

## Abstract (150)

**Background:** It is now a requirement that all qualified nurses act as practice supervisors and support student nurses' education in practice, hence preparing third-year students for this role is a priority. This study evaluates students' experiences of peer teaching in clinical skills setting from the perspective of these students taking up the supervisory role once they graduate.

**Method:** An evaluative survey was utilised to explore and understand student nurse participation in peer teaching. Seventeen students took part in a questionnaire containing closed and open questions.

**Results:** This research suggests that students who engaged in peer teaching gained confidence in their own skills, through the revision of their own skills and knowledge. It also triggered reflection upon continuous professional development and inspired students to consider a future career in teaching.

**Conclusion:** Peer teaching provides an opportunity to reinforce the students' knowledge, clinical and communication skills. It helps prepare them for the role of practice supervisor upon qualifying by building confidence and enhancing their teaching skills.

**Keywords:** Pre-registration nursing; Peer-led teaching; Student competencies; Student supervision.

## Introduction

Peer teaching in pre-registration nursing education is a well-known concept already utilised in university skills laboratories (Stables, 2012), and clinical practice (Henderson, Needham and van de Mortel, 2020). Topping (2005) defines peer learning as the transition of knowledge and skill through active support among learners of the same level. Similarly, near-

24 peer teaching refers specifically to senior students teaching junior students from the same  
25 education program (McKenna & Williams, 2017). Research into peer teaching and near-peer  
26 teaching reports a range of positive outcomes for those students engaged in the process  
27 (Christiansen & Bell, 2010; George et al., 2020; Henderson, Needham and van de Mortel,  
28 2020; Loke & Chow, 2007; McKenna & French, 2011; Ramm, Thomson and Jackson, 2015),  
29 and there is an overall assumption that teaching a subject deepens the students' understanding  
30 for those who are in the teacher's role (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Peer teaching, for example, in  
31 clinical skills, has been shown to increase self-efficacy (students gaining better  
32 understanding), decrease anxiety (being taught by peers) and contribute to cost-effectiveness,  
33 thus positively impacting a student's learning (Brannagan et al., 2013).

34         During this near-peer teaching process, students also socially interact with each other  
35 and there is an opportunity for significant learning to occur. However, this is not  
36 conventionally recognised as knowledge acquisition within formal nursing education. This  
37 'hidden curriculum', which could be described as the unintentional lessons learnt or the  
38 learning beyond the defined curriculum (McKenna & Williams, 2017), has been identified as  
39 playing an important role in student's development of professional values and cultural  
40 competence as well as just skills acquisition (Paul, Ewen & Jones, 2014). The concept of the  
41 hidden curriculum in nurse education is not new, yet near-peer teaching between senior and  
42 junior students is not well described (Irvine, Williams & McKenna, 2018; McKenna &  
43 Williams, 2017).

44         The Nursing and Midwifery Council Standards for Student Supervision and  
45 Assessment (NMCa, 2018) state that every registered nurse in the United Kingdom will be  
46 responsible for student nurse learning in practice. This role will involve supervising and  
47 providing feedback to nursing students in clinical practice as soon as they become NMC

48 registrants and start working. Providing experiences in which third-year nursing students can  
49 prepare for this role is therefore an important part of nurse training (McKenna & French,  
50 2011; Ramm et al., 2015). For this reason, third year/ final year nursing students were invited  
51 to support the clinical skills teaching of first-year nursing students in the university skills lab,  
52 and this evaluative project aimed to evaluate those experiences to identify any potential  
53 value/ issues in this activity. This evaluative survey aims to better understand whether peer  
54 teaching, as part of the student nurse training, is of value to the students and to understand  
55 their perceptions on whether they feel it supports their future role.

## 56 **Method**

57 An evaluative survey using quantitative and qualitative data was utilised to explore the  
58 research. A questionnaire was chosen as a method of exploring the students' experiences, and  
59 best answer the research question. The questionnaire contained three parts: demographic/  
60 baseline data (e.g., age, gender, the programme of study, hours completed in teaching); five  
61 questions utilising a Likert scale (1-5); and five open questions that further explored the  
62 students' experiences, allowing participants the freedom to provide their responses (Table 1).  
63 To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the research tool, the questionnaire was piloted on  
64 two students prior, to ensure readability and student understanding.

