Rising from the Ashes: The Effects of the Peer Experience in the Phoenix Program

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Abstract

The Peer Instructor experience in the Phoenix Program is examined in this study. Students who participate as peers showed an increase in their level of confidence, an increase in their level of academic achievement, and noted development of more self-regulated attributes since starting their peer experience. Peer instructors also reported better communication skills (written and verbal), stronger critical thinking skills, and a stronger work ethic. The findings of this study are similar to other studies that address the effects of participation on the peers themselves. Directions for future research are also discussed.
Peer education programs in higher education train students to provide information, assistance, counseling, and programming for their fellow students. Students now serve as peer health educators, resident assistants, supplemental instructors, group leaders, and peer mentors in academic courses (Ender & Newton, 2000). Reports from higher education institutions indicate that peer programs exist at seventy-eight percent (Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000) to eighty-three percent (Ender & Newton, 2000) of all colleges and universities. Peer educators play a significant role in higher education and have for many years. In fact, students have been assisting other students in roles such as resident assistants, hall counselors, and advisers since the early 1900’s (Powell, Pyler, Dickerson, & McClellan, 1969, as cited in Ender & Newton, 2000). Over the years, the role of peers has evolved on the college campus. Carns, Carns, and Wright (1993) noted that students in peer roles have begun to assist beyond the traditional residence hall roles. Peer educators are now seen in academic departments, study skills courses, academic centers, and in career counseling roles.

College students often rely on peers as sources of information more than they do any other group on campus (Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell, 1997). Further research confirms the appeal of such peer education programming. Nichols and Lumley (1999) reported that 83% of students in their survey study expressed an interest in attending a peer-led workshop or session. Given that a majority of higher education institutions now utilize some form of peer education programming, it stands to reason that research must begin to address the effectiveness of such programming.

Research has supported the effectiveness of peer programs on those students who seek peer counseling or education (Burke, 1989; Ender & Newton, 2000; Grant-Vallone
Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2000) found that graduate students who had more contact with their mentors reported having significantly more psychosocial support than those who had less contact. In addition, those same students reported more satisfaction with their graduate program. Roth and Kampmeier (2002) reported that students taking part in a class with peer leaders showed improvement in performance, retention, and attitudes about the course. Lassner et al., (1995) examined a peer writing tutorial program and its effectiveness for those seeking assistance. The authors reported that students who sought out the peers were happy about the tutoring they received and said they would return for more assistance.

The literature also includes some investigations regarding the effect that peer education has on the actual peer educator or leader (Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000; Fantuzzo, Dimeff, & Fox, 1989; Groccia & Miller, 1996; Hatcher, Nadeau, Walsh, Reynolds, Galea, Marz, 1994; Libarkin & Mencke, 2001; Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell, 1997; Spratt & Leung, 2000). Most of this research has examined peers in health education programs and science courses. Badura et al., (2000) investigated the effects of participating in peer education training on 30 undergraduate peer educators. Peers reported significantly more leadership, health knowledge, and active involvement in changing personal health behaviors after completing their training. While important, these findings are also limited by the sample size and the use of only one program in the study.

Groccia and Miller (1996) evaluated the experiences of 25 Peer Learning Assistants (PLAs) in an introductory biology program. The peers in this study reported
qualitatively that their experience in the program was quite positive. For example, one student reported that “my PLA experience has enhanced my academic life (p. 98).

Another PLA in this program reported “I learned how much I enjoyed helping others, how to deal with different people, how to deal with all sorts of group problems. I also learned new study methods. I am a more efficient worker than ever before and I feel more developed as a person” (p. 98). The responses from the students as a whole were positive and show that participation in this program had an effect on their academic, social, personal, and interpersonal functioning during the course and in the year and a half since finishing the course.

Sawyer, Pinciaro, and Bedwell (1997) studied peer educators in a sexuality program. The authors attempted to evaluate changes in the peer educators’ self-esteem and personal development. While results did not provide statistically significant results, the authors did report that peer educators showed greater and more relevant shifts in a positive direction for higher self-esteem and personal development. Hatcher et al. (1994) reported that peer counselors’ self-esteem, capacity for empathy, and self-awareness were all enhanced by participation in a peer education program.

