Evaluation of the use of peer support groups to facilitate confidence in communication skills

Wendy Munro & Tamara Brown
2016
Graduate skills and attributes valued by employers

- Team working
- Problem solving
- Self management
- Knowledge of the business
- Literacy and numeracy
- ICT knowledge
- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- Ability to use initiative and also follow instructions
- Leadership skills where necessary

Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin (2011)
Communication is a key skill for employability for Health Care Professionals (HCP)
There is a need for effective communication skills with colleagues, service users and others
There is a need to facilitate development of language skills in increasing numbers of international students who are required to achieve the equivalent of 7 on the International English Language testing System (IELTS)

(HCPC, 2013)
Lecturers have noted that high anxiety levels impact on students verbal communication during Viva’s.

There is an increasing number of international students on the BSc Hons Physiotherapy degree.
Opportunities to develop communication skills within BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy

- Classroom activities – presentations, tutorial discussion, role play
- Assessment activities – Viva’s, individual and group presentations, interviews
- Clinical placement activities – interaction with service users and clinical colleagues within the interdisciplinary team
Barriers to communication development

- Anxiety / fear of public speaking (Pull, 2012)
- Social barriers
  - English as a second language
  - Cultural or family issues
  - Lack of topic knowledge
- Experiential barriers
  - Influence of good or poor experiences with others
- Environmental or structural barriers
  - Time limitations

(Lonie, 2010)
Examples of strategies that help public speaking anxiety

- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Exposure
- Positive feedback

(Borgeat at al, 2009)
Peer group support

• Provides opportunities to learn from explaining ideas to others, and giving and receiving feedback on performance (Boud, 2002)
• Develops confidence in clinical practice (Secomb, 2008)

And:
Students in a mentoring role benefit in terms of developing leadership and collaborative skills (Scott, 2005)
Employability

Graduate skills and attributes valued by employers

- Team working
- Problem solving
- Self management
- Knowledge of the business
- Literacy and numeracy
- ICT knowledge
- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- Ability to use initiative and also follow instructions
- Leadership skills where necessary

Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin (2011)
Aims

• To evaluate the use of peer support to facilitate students’ confidence in verbal communication
  – In class
  – To service users and clinicians in the workplace
  – During University live assessment (VIVAs)

• To evaluate students’ perceptions of the experience as both participants and mentors
Objectives

• To measure confidence levels pre and post facilitated peer sessions

• To carry out a qualitative evaluation of the process via a survey
Methods

• Recruitment strategy
  – Email invitation to all students from FT and PT cohorts of BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy Degree University of Salford for participants and mentors
  – Presentation covering aims & objectives and outline of sessions
Who are we targeting?

- Anyone who is anxious about speaking out in class
- Anyone who finds they take longer to process information and respond in a pressured situation
- Anyone who has difficulty articulating their ideas and concepts out loud
- Anyone who finds it difficult to perform techniques and explain what they are doing at the same time.
General outline of sessions

• Session 1
  – Measurement of confidence levels using Modified Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS)
  – Brief staff presentation to clarify differences in communication e.g. in different contexts; to service users & clinicians
  – Identification by students of self directed concepts to practice verbalising
  – Worksheets with guidance provided for participants and volunteers
  – Peer feedback
  – 3 members of staff
  – Mixed groups levels 4-6
### Peer Group Support Session Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choose a concept to explain to one of your peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice communicating the concept to your peer as though they were a patient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice communicating the concept as if you were being examined on it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Action plan for participant STOP/START/CONTINUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When providing verbal feedback please be supportive and constructive. Consider the following:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clarity of explanation of techniques and conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Logical order of explanation/presenting information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incorrect use of medical jargon with patient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of correct terminology to peers/tutors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear clinical reasoning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appropriate detail of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-verbal communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Eye-contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Speed of speech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Volume, tone, confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Any hints/tips you can provide regarding technique e.g. using methods that suit learning style – demonstrate on self, visual methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Session 2
  – Continuation of practice sessions
  – Specific module activities provided as prompts if needed
  – Peer feedback

• Session 3
  – Tutor presentation – viva strategies
  – Continuation of practice sessions
  – Specific module activities provided as prompts if needed
  – Peer feedback
  – PSCAS completed
Outcome measures

- Modified Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012)
  - modification included replacing ‘speaking English’ with ‘Speaking in class’