65 The invitation to participate was sent to all final year adult nursing students in one of  
66 the Higher Education Institutions in East of England (United Kingdom) but only thirty-three  
67 students took part in the study and volunteered to support a variety of clinical skills sessions  
68 for first-year nursing students. They all completed 3-22 hours of near-peer teaching and were  
69 asked to either deliver part of the session or to supervise a small group of students completing  
70 a particular task within the session. This was agreed upon by the students before the session,  
71 based on their comfort level with the task at hand and all students were given any necessary

72 resources a week in advance. All 33 students had an opportunity to practice the clinical skills  
73 prior to the teaching and had the mandatory lecture regarding the supervisor role in view of  
74 new NMC standards (NMC, 2018b).

75 The teaching project started in September 2018, ending in March 2020. Data was  
76 collated from June 2019 until August 2020 and of the 33 students taking part, 17 students  
77 returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 51.5 %. University ethical approval was  
78 obtained, and all responses were anonymously submitted either online or on paper.

79 The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 26) programme was used to analyse the  
80 quantitative data such as the demographic and Likert scale questions, using descriptive  
81 statistics. Open text questions (Table 1: column three) were thematically analysed using the  
82 Braun and Clarke method (2006). This is an inductive, iterative process of identifying  
83 patterns in the data. The primary researcher coded the qualitative data which was agreed by  
84 two other authors. This research set out to answer the following questions: Does peer  
85 teaching, as part of student nurse training, better prepare students for their inevitable role as a  
86 supervisor and if so, how?

## 87 **Results**

88 **Quantitative data:** The study included a total of 17 participants (3 males and 14  
89 females), between 24 to 29 years old, and the majority were undertaking a BSc in adult  
90 nursing. 52.9% of the students had spent 17 to 22 hours teaching peer skills, whilst 23.5%  
91 spent 3-9- or 10-16-hours teaching skills, as highlighted in Table 2. The majority spent  
92 greater than 10 hours of peer teaching.

93 Students were asked to rate specific aspects of supervision and teaching preparation  
94 and expectations (Table 3). The majority agreed or strongly agreed that they felt sufficiently  
95 prepared for sessions and that the expectations were clear to them. When asked whether they

96 were comfortable with teaching, the majority agreed or strongly agreed. However, 2 students  
97 responded that they were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. To the question about  
98 whether first-year students valued being taught by third-year students, the majority replied  
99 that they either agreed or disagreed. Finally, when asked about whether teaching and  
100 supervision should be mandatory for third-year students, the results were more skewed.  
101 While half either agreed or strongly agreed, almost a quarter disagreed. One student strongly  
102 disagreed with all the questions. This was noted by researchers and may be attributed to non-  
103 conformity with the activity.

#### 104 **Qualitative data**

105 Three themes emerged when analysing the open questions (Table 1). When asked to  
106 provide a narrative around their peer teaching the findings incorporated; their motivation to  
107 participate, the impact on their own learning, and the potential impact on their future careers.  
108 Overall students shared why they chose to participate and what it meant to them.

109 Theme one explored the motivation for participating in peer teaching. Amongst the  
110 motivations, an opportunity for revision was a key motivator. Students wanted to refresh their  
111 knowledge, work on their revision techniques, and keep up to date with any changes in  
112 clinical skills. They also expressed how the absence of peer teaching was a missed  
113 opportunity when they were first-year students themselves.

114 Theme two explored the impact of peer teaching on themselves, and confidence was a  
115 major sub-theme in this section. This peer teaching experience prompted self-reflection. They  
116 also alluded to the perception that by teaching others they were able to master their skills, and  
117 found it boosted their confidence: “now I’m able to teach and explain things, learnt how to  
118 engage with younger students; I knew more and have developed skills more than I had  
119 thought, feeling more confident”, and enjoyed knowing they had supported others:  
120 “opportunity to meet with junior; advise them, being able to answer questions about the

121 course/my experience that a lecturer could not, the honest student experience, sharing my  
122 experience with them; seeing them learn, knowing that I have supported in that". Another  
123 student noted that the peer teaching experience provided: "confidence to engage in teaching  
124 roles e.g., mentoring; I am more confident in teaching; I feel excited to work with students as  
125 a registered nurse; I will be confident in the new NMC model of assessing students  
126 on placement; a confidence to teach others and prepared me to teach junior/students when I  
127 qualify as nurse. I think this was very beneficial to my learning as a third-year  
128 student". Students also wanted to have the opportunity to supervise others in the practice  
129 setting, stating: "It will better equip me for new NMC standards; gives me confidence to  
130 support student once qualified; give insight into what being a mentor might be like; gives  
131 confidence to teaching others and ability to share experience, knowledge and skills".