An important line of inquiry that has emerged during the course of the last thirty years is that of students’ self-regulated learning (Paris & Paris, 2001). Self-regulated learning (SRL) “emphasizes autonomy and control by the individual who monitors, directs, and regulates actions toward goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise, and self-improvement” (p. 89). SRL is a process in which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills (Zimmerman, 2002). These learners monitor their own behavior and self-reflect on their effectiveness. Zimmerman (2000) states that
self-regulation “refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals” (p. 14). The structure of the self-regulation process includes three phases, (1) the forethought phase, (2) the performance phase, and (3) the self-reflection phase (Zimmermann, 2002).

In the forethought phase, two processes that are important include task analysis and self-motivation. According to Zimmerman (2002), there is considerable evidence of increased academic success by those learners who set specific goals for themselves. Additionally, students who feel self-efficacious about learning are more motivated to learn in a self-regulating manner.

The performance phase of SRL includes self-control and self-observation (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-control includes methods such as attention focusing, use of imagery, and self instruction. Self-observation includes recording events on a personal level. For example, students in a study skills course may be required to keep a time log of their activities to evaluate their time management skills.

Self-reflection includes self-judgment and self-reaction. Self-judgment may involve evaluating yourself and performance against a standard. This standard may be your prior performance, the performance of another person, or a universal standard of performance. Additionally, self evaluation may include attribution for successes and failures. Self-reaction involves feelings of satisfaction and positive affect. According to Schunk (2001), increases in self-satisfaction may enhance motivation whereas decreases in self-satisfaction tend to weaken any further efforts to learn.

Schaprio and Livingston (2000) examined the dynamic self-regulation of students enrolled in a Methods of Inquiry course. The authors expand the notion of self-regulation
to include those qualities that are internally driven. In this study, the authors reported that
dynamic qualities such as curiosity, enthusiasm, willingness to take risks, and persistence
actually drive the strategic behavior of the students. This study adds to the existing
literature by investigating other behaviors that enhance the self-regulated learning of
students. VanZile-Tamsen (2001) examined if the expectancy of success and task value
could predict the use of self-regulated strategies by students. The author reported that
task value was an important predictor of self-regulated strategy use for students.
Expectancy of success was only a moderate predictor of self-regulated strategy use.

In this current study, we sought to add to the current literature on peer education
programs and examine the effects of participation on the peer instructors themselves.
Therefore, the specific question that guided this study was: what tangible effect(s), if
any, does peer instructing have on the peer instructors? This qualitative study only begins
to explore and evaluate the experiences of peer educators.

Methods

This section describes the methods used to conduct this study. The section is
divided into six sections: (1) methodology; (2) setting of research; (3) sample; (4)
instrumentation; (5) data collection; and (6) limitations of the study.

Methodology

A qualitative approach using case study methodology was used in this study.
Case studies are appropriate when the researcher wants to examine a program, an event,
an activity, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2003). In a case study, the researchers
also need to have a wide array of information about the case and employ different data
collection procedures (Creswell, 1998). For purposes of this study, the authors were
interested in exploring the Phoenix Peer Instructor program in the Student Academic Center at Indiana University.

*Student Academic Center*

The Student Academic Center (SAC) at Indiana University provides a wide array of services for the undergraduate student. The SAC offers courses that help students develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. In addition, the SAC provides courses that enable students to become better adapted to campus once they arrive. Supplemental instruction in the form of tutors for math and chemistry is also provided through the Student Academic Center. Graduate students provide workshops on campus for students who are interested in enhancing their time management skills, test taking skills, and general study skills. The SAC also houses the Phoenix Program for students who experience academic difficulty.

*The Phoenix Program*

The Phoenix Program at the Student Academic Center assists students who are experiencing academic difficulty. Students enrolled in Phoenix Program course are those students who are currently on academic probation at the university (below 2.0 cumulative GPA) and those who have been reinstated to the university after failing to maintain the 2.0 GPA for two consecutive semesters. After being dismissed from the university, students can reapply to Indiana University and be placed on reinstated status.

The Phoenix Program offers courses for these students that address issues and areas such as study skills, time management skills, critical thinking skills, career exploration, and writing skills. In addition, students in these courses regularly share the affective aspects of their lives with instructors, peer instructors, and classmates. Each
course offered through the Phoenix Program includes an Associate Instructor who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the course. Each course also includes a peer mentor or instructor. Peer Instructors are past students in the Phoenix Program who have found the course beneficial in helping them meet their academic and personal goals. Potential Peer Instructors are recommended by their respective AIs and if chosen, participate in a semester-long training course at the Student Academic Center. Peer Instructors assist students in developing practical ways to achieve their goals and to integrate course concepts into their academic and personal lives. Peer Instructors often lead class discussions, develop and carry out class activities, and meet with each student on an individual basis regularly over the course of the semester. Currently, there are ten (10) peer instructors in the Phoenix Program.

