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How Far Can Peers Go In Supporting Student Learning? A Student's Perspective

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Outline

- The history
- Student viewpoint
- Perceived benefits
- Drawbacks
- Conclusion



Background and Rationale

- “Peer assisted learning (PAL) is a generic term for a group of strategies that involve the active and interactive mediation of learning through other learners who are not professional teachers.” (Topping and Ehly 2001)
- Art & Design TQEF Peer Assisted Learning (PALs) Project
- Collaborative Partners
- Retention Tool



The Original Structure

- 2008 – looked for volunteers from Y1
- Sept 2008 – trained with staff development support
- Oct 2008 – weekly timetabled class
- Agenda – student driven support
- Initial enthusiasm – attendance declined

- Evidence of retention success (Oct 2009)

Development

- Summer 2009 – limited interest in role of PAL
- Year 1 tutor had to sell it to Y2s
- Personal Development opportunity
 - PALs
 - Year 1 students
- Reduced to fortnightly; alternating classes
- Linked to AIO (PDP module run by Y1 tutor)



My Reflections

- Met by PALs
 - PDP questionnaires over first weeks
 - Over weeks purpose became less clear
 - Attendance declined
-
- We (the new PALs) thought we could add value



The Enablers

- Peer review during Y1 (Ireland and English, 2013)
- Unilearn (VLE resource created)
- Turnitin (formative assessment)
- Year 2 Students
- Approachable tutors

The New Structure

- PALs became more instructional in approach
- Tasks were given
 - Formative essays
 - Presentations
 - The Big Debate
 - Quants Presentations
 - AIO Questionnaires

The New Structure Cont.

- Ran application process for new PALs
 - Online application
- Current PALs interview (help from HR Dept)



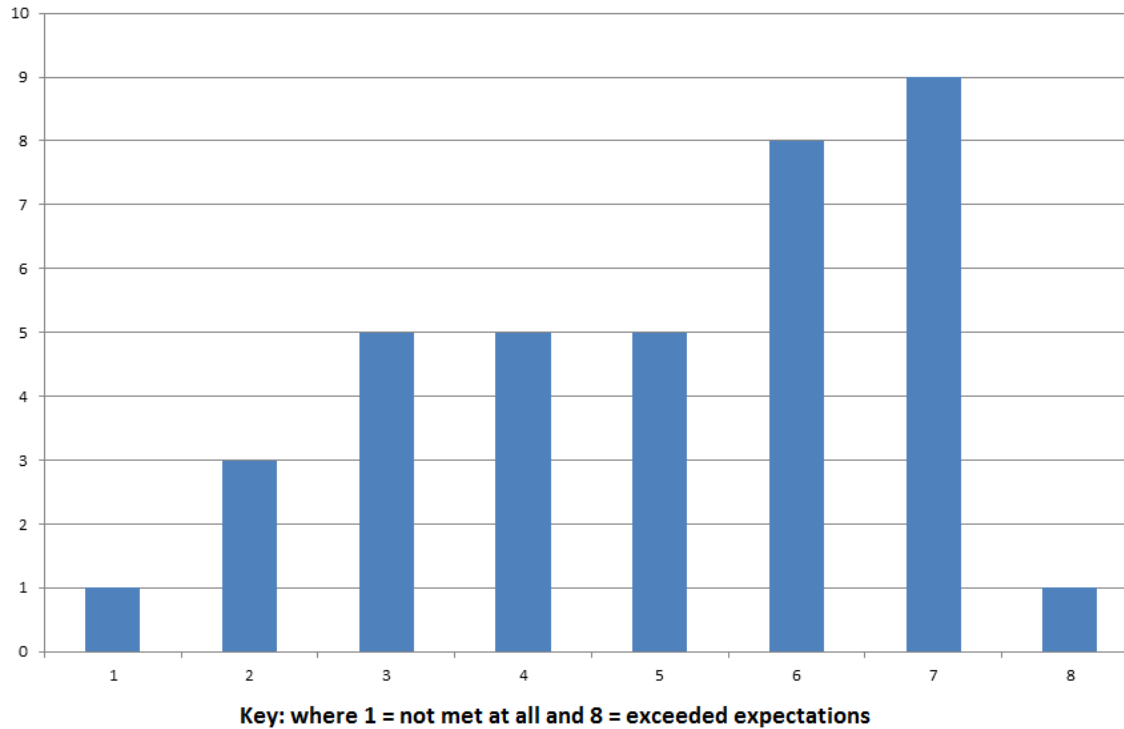
Students' Reported Benefits

- Over 90% Said the scheme was useful
 - Practice essays
 - Practice Presentations
 - Big Debate promoted research in an area they were not fully conversant with
- Students not Lecturers
 - More approachable
 - Similar problems
 - Still fresh in the PALs' minds

