

Title: Using reciprocal peer coaching to engage students as communities of learners

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Experience for themselves the reciprocal peer coaching process
- Engage with the underpinning pedagogic research
- Appreciate how reciprocal peer coaching can be used as a formative assessment strategy
- Consider how reciprocal peer coaching would be applicable to their own practice as a means to engage students as communities of learners.

Session Outline

Research has shown that cognitive gains are significantly higher in pairs that work together when compared to students studying independently (Ladyshewsky 2000, Topping 2005). Higher achievement, more caring and supportive relationships, greater psychological health, social competence and self esteem are all valuable consequences of introducing peer assisted learning strategies. In reciprocal peer coaching students goals are inter-related and the most successful outcome depends on mutual coaching. i.e. they all 'sink or swim together' (Johnson and Johnson 1994). This means that each student has a vested interest in their own learning *and* in that of the other members of the group.

Reciprocal peer coaching was used as an innovative formative assessment strategy, to assess the competency of first year physiotherapy students' abilities to carry out the practical skills required to become a successful therapist. Students worked in groups of 4. A qualitative project explored students' perceptions of this assessment strategy (Asghar 2009). 4 themes emerged from the data: Motivation and Learning, the Emotional Experience of Learning, Learning Together and Contextualising the Learning Experience. Students valued the feedback about their knowledge and abilities from the formative assessment process and they expressed a willingness to engage with reciprocal peer coaching as it provided that "pressure" which *made* them study. While students mostly valued this opportunity to work together as a community of learners, others found the process challenging and would have preferred to work independently.

Reciprocal peer coaching is not exclusively applicable to vocational students and has been successfully used in other disciplines where practical. In reflecting on the outcomes of the research it is proposed that this session give participants both a practical taste of the strategy

and an opportunity to discuss how reciprocal peer coaching could be applied to participants' own subject areas as a means to develop students as communities of learners.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Session will be introduced by briefly outlining the reciprocal peer coaching process and introducing the underpinning pedagogic research 10 mins

Participants will then be engaged in a practical task in groups of 4 to experience for themselves how reciprocal peer coaching can work 20 mins

Participants will then be given the opportunity to discuss in small groups:

How reciprocal peer coaching might be used in their own discipline areas to build communities of practice particularly for first year students 15 mins

References

Asgar, A (2009) Reciprocal peer coaching and its use as a formative assessment strategy for first-year students, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*,99999:1

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<http://www.cooperation.org/pages/overviewpaper.html> (accessed August 31, 2007).

Ladyshevsky R (2002) A quasi-experimental study of the differences in performance and clinical reasoning using individual learning versus reciprocal peer coaching. *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice*, 18:1, 17 - 31

Topping K (2005) Trends in peer learning. *Educational Psychology* vol 25, 6,631 - 645