

# The role of the peer in later-life peer learning

BSG 2025

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# Sys Rev: How did people learn?

Activity	Number of papers (including double counted)
1. Training programme or workshop consisting of: a. Presentations, structured discussion or learning activities b. Exercise programmes	45
2. Peer mentoring, coaching or support of some kind	29
3. 'Club'-style activities	8
4. Co-creation of training session or learning materials	3
5. Peer-based educational activism	3

# Sys Rev: type of peer learning

<p><b>Low structure</b></p> <p>The learning activity responds to particular individual needs of the participant or the relational dynamics of the dyad</p>	<p><b>Group activity</b></p> <p>Activity is presented to or engages people in a group setting</p>		<p><b>High structure</b></p> <p>The learning activity predominantly consists of a prescribed set of steps or stages</p>
	9	49	
	19	13	
	<p><b>Individual activity</b></p> <p>Learning activity is primarily one-to-one</p>		

# What is peerness?

- Peerness as cultural capital
- Peerness as resource
- The peer as social bridge
- Peers as ‘trained educators’



# Peerness as cultural capital

Peerness as a method to present educational interventions  
similarity between the educator and the learner gives rise to benefits

- the capacity to more readily build rapport and engagement with the learner
- a better understanding of the problems faced by their group
- better understanding of learning needs of their peers, possibly in relation to level and pace of learning



# Peerness as cultural capital

## Challenges:

- a one-dimensional perspective on peerness, neglecting other characteristics.
- more precise peer groupings such as those by gender and ethnicity possible
- Programmes tend to privilege certain characteristics of the peer:  
E.g. white , middle class, women, healthier, wealthier, well educated –  
**what role does social capital play in drawing people into such activities?**
- Peerness sufficient to ensure programme success?
- Skills of the peer educator: group management skills
- Peers often selected by programme leads





# Peerness as social influence

- Leaders in small groups role can influence behaviour change
- Peer educator as role model (personal qualities)

**Challenges:** reach of group still depends on existing networks / relationships



# Peers as 'trained educators'

- Programmes selected, trained and often supervised the peer educator
- Some programmes required entry qualifications

## **Challenges:** a certain level of qualifications

- Despite training some peer educators did not feel confident in their knowledge
- When wholly programme educated, still a peer?



# Conclusions

The role of the peer in later-life peer learning:

- Heterogeneous and complex
- Context dependent
- Often top-down created
- Often nearer to peer teaching than peer learning
- The importance of social and cultural capital

# Future directions

- More research comparing the roles of peers in different programme settings
- Further the discourse on learning activities in later life
- Elevate learning theories into the discourse
- Deepen the critical stance on neoliberal influences  
e.g. peers to counter staff shortages
- Reclaim peer learning as an emancipatory method to work against oppressive structures  
(rarely present in studies)
- What educational skills are required for peer education in later life?

Any questions?

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Thank you



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