Sample

We used a convenience sampling for this study. We surveyed six undergraduate peer instructors in the Phoenix Program. Participants in this study included three males and three females. All participants were traditional-aged college students (19-22). Participation in this study was voluntary for the peer instructors and they were not offered any incentive to complete the survey. Although this sample size was small, Gay and Airasian (2000) note that “qualitative research samples tend to be small and not necessarily broadly representative” (p. 106).

Instrumentation

The researchers in this study developed their own instrument. Given the qualitative nature of this study, it was important to consult other sources in the development of questions for our survey. The survey was developed by consulting the
director of the Phoenix Program, by observing peer mentors in the classroom, and by consulting previously discussed research concerning peer education programs (Ender & Newton, 2000; Hatcher, 1995). In addition, demographic questions were added to gain pertinent information about the age, experience, and year in school for each participant. See Appendix D for the complete set of questions given to the participants in this study.

Data Collection

Given the limited time for completion of the study and the schedules of the peer instructors, it was thereby necessary that a survey instrument be devised for all participating peer instructors. The authors had hoped to interview all the participants on an individual basis but realized that time and logistical considerations would not allow that type of data collection. Therefore, a survey was sent via electronic mail to the Phoenix Program director who then forwarded it to the peer instructors. Two follow-up messages were sent to the peer instructors to encourage their participation. Completed surveys were returned via e-mail or the mailbox of one of the researchers.

Limitations

This study is limited in that it only examines the experiences of peer instructors involved in one distinct program on campus. In addition, the sample includes only six peer instructors, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Given the time limitation of this study, it was difficult to capture the full essence of the peer instructor experience. More time would have allowed the researchers to follow the peer instructors and observe their classroom activities more closely.
Data Analysis and Findings

Theme identification and analysis was achieved through the application of qualitative techniques congruent with case study research. Due to the small sample size the ocular technique of ‘pawing’ was deemed to be the most suitable and effective approach by the researchers (Ryan and Bernard, 2002). This allows great familiarity with the data and results in theme identification stemming from the data itself and intuition rather than manipulation through computer software. Two other approaches embedded in ‘pawing’ techniques, the identification of ‘word repetition’ and ‘key-words-in-context’, both types of qualitative coding, were also utilized (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). Both researchers independently analyzed the data to discern the themes throughout the data and discussed thematic definition and differences in interpretation in an attempt to clarify meaning and dispel individual bias.

One of the researchers in this project is involved in the Phoenix program which raises the problematic issues of bias and implicit power relationships corresponding to “backyard research” that may be embedded in the responses of the participants and in the interpretation of the data (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). This limitation was balanced by member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the triangulation of data (Seale, 1999), and through the clarification of bias. Once responses were obtained and analyzed by the researchers, the themes identified were then discussed with the peer instructors, the director of the program, and other Associate Instructors in the Phoenix Program. This “member checking” allowed the researchers to validate the themes with the important stakeholders. Triangulation occurred through multiple data collection methods such as...
interviews with peer instructors, interviews with the program director, and classroom observations.

During analysis, both researchers noticed that the responses of one of the participants (Clara), was significantly different from the others, notably she did not self-identify as being part of the Phoenix program or of previously being on academic probation. Through further investigation with the supervisor of the program the researchers discovered that she was not a part of the Phoenix program and had been given the survey erroneously. Therefore, her survey is not applicable for this study.

Also, the size of the study renders an exploration or explanation of difference between gender, and the length of experience in the responses of peer mentors impossible.

Data Analysis

The responses of the 6 participants were obviously unique in expression and motivations. Due to the small sample size and the ethnographic nature of the study, an introduction to them and their pervasive characteristics, as elucidated by their responses to questions regarding their peer mentoring experience, is pertinent to the study. To ensure their relative anonymity, pseudonyms have been assumed for all the participants and are consistent.

Blake

Blake has been a peer mentor for two and a half years. He is now 23, a senior, and majors in Sports Communication-Broadcasting. He took a course in the Phoenix program when he was on academic probation, and the Associate Instructor (AI) for the class recruited him as a peer instructor. He does claim that his peer instructing has had a
significant influence on him, in practical terms it instigated his change to his current major; he was formerly a secondary education major but his peer experience taught him that teaching was something he would not enjoy!

