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The Implementation of Small-group Peer-led Discussion Activities in a Human Development Course: an Action Research Approach

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Abstract

Large enrollment classes often limit students' active engagement, meaningful collaboration, and leadership skill development. The purpose of this action research is to implement a Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) approach to address these challenges in an undergraduate human development course at a midwestern university in America. This study reports how the action research approach was used to plan, design, implement, and refine peer-led discussions. After seven weeks of structured group discussion activities and reflection on outcomes through observations and students' responses to open-ended questions, the findings revealed that the peer-led discussion activities improved collaboration, engagement, and critical thinking skills, and promoted deeper understanding of course content and greater ownership of learning. Key factors influencing the success of the trial were collaborative group dynamics, peer leaders' active facilitation, varied instructional strategies, and practical applications of discussion concepts; however, the factors constraining effectiveness included limited discussion time, absenteeism, and occasional less engaging activities. This action research shows the promise of peer-led team discussions in promoting collaborative and engaging learning environments in large-enrollment classes.

Keywords: Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Leadership Skills, Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL), Student Engagement