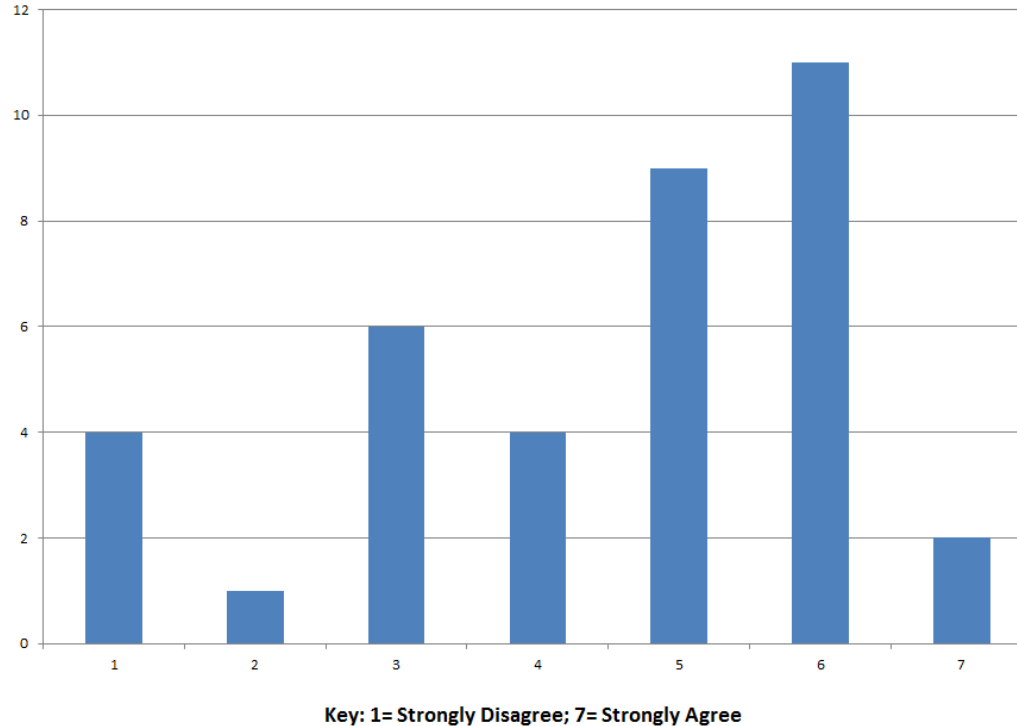
Students' Reported Benefits Cont.

- Friendship
- Knowledge of the module options
- Help with structure
- Someone to ask the silly questions that are not always silly!
- 80% said they would like to be a PAL

Were expectations met?



Practice Essay helped to improve my grade





PALs Reported Benefits

- Realisation they did learn in year 1
 - By passing on information they confirmed they had understood it
- Gained further experience in presentation skills
 - 12 practice presentations with Q and A
 - Y1 student reactions gave them a critique of the presentation
- Had an excellent addition to their CV

Benefits for staff

- No extra workload
- Potential to shift formative work over to PALs for review
- Tasks complement the core modules

My benefits

- A huge improvement in my essay writing (through peer marking)
- A big improvement to my CV
- Confidence in my learning
- Community in practice.(Etienne Wenger Traynor 2014)

Drawbacks

- Attendance
- Extra workload for PALs
- Cannot cover all aspects of the course
- Some work needs to be done on the feedback from formative work

Conclusion

- Still a work in progress
- Easily changed to suit current curriculum
- Benefits all parties concerned
- Supports students through the initial stages of university
- Supports work in PDP
- Helps with retention of students

References

- Ireland, C. and English, J. (2013) 'Student oral presentations: incorporating peer e-assessment'. In: *10th ALDinHE Conference 2013: Celebrating Learning Development, 25-27 March 2013, Plymouth University*
- Topping, K. & Ehly, S. (2001) Peer Assisted Learning: A Framework for Consultation, *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 12:2, 113-132.