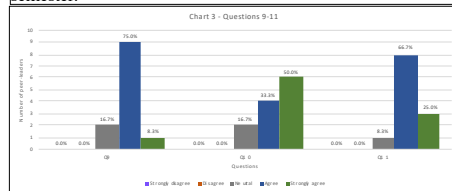
### Questions 5-8:

- 5- I have become better at diagnosing strengths and weaknesses of students.
- 6- I have become better at facilitating the work of a group of students.
- 7- I have become better at scaffolding students' understanding through giving hints.
- 8- I have become better at asking questions.



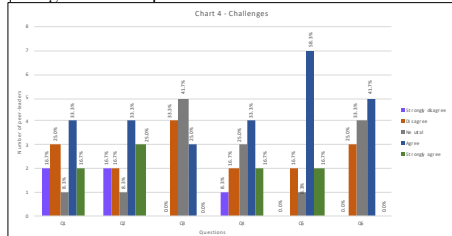
### Questions 9-11:

- 9- I have become better at understanding how students think.
- 10- I have become more confident as a peer-leader.
- 11- Overall I have improved a lot as a peer-leader during this semester.



### Challenges:

1. It has been challenging to review materials/modules before the workshop.
2. It has been challenging to manage time during the peer-leading session.
3. It has been challenging to give hints to students.
4. It has been challenging to guide an entire group of students at the same time.
5. It has been challenging to scaffold student understanding through questions instead of giving answers.
6. It has been challenging to have students effectively work during the workshop.



Some other challenges that the PLs reported that they encountered were: irregular student attendance, student use of cell phones, lack of basic math knowledge and skills, building/changing group relationships, motivating students unwilling to work, helping students to review material that they were expected to do on their own or do as a homework, helping students to catch up with material.

## Results

Overall, 75% or more of the PLs agree that they improved at creating comfortable work environment during the PLTL sessions, at building positive relationship with students and listening to students. About 75% or more of the PLs believe that they became better at explaining ideas, scaffolding student thinking through asking questions and providing hints.

Only about 2/3 of the PLs feel that they improved in group facilitation and in diagnostic student strengths and weaknesses. Overall, the perception of 83% of the PLs was that they became more confident and improved as peer-leaders.

Regarding the challenges that the students faced during their peer-leading experience, the greatest ones were related to having students effectively work in groups during the sessions and with the group facilitation and scaffolding.

## Conclusions

The overwhelming perceptions of the peer-leaders was that they improved as such during the semester of training and peer-leading a group of students. Although most of them encountered various challenges, they overall have developed as facilitators able to guide groups of students in problem solving.

## References

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