Although he seems to be reluctant to attribute his “success” to peer instructing, Blake does admit that it has been a positive and beneficial experience. Contradictorily, he claims that his increase in confidence is the major contributor to his success, but then attributes his increase in confidence to his peer instructing. His answers are somewhat cooler regarding his experience than the other respondents, probably due to his realization that teaching isn’t for him, although he does rate his overall experience as positive, proclaiming it was a 7/10! “Focus” and “focusing” seem to be key words for Blake when musing on his peer instruction experience.

Simon

Self-identifying as a 5th year senior, Simon is 22 and has been a peer instructor since the Fall of 2000, this being his third year. Formerly a Business major, he changed majors the beginning of the semester he started peer instructing as he realized that it “wasn’t for me”. He admits that he struggled with the course of study and “decided to make a change”. He now majors in Social Studies Education with a Computer Endorsement minor. After being put on academic probation he was recruited by his AI in a Phoenix program course where he had demonstrated improvement, and applied his experience in that class to his other courses that semester, doing well in them also.

The major characteristic of Simon’s response is a sense of achieving balance and of a continuing awareness of the need to attempt to maintain that balance. “Serious” and “more seriously” appear to be the key vocabulary applications of his peer instructor
experience. Simon really relates mentoring towards his future career both as an opportunity for experience and for early networking; he has adopted it as part of his master plan. He realized that “It’s all fun and games until you get kicked out and have to work at a Burger King the rest of your life”.

Clara

Clara is a 19 year old sophomore who started peer instructing this semester, and majors in Education/Mathematics. Her distinctive theme is affective. She answered a majority of the questions in reference to her need to “feel useful”, “feel needed”, “feel not so lonely”, and “feel wanted”. Unlike the other respondents she does not identify herself as a former student of the Phoenix program. Her answers are sometimes quite different in focus and sophistication to that of the other respondents; different aspects of this might be accounted for by several factors - her age, her gender, her successful freshmen year as opposed to an academic probation experience, and this being her first semester as a peer instructor. As noted in the limitations of the study, due to the discovery by the researchers that she was not in fact on academic probation or a part of the Phoenix Program, her answers are not referred to in the rest of the analysis.

Sara

Unlike Blake and Simon, Sara has only experienced a few months as a peer instructor. She is a twenty year old junior and majors in Philosophy. She has changed her major but does not identify whether this was since becoming a peer instructor, but it was formerly Psychology. She says she “ran into a professor that I had difference with”. Her brevity of experience as a peer can be interpreted as being quite important in the analysis and interpretation of her responses. Her answers to many of the questions do not express
the fervor of the others – themes are consistent but not accentuated in choice of language by the time spent as a peer. Peer instructing so far has proven to be a good experience but the formative aspect of being put on academic probation seems to be more influential on her life style than her peer experience.

Jane

A twenty-two year old senior, Jane has been a peer instructor for two years. She was recruited from a Phoenix program course and since becoming an instructor has changed her major from the School of Public and Environmental Affairs to Education, as she has discovered she likes teaching. She did want to work in Business before.

Jane is enthusiastic about her experience; she is excited about the opportunities it has allowed her, and the skills she has developed as a result of peer instructing. Her answers seem to relate her continuing academic success directly to her peer experience rather than as a reaction to her previous academic probationary status. She too talks of “focus” and claims that “I really feel good about my college career”. Her choice of language is adamant – her responses were characterized by the consistent use of “definitely”, relating to improvement and development. The repeated use of “eager” is also of note - she is now “eager to learn” and “eager to get full time work”.

Julian

As a twenty year old junior, Julian has been a peer instructor for two semesters after being recruited by his AI in the X158 class for those on academic probation. He is in the independent study program and is going to specialize in film and production studies. He used to be a business major, but states that being a peer instructor led him to ruminate on his life and life choices and he realized that he did not want to have a career in
business. He does not have any specific career goals as yet but is considering graduate school, something he had never even thought about before he started as a peer, and is thinking about teaching.

Julian really likes being a peer instructor, he comments on that several times in his response. He also talks about how much he now likes school. It sounds as if he was searching for things he enjoyed and peer instructing is one of the means by which he has attained the skills necessary for him to enjoy work, school and take ownership of his time at university, “I now feel more in control of my situation”. He is intending to be a peer instructor for the next two years, and hoping to be the peer leader next semester. The major characteristics of his response tend towards a reflection on learning, a realization that significant change has occurred, and that more is to come.

Our analysis detected three major themes that were common to all the participants irrespective of their age, gender, or length of service.

