

# Reflecting on Peer Tutoring

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The empty seats seemed more intimidating than usual as I entered the lecture hall. We were 20 minutes early and no one had arrived yet. I turned to Nati, “Are you ready to roll?” He gives me a nod of approval. Nati and I put together an interactive review program to help the first year students by providing the tools, tricks and tips needed to study the fundamentals of histology. It was one of the more challenging courses at our school and, as a second year, I felt that I could make it easier for other students to learn.

I pulled out my markers as my partner prepared the PowerPoint presentation: red, green, blue, black--they were all there. Our teaching methodology was (1) put a simple but concise presentation on the projector and (2) draw pictures on the dry erase board. Histology lectures were daunting at times, especially the professors’ PowerPoint presentations that included a multitude of microscope slides accompanied by quite descriptive characterizations. A quandary arises as to what to include in the presentation.

Simplify, that’s what we needed to do. Accordingly, Nati and I created worksheets in order for each student to transcribe exactly what I drew (e.g., flattened “pancakes” as stratified squamous cells) on the dry erase board onto their pages. The titles of each subject and the information from the Powerpoint slides were already on the paper. This took the attention off the projected slides and put it directly on us: the peer tutors. No time for laptops and no time for spacing out; just active learning.

Looking around the lecture hall, I spotted an auxiliary cable. I plugged it into my phone, picked a song, and pressed play. The room was injected with my upbeat tunes; as the music flowed in, students did as well, bobbing their heads excited for the lecture to follow. With this relaxed environment, there was a better chance that the students would be able to focus and understand the material.

As the room started to fill up, I could feel a pit growing in my stomach. I remind myself about all of my preparation. “You’ve done this before, Jon,” I reminded myself. My drawings were polished after numerous attempts and my lines were rehearsed. Nati and I honed our teaching skills in our living room, with our little white board and the Sheetrock as our audience. “Maybe we should start passing out those worksheets,” my partner said as he woke me up out of my reverie. All eyes were all on me and it was game time.

Fast forward one year and I am standing in the same lecture hall. “Look who’s here! What’s up Jonny?” Josh, a second-year student who was in the audience during the previous year’s lesson and now teaching a peer tutoring session, called out from the front of the room.

Upon reflection, that day ended up being a hit; it led to more teaching and mentorship opportunities to apply our methods to other courses, as well to teach other students this model. We were able to apply our peer-tutoring course into research due to the students’ great testing performances. We also presented our model at the Association for Medical Education in Europe (AMEE) conference.

You see, the benefits of peer tutoring are two-fold. For the younger students, it gives them an opportunity to learn from colleagues who can simplify the subject matter as opposed to professors who can sometimes present material in a more complex way. For the upperclassmen, along with acquiring a deeper understanding of the material, we have found that it is extremely rewarding. “Good luck today,” I tell Josh as I look at the crowd. A chill goes down my spine as that same pit develops in my stomach.