- Bristol online survey tool (BOST): (piloted by 1 staff member)
  - Student status
  - Sessions attended
  - Reasons for non-attendance
  - Participant / volunteer / both
  - Reason for attendance
  - Aspects enjoyed and found useful
  - Areas to be improved
  - Participant view of specific activities
  - Benefits for volunteers
  - Confidence improvement
  - Overall views
Recruited numbers

• Available sample = 263 students
• Students showing interest = 44 (16%)
• Student participants attending = 23
• Student volunteers attending = 12
• 16 completed pre sessions PSCAS
• 14 completed post sessions PSCAS
• 11 matched pairs of PSCAS
• 23/35 completed BOST (70%)
Reasons for attendance (Participants)

- To improve confidence in volunteering to speak in class
- To prepare for & improve confidence articulating ideas in viva’s
- To practice English speaking as a second language
- To receive feedback from peers
- To gain confidence to speak to patients
- As a revision aid
Reasons for Attendance (Volunteers)

- To help others
- To develop mentoring skills
- To review knowledge and skills from previous years
- Share my experience and offer advice
Participants' perceptions of benefits
Talking through concepts at patients level

Extremely to Very Beneficial
Slightly to Moderately Beneficial
Not beneficial

Talking through concepts at tutor or clinical educators level
Listening

- Listening to peers discuss concepts:
  - Extremely to Very Beneficial: 90%
  - Slightly to Moderately Beneficial: 10%
  - Not beneficial: 0%

- Listening to students sharing experiences regarding speaking in class and vivas:
  - Extremely to Very Beneficial: 90%
  - Slightly to Moderately Beneficial: 10%
  - Not beneficial: 0%
Gaining feedback

- Receiving feedback from experienced students: Extremely to Very Beneficial
- Receiving feedback from same level peers: Slightly to Moderately Beneficial
- Receiving feedback from tutors: Extremely to Very Beneficial

Legend:
- Red: Extremely to Very Beneficial
- Turquoise: Slightly to Moderately Beneficial
- Purple: Not beneficial
Volunteers perception of benefits

The majority of respondents on the BOST reported that they found the sessions to be very beneficial or extremely beneficial in terms of:

- Revision (85.8%)
- Mentoring development (100%)
- Teaching skills (85.7%)
- Skills in constructive feedback (100%)
### PSCAS score – descriptive statistics

**Total anxiety categories**  
(1 = high anxiety, 2 = medium anxiety, 3 = low anxiety)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Level of Anxiety</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Level of Anxiety</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Total scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre score</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>60.75</td>
<td>10.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post score</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53.79</td>
<td>10.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PSCAS pre and post descriptive comparison

Looking at the 11 matched pairs:

Pre
- High anxiety
- Medium anxiety
- Low anxiety

Post
- High anxiety
- Medium anxiety
- Low anxiety
Perception of confidence improvement

- Speaking class
- Participating in class activities
- Own knowledge and skills
- Own mentoring / tutoring skills
- Preparing for future VIVAs
- Preparing for workplace and clinical placement activity
- Adjusting communication skills
- Providing constructive feedback to peers

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly agree
Reasons for non-attendance

- Sessions took place during lunch break
- External medical appointments
- Placements
- Work commitments
Overall student feedback

• 100% of respondents would recommend the activity to other students
• 52.6% of participants would consider being a volunteer in future groups
• 42.1% would like to gain more confidence prior to being a volunteer
• 5.3% would not volunteer
To be able to share experiences with students who had recently gone through the same module was very helpful.

Been involved in a non-pressured environment that puts you outside your comfort zone was very helpful. This allowed me to practice putting myself forward.

I found it useful to be in small groups with people I did know.

Working with students from the second year was a great help.

I initially assumed that it was a session to mentor some of the international students with their spoken and written English skills. However, I then realised that I could greatly benefit from the session myself and so switched from volunteer to participant in the hope of improving my own verbal skills.

Having seen my peers stressed and upset by VIVA’s, I hoped to help other students manage their emotions so that they could gain better grades and feel happier speaking in public.

Sharing worries and realising others have the same concerns helps with confidence.

Enjoyed working in groups to collaborate on concepts and information.
Our reflections

- Timetabling
- Organisation of groups
- Need sufficient experienced volunteers
- Useful to meet with volunteers prior to sessions to explain expectations of their input
- PowerPoint presentations – screencasts
Now what?

- Repetition and further evaluation
- Feedback to team
- Consider incorporation into portfolio activity to develop leadership skills
- Consider integrating peer support sessions into module timetables
- Consider whether appropriate students attended
Questions or feedback?