1. The participants reported a significant increase in their levels of confidence, reflected both academically and socially.

2. Significant and continuing academic improvement has been demonstrated by all the participants.

3. Participants now demonstrate the attributes of self-regulation.

Although the analysis of our participants and their peer mentoring experience reported no significant difference between age, gender and length of service, that does not indicate that none exists, only that further research is warranted. Also, all of the peer mentors
working with the Phoenix program currently are White; therefore the researchers were unable to note possible differences among students of color.

Confidence.

Standing in front of a class full of struggling students twice a week, and all of the responsibilities and duties that entails, has had a significant and formative increase in the levels of confidence reported by the peer mentors participating in this study. “I was scared to death the first time that I was in front of the class” remembers Simon, but he now has “no problem at all”, saying that “I have developed a tremendous confidence that I have not had in the past”.

The expansiveness in his choice of language can be interpreted as reinforcing his self identification in the increase of his confidence, and he is not alone. Blake extravagantly claims he is now “20x more confident”, which is significant when one notes that all of his responses, bar this one, use language that is not at all prone to excess. Even Sara, in just her few months of peer mentoring, has noticed that her level of confidence has “started building”.

Their confidence levels are also demonstrated, or perhaps instrumental, in the type of activities and aspirations they report in other questions - they believe they can and have made a difference to other students, they seem to know what they want, what to do to get there, or where to go for help, and seem more likely to seek help. Prominent examples of this in their responses relate to their roles in other classes. Jane says she is “definitely more confident in front of people now” and that because of this “I am a much better presenter than I used to be”. Due to his “great increase in confidence since becoming a peer”, Simon claims, “I am also more able to speak out in my other classes
and approach people.’’ Julian further explains, ‘‘I am more confident about my abilities in school and am more socially confident’’.

Our observation of the peer instructors in their class situation verifies their confidence in action. An illuminating moment might be that of Sara who, after only a few months of peer mentoring, demonstrated comfort in her interactions with the probation students in her class, reviewing their work, answering their questions, and good naturedly holding them accountable, ‘‘What font is this in Bill?’’, ‘‘Did you write this paper for another class?’’ She was confident enough to seek an answer from the instructor when she was unsure and spontaneously contributed tasks to the class homework for the next session. A complete list of responses concerning the theme of confidence can be located in Appendix A.

**Academic improvement.**

A quite remarkable and praiseworthy attribute of these students, and a distinctive theme in their responses, is the significant academic turn-around they have accomplished after being on probation. Blake writes of having ‘‘a more serious attitude’’ towards graduating, Simon talks of his increased ‘‘focus’’ and is quite specific regarding his grades having managed to raise his GPA from a 1.4 to a 3.0 in 2 years. He says, ‘‘I have had to make the Dean’s List 3 of the last 5 semesters with the other two semesters having a GPA of a 3.3 or 3.4.’’ Within four semesters, Jane has also elevated her GPA from a 1.68 to a 3.61, and Julian also explains that, ‘‘Since becoming a peer, I have been on the Dean’s list for 2 semesters.’’ He has been a peer for two semesters.

Sara has a documented increase in her class grades since her academic probation but as this is her first semester as a peer mentor the researchers cannot ascertain a
continuance of this trend. She does indicate a desire to achieve and says that her GPA is “hopefully still on the rise”.

Academic improvement, as a result of peer mentoring, is also revealed in the enhancement of other skills necessary for scholastic achievement. When talking about his written and verbal skills, Blake notes that “I have improved in both – working as a peer has helped me – especially verbally”. He also claims that “I have learned to become more critical…I notice things now that I did not before”. Simon also had opinions on this aspect of his mentoring experience, “I think that when being a peer, you always have to be thinking on your toes and thinking outside of the box in order to challenge your students more. We are supposed to be teaching them to think outside the box so we need to develop this skill in order to be affective.” As well as developing critical thinking skills, Simon also notes that “Since becoming a peer my verbal and written skills have gotten a lot better.” Julian succinctly observes that “I am a more focused communicator than I used to be.” The complete list of responses reporting their academic achievement can be found in Appendix B.

Self-regulation

All the respondents have made changes, have shifted focus, or rather, attained focus since becoming a peer mentor. Simon acknowledges that he can still make time-management improvements, Blake writes of how he now “tries to set realistic goals that I know are within my capabilities to achieve” and Sara talks of how her “focus is better”. Linked to a sense of self-awareness, all now importantly hold themselves accountable for their former academic probationary status. They have also taken the initiative in halting their academic descent and strive to achieve.
New motivational heights have been achieved by the participants. Jane’s response is littered with the words “more motivated”, and specifies that “I have learned to motivate myself in the last couple of years”. She has been a peer instructor for two years. Julian also expresses a change in this area claiming that, “Being a peer makes me motivate myself because I now have responsibility to the students and the AI.”

