UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

Peer Support in learning/teaching Maths

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Motivation for peer support

- November 2010: Facing the situation where, describe by a PGTA,

‘…. *it seems to be two levels of the students, either they are very good or very bad* ….’

- Question: What should I do?
- Answer: The students should help each other.

What I have done?

- Emailed the students with intention to encourage them to help each other –

  I was going to initiate a peer support group.

Students' reaction on my email

- *I am quite interested in participating in the peer support, so I'd like to help.*
- *I would like to help out with this peer system, as I am comfortable with the topics, it sounds very useful.*
- *I would appreciate the support I could get.*
- *It is a good idea and one that will benefit all involved.*
- *As one of those students who are struggling I think it is a good idea. I love maths but I pick things up late. I feel I am always chasing the boat. I would really appreciate this.*
- *It is a good idea. It will be beneficial for both groups of students. Teaching is another method of learning. I am not sure I have enough skill/knowledge to teach somebody else, but I would love to help you as far as I can.*

Meeting with the students interested in peer support

- I made a few introductory comments.
- Students took it over:

  Communication – Facebook Group (Vesna's gangsters) was created
- My involvement has stopped here.

Feedback from the students at the end of the year

- *I did benefit from the peer support. I felt that teaching topics to others helped to reinforce the topics in my head.*
- *I feel I did benefit because I gained friends from it. It may have contributed to 'The Base Room' being a study area rather then a wholly social one. I admired the patience of some of the helpers.*
- *Peer support has certainly had benefits for both those helping and getting help, and it is definitely a worthwhile endeavour. However, I think that those who made it work where probably the people who would have been getting together to study anyway. If you were able to find a way to extend it to a wider audience then I think it would be a great addition to the course.*

- *The group sessions were a great help but only for the socially confident, the less confident did not actually come to the sessions…maybe social interaction is more scary than facing hard questions.*

  Options here are to approach the strong and get them to reach out to the weak, Facebook is a powerful aid in these circumstances…

Questions arising

- Should I be doing this again?
- Benefits?
- Can peer support address some other issues such as:
  - diversity and its benefits
  - social interaction
  - team working skills
  - responsibility, solidarity, …..

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