

Can Peer-Assisted Learning supplement the delivery of Clinical Skills Teaching?

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Introduction

Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) is a well-established approach in many undergraduate programs.^{1,2} Some medical schools, such as Birmingham, have integrated PAL into their curriculum, with peer-led Basic Life Support training for over 15 years.³ At Edinburgh Medical School, positive anecdotal feedback from informal PAL sessions last year prompted us to explore a structured PAL program to supplement clinical skills teaching.

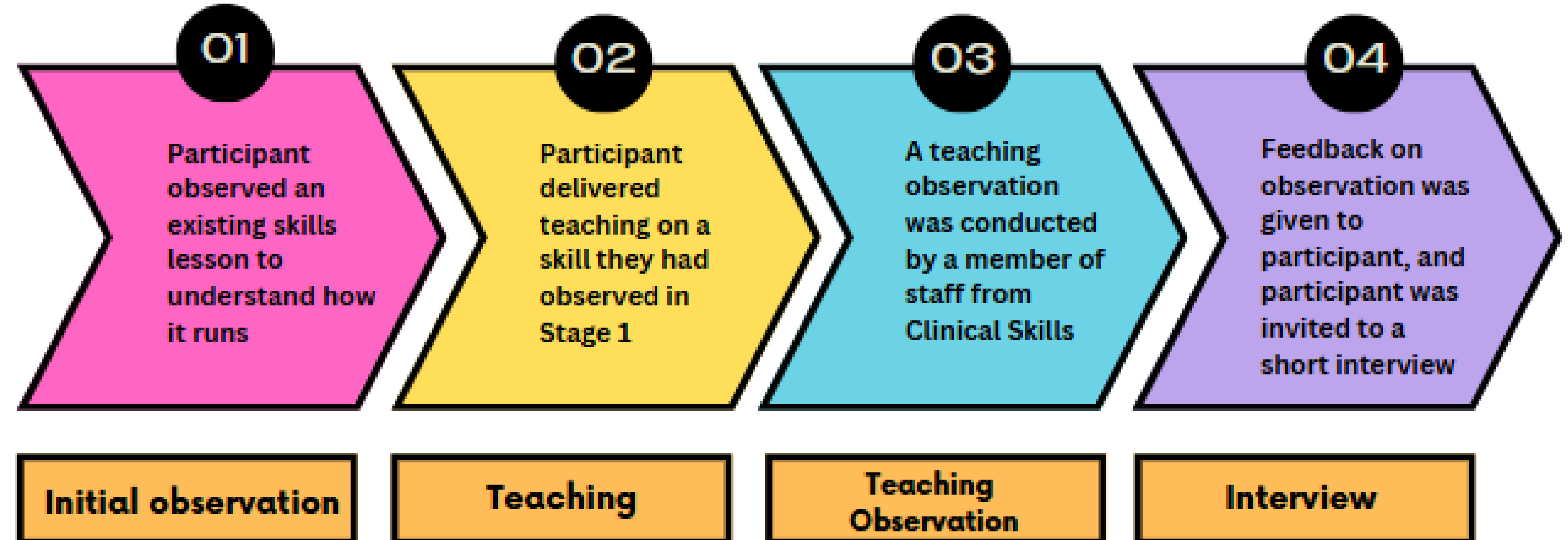
Objective

We aimed to explore potential benefits to developing a PAL program for Year 6 students to supplement the teaching of clinical skills to Year 1 and Year 4 students.



Methodology

The skills team recruited Year 6 students interested in teaching to serve as PAL tutors for basic clinical skills, such as handwashing, taking vital signs, and basic life support. Following principles outlined by Burgess et al. (2020), they underwent the following process:

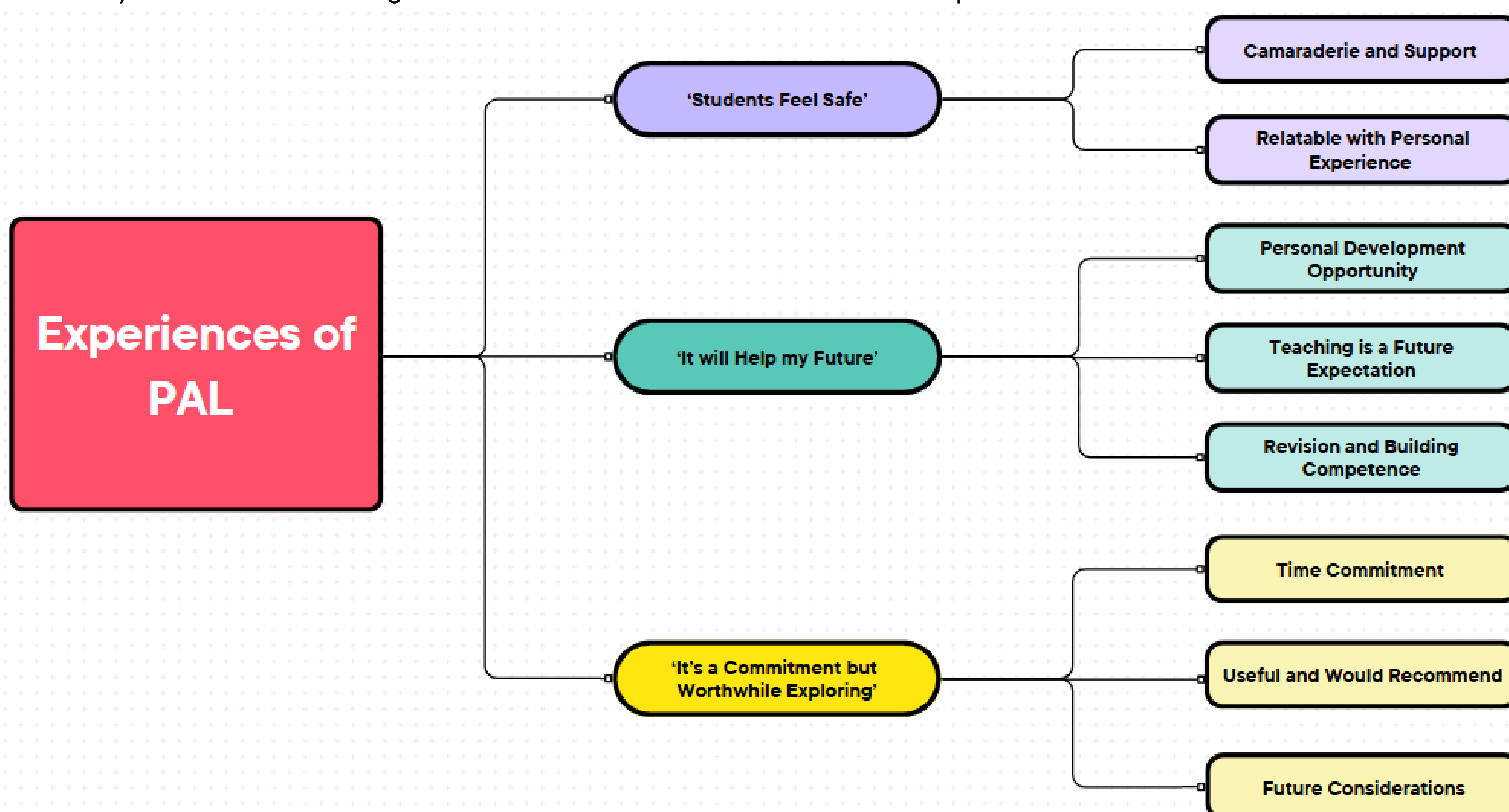


Eight tutors were enrolled with six completing the process, by participating in an informal semi-structured interviews after their teaching observation. Interviews were anonymised, coded and analysed thematically using NVivo Software in order to make sense of the information, as per principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2017).⁵ The first interview was independently dual coded to ensure no major inconsistencies in data analysis and interpretation of themes. Tutors received feedback on completion for their portfolios.

Learners had the opportunity to provide feedback using a feedback form after each session.

Results

Data yielded the following themes as illustrated in the thematic map:



'Students Feel Safe'

Tutors appreciated the opportunity to offer insights from their personal experiences to create a supportive learning environment.

'It will Help my Future'

Tutors found Peer-Assisted Learning to be a rewarding personal development opportunity to not only build competence in teaching, but also to reinforce key knowledge.

'Its a Commitment but Worthwhile Exploring'

All participants would recommend the scheme, but were not afraid to highlight challenges such as time commitment. Future considerations suggested included greater clarity in the teaching role, and more consistency in learner groups.

Learner Feedback

Of the learners who responded to the feedback forms (response rate 41%):

- All reported PAL to be effective and worthwhile
- They valued being able relate to their peers
- Felt more comfortable in asking questions.
- Some described tutors as "inspirational" and "reassuring"

Conclusion

This small-scale study suggests that PAL programs offer mutual benefits for both peer tutors and learners. Peer tutors gained teaching confidence and competence, while learners appreciated the relatability of near-peer instructors. Scaling this program to all final-year students will require a focus on quality control and sustainability.¹ Despite minor challenges, participants unanimously endorsed PAL as a valuable initiative.

References

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