Balance now seems to be part of their lives. Simon insists that “I still have fun, but now I get my work done first”. Time management skills play a part in this balance. Sara explains that “through peering I am able to schedule my time better”, and Jane declares her time management skills to be “much better” because “I have too!” She also reports that she puts a lot of time into her preparation, and that due to being a peer “I definitely take a lot more time to evaluate things now. For instance, the things I teach and the sources I use”.

The new sense of responsibility portrayed by the respondents is quite profound on several levels. Simon states that he no longer expects to have “a diploma given to me”. This suggests that he now realizes that he is responsible for earning a degree, it is not something that he should expect to attain without significant effort, “Being a peer makes you realize that there is more out there than just partying and having a good time, you need to be serious and start making a life for yourself”. This is reflected in Jane’s responses as she claims “I have finally realized that I had to make the changes, not the professors.” Julian also makes reference to this change in attitude towards self-responsibility, “I keep track of my time and make sure I am on the right track. I used to rely on teachers to do that.”
Simon has demonstrated a different type of responsibility as he intentionally sought aid with his writing, making “a conscious effort to get help”. As the Peer Leader, he has also experienced responsibilities towards his colleagues as well as his students.

The respondents attribute their peer experience as contributing towards their goals through a means of “drive” (Sara), or making them “more realistic now” (Simon), by setting “realistic goals that are within my capabilities to achieve” (Blake), and through a sense of “control” (Julian). Peer instructing has allowed them to become more aware of their strengths, weaknesses and, markedly, their possibilities. Full references concerning their self-regulation can be found in Appendix C.

Discussion

Students who participate in this program report numerous benefits to their academic and personal development. Peer programs can and do have impacts on the peers themselves (Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000; Groccia & Miller, 1996; Hatcher et al., 1995). Peer instructors in this study reported higher levels of confidence since they began their peer experience in the Phoenix Program. Ender and Newton (2000) discuss the potential positive change in confidence that peer educators can enjoy when participating in a peer program on campus. The rise in confidence for students in this current study seems to be the result of something far more active and tangible than simply their maturation process.

From their responses, it is also evident that the peer instructors enjoyed higher levels of academic achievement. Groccia and Miller (1996) stated that Peer Learning Assistants in their study reported more academic achievement. All students in this study indicated a rise in their overall grades since beginning their peer instruction experience.
Many of the peer instructors in this study actually became members of the Dean’s List after beginning their peer instructing experience. Lastly, peers in this study reported an improvement in their communication skills (written and verbal) and in their ability to think more critically.

Badura et al (2000) reported that students who participated in a peer training program showed more active involvement in changing their health behaviors. In this present study, it is evident that participating in a peer instructor program was instrumental in changing the behaviors of the peers. Peer instructors in the Phoenix Program changed behaviors such as time management, study habits, social interactions, and classroom participation.

The emergence of literature in the area of self-regulated behavior is important in this study. Peer instructors stated that they have become more self-motivated since starting their experience. As Zimmerman (2002) discusses, self-motivation is an important first step in the self-regulation of behavior and is a component of the forethought phase. In the performance phase of self-regulation, students demonstrate an increase in self-control through more focused attention and self-instruction. These behaviors were exhibited by the peer instructors in this study, according to their self-reports. Self-reflection is also an important component of self-regulation. When analyzing the responses in this study, the authors found that self-reflection had become quite an important activity for the peer instructors in the Phoenix Program. Lastly, the participants seemed to truly self-reflect about their career aspirations by discussing how their thoughts and critical thinking have evolved since becoming a peer instructor. The
peers seem to have developed the means to more realistically assess their part in past failures and critically think about their future possibilities.

Although this study provides strong anecdotal evidence of improvement for peer instructors, it is limited by a small sample size, the study of a single program within one university, and the self-reporting of the peer instructors. It is possible that other factors contributed to the increase in confidence, higher levels of academic achievement, and the use of more self-regulated behavior. Maturation may have played a role in the gains reported by the peer instructors in this study. Future research should examine a peer instructor program for a much longer period of time. This may provide the researcher a more accurate account of what changes really take place by participating in a peer education program. Larger sample sizes, if available, would also allow researchers the opportunity to evaluate more fully the effectiveness of peer education programs on college campuses.

Peer education programs should develop more comprehensive, on-going assessment tools that may help to fully explain the personal and academic gains made by those who participate in such programs. Additionally, future research should address how long peer instructors display their self-reported behaviors.

In summary, this study shows that the effect of peer instructing on these peer instructors has been a positive rise in confidence, improved academic achievement, and the exhibition of self-regulatory attitudes and behaviors. These have been instrumental in their continued development and have been illuminated both explicitly and implicitly in their responses and observable actions during this study. Peer instructors improved their GPAs, became more self-motivated, developed stronger critical thinking skills, and
displayed more self-reflective behaviors. Clearly this study supports the positive effect that peer education can have on the peers themselves. Peer education programs such as the Phoenix Program should continue to offer this opportunity to as many students as possible. Furthermore, this study clearly supports the need for more longitudinal studies of the effects that a peer experience has on peer educators.
References


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perspective. *Journal of College Student Development, 41*, 637-642.


Appendix A

All references concerning the rise in confidence.

*Jane*

“My confidence is much higher and I really feel good about my college career. I’m definitely more confident in front of people.”

*Sara*

“I feel that I started off on probation because I had a low level of confidence. Once my grades started building my confidence level did also.”

*Simon*

“I have developed a tremendous confidence that I have not had in the past. I was scared to death the first time that I was in front of the class, but now I have no problem at all… I have had a great increase in confidence since becoming a peer.”

*Blake*

“I have become 20x more confident- that is a big part of my success”

*Julian*

“I am now better in front of a group of people. I have gained more confidence in that area.”

“My confidence has changed. I am more confident about my abilities in school and am more socially confident.”
Appendix B

All references portraying academic improvement.

*Jane*

“I put a lot of time into my preparation.”

“I had a GPA of 1.68 when I was put on academic probation. Since becoming a peer I had a 3.5, 3.60 and a 3.61.”

“I am a much better presenter than I used to be.”

“I definitely take a lot more time to evaluate things now. For instance the things I teach and the sources I use.”

*Sara*

“My first semester was 1.83 and from there slowly climbed. I had 2 semesters over 3.5 which brings my cumulative GPA up to 2.81, and is hopefully still on the rise.”

*Simon*

“Since becoming a peer, my GPA has gone from a 1.4 to a 3.0 in 2 years. That is something which is very hard to do. It’s easy to blow off your GPA, but bringing it back up is very difficult. I have had to make Dean’s List 3 of the last 5 semesters with the other two semesters having a GPA of a 3.3 or 3.4.”

“Since becoming a peer my verbal skills have gotten a lot better. From being in front of the class I have really improved my verbal skills …”

“I think that when being a peer, you always have to be thinking on your toes and thinking outside of the box in order to challenge your students more. We are supposed to be teaching them to think outside the box so we need to develop this skill in order to be effective.”
Appendix B: cont.

“Through teaching the classes on study skills, I have realized what it is that I also do wrong and need to work on.”

Blake

Referring to a change in communication skills, written and verbal – “I have improved in both – working as a peer has helped me- especially verbally”.

“I take a lot of telecommunication courses – I have learned to become more critical of the media. I notice things now that I did not before”.

Julian

“I am certainly thinking about graduate school and that was never an option when I first started school.”

“My GPA has improved a lot. Since becoming a peer, I have been on the Dean’s lisyt for 2 semesters.”

Answering whether he has developed better critical thinking skills, he replies “ For sure. I definitely take the time necessary to think through things. Classes that I lead, assignments that I do, etc.”

“I have learned that I cab help other people understand things and listen better.”
Appendix C

All comments regarding the development of self-regulation.

Jane

“I am more motivated and eager to learn.”

“This experience has definitely encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone more.”

“I am eager to get full time work. This experience has made me realize how important it is to do something you like.”

“I am way more motivated. Being a peer certainly has helped me focus.”

“I have much better time management skills, I have had to!”

“I have learned to motivate myself in the last couple of years. I finally realized that I had to make the changes, not the professors.”

“I have learned a lot about how others work and think of themselves etc.”

“I have learned a lot about myself.”

“I have learned a lot”

Concerning her strengths and weaknesses - “I am able to better understand them and deal with them now.”

Sara

“I have noticed that my focus is better. I am attending school because I want to be here, not because I feel that I must be.”

“I feel that the best way to learn and gain knowledge is through other people.’

“…through peering I am able to schedule my time better.”

“I have more drive, not necessarily towards a certain time period to finish, but towards finishing.”
Appendix C: cont.

“I live by my planner and try to schedule everything during the day hours, if possible.”

*Simon*

“I now take school a lot more seriously than I used to. Being a peer makes you realize that there is more out there than just partying and having a good time, you need to be serious and start making a life for yourself. It’s all fun and games until you get kicked out and have to work at Burger King the rest of your life. I still have fun, but now I get my work done first.”

Talking about being a peer instructor,” It would expand my own life of culture. It just overall sounded like a great thing to get involved with on campus.”

“I am motivated to work and succeed even more by being in those classes twice a week. I have a lot of intrinsic motivation to succeed.”

“I balance my priorities better now than I used to, but my time management skills are still bad. Old habits are hard to break. I always get everything accomplished, but I know that if I managed my time a little better than I would be able to get more things done that I want to do.”

“Yes, I do feel as though I am more self-motivated than before I became a peer. I want to be successful and get a good job rather than try and squeeze by and party all the time with little bits of money to live on. I don’t want to go back to that life of being on probation and just trying to stay in school and have a diploma given to me. It doesn’t work that way and I now know that.”

Referring to his goals – “they are just a little bit more realistic for me now.”
Appendix C: cont.

“...and from making a conscious effort to get help with my papers have my written communication skills got better.”

“I think that being a peer can help other people understand others and the differences that each person has. I think that we can almost teach it better than the AI because we are more on the level of the students than they are. We get to know the students pretty well on a personal basis and try to connect the students to one another in some way.”

“Through teaching the classes on study skills, I have realized what it is that I also do wrong and need to work on. It also makes me more aware of what I am good at and what I need to build on.”

Blake

He has “a more serious attitude about accomplishing goals (graduating)”

“I am very focused on graduating”

“I learned what a planner was”

“I became self-motivated the semester I took the Phoenix course”

“I try to set realistic goals that I know are within my capabilities to achieve.”

“I always assumed that every person on academic probation was simply last (partied too much) like me. That’s no the case – my experience as a peer has taught me a lot about struggles people go through in college.”

“I have learned that by sharing my experiences I can help other people succeed.”

“I think I understand what I am capable of doing and what I am not capable of doing. I try to use that to my advantage.”
Appendix C: cont.

Julian

“I think this job has helped me focus more and think more critically about my career”

“I am much more self-motivating now than I used to be.”

“My motivation has definitely changed. I am more motivated now. Being a peer makes me motivate myself because I now have responsibility to the students and the AI.”

Regarding time management skills, “They are much better now. They started to get better when I was in X158 but have really improved since I started teaching in the classroom.”

“I keep track of my time and make sure that I am on the right track. I used to rely on teachers to do that.”

“I have learned how to be more responsible. I am now responsible for in-class lectures, discussions, and activities.”

Regarding strengths and weaknesses, “Yes. I am definitely aware of those. It took some time but a lot of reflection got me to that point. It is a good feeling to be aware of them because I now feel more in control of my situation.”
Appendix D

Phoenix Program Peer Instructor Questionnaire

1. What is your year in school?

2. What is your major? Has it changed since becoming a peer instructor? If so, why?

3. What is your age?

4. How long have you been a peer instructor?

5. How did you become a peer instructor?

6. Some peers report a change in attitude toward school after starting such a program, what kinds of changes have you noticed?

7. What are your interactions like with people from different backgrounds and points of view? Have those changed?

8. What is your outlook towards work? How has it changed since becoming a peer instructor?

9. What reasons contributed to your decision to become a peer?

10. Since becoming a peer, how has your motivation to succeed in college changed?

11. How have your time management skills changed?

12. Have you become more self-motivating since becoming a peer? If so, how?

13. How have your goals changed?

14. What are your career aspirations? Have they changed since becoming a peer?

15. How has your GPA changed since becoming a peer?

16. How have your communication skills changed? (written and verbal)

17. Have you developed better critical thinking skills? If so, give examples.
Appendix D: cont.

18. Some peers report a change in their level of confidence. Is this true for you? If so, how?

19. Peer helping can also teach people new things about others. Has this occurred through your experience? If so, how?

20. Describe your relationship with other peers.

21. Peer helping sometimes teaches people new things about themselves. Is this true for you? If so, how?

22. How would you rate your overall experience as a peer instructor?

23. Have you become more aware of your strengths and weaknesses?