132 The final theme that emerged was the perceived impact on their future nursing career.  
133 Students felt that it prompted continuous learning within the nursing profession, stating: "it  
134 prepared me to an endless learning process for the future; I'm more confident to engage in  
135 coaching but not without making sure first that my competencies are in place and my own  
136 practice is at a high standard". Teaching project opened some possibilities to consider  
137 teaching in the professional role: "peer teaching offers career opportunities (teaching);  
138 allowed me to consider this for my future career; this will influence my future career". One  
139 student stated: "I love to teach and feel passionate about this topic; enjoy teaching people, I  
140 will mention the participation in my job interview".

## 141 **Discussion**

142 This evaluative survey set out to explore the experiences of student nurses undertaking peer  
143 teaching in a clinical skill setting. Findings suggest that peer teaching positively impacted the  
144 students, who found value in this activity in developing their own skills, experiences, and

145 career pathway. Although there were egoistic motivations to better themselves, they also took  
146 value in helping others. This experience was, overall, seen to prepare them for their role as  
147 practice supervisor to new student nurses in the future.

148           Near-peer teaching for student nurses, in the practical skills' setting, is under-  
149 researched in the literature, but almost all current studies focus on the benefits (Dumas et al.,  
150 2015; George et al., 2020; Ramm, Thomson & Jackson, 2015; Zentz, Kurtz, & Alverson,  
151 2014). Those exploring students' intentions of taking part in peer teaching have observed that  
152 knowledge consolidation, teaching preparation and the possibility of considering academia as  
153 a career opportunity were the main motivating factors (Irvine et al., 2019; Massy–Westropp  
154 et al., 2021) and something noted in this small research evaluation.

155           Participation in peer teaching has positively impacted the students themselves. Peer  
156 teaching enables them to expand their knowledge and skills, something also noted in the  
157 literature (Gregory et al., 2011). Gregory et al (2011) recognised a significant increase in  
158 knowledge for peer teachers, compared to the students who only prepared for the sessions but  
159 did not participate in teaching. Our study suggests that peer teaching was seen as the  
160 opportunity to review skills and reflect on knowledge, and existing research had similar  
161 findings (Dumas et al., 2015; Goldsmith, Stewart & Ferguson, 2006; Henderson, Needham &  
162 van de Mortel, 2020; Stables, 2012). This also triggered reflection upon continuous  
163 professional development in the future, and deeper learning from reflection was especially  
164 seen in the literature (Loke & Chow, 2007; Ramm, Thomson and Jackson, 2015), as  
165 contributing to an increase in students' confidence (Christiansen & Bell, 2010; George et al.,  
166 2020; Loke & Chow, 2007; McKenna & French, 2011; Stables, 2012).

167           The peer teaching project was designed to support the students' transition into the  
168 supervisor role, a skill expected of them upon qualifying in line with the NMC future nurse

169 standards (NMCb, 2018). It was expressed by the students in this study that such competency  
170 was developed, and they are ready to undertake the mentoring role in practice. This is not  
171 new and was also confirmed in other studies (Christiansen et al., 2011; Irvine et al., 2019;  
172 Ramm, Thomson and Jackson, 2015; Zentz, Kurtz, & Alverson, 2014). Overall, this study  
173 agrees with the literature in that, peer teaching allows students to consider the educator role in  
174 the future (Irvine et al., 2019; Stables, 2012) and therefore it influences their professional  
175 career.

176           McKenna and Williams' (2017) have described the concept of the hidden curriculum  
177 in peer teaching, but further research is needed to explore the link between peer teaching and  
178 its social benefits, especially for peer teachers. This research goes part way in starting a  
179 further dialogue around this as students in their teaching role noticed that there is also  
180 learning happening through the socialisation processes. Such support and acting as role  
181 models can remarkably contribute to the development of professional values for junior  
182 students (Philips, 2013). Discussion is warranted around whether such an intervention should  
183 be mandatory, and if all students would feel the same, as a small study this is uncertain at this  
184 time, and further larger studies are required to draw any generalisation. However, this study  
185 provides a starting block within the university to explore this further.

186           This teaching project was optional for students, so those that wanted to attend and  
187 participate did. Similarly, only a few studies had a formal teaching unit, mandatory to attend  
188 for the students. As the benefits are being seen across studies (Brannagan et al., 2013;  
189 Christiansen & Bell, 2010; Irvine et al., 2019; McKenna & French, 2011; McKenna &  
190 Williams, 2017), then discussion around embedding peer teaching into the curriculum is  
191 warranted. Furthermore, Roscoe and Chi (2007) have highlighted the need to support  
192 reflective knowledge-building in higher education students. Educators should be fostering

193 activities that promote explaining and questioning rather than the simple transmission of  
194 knowledge (Roscoe and Chi, 2007).

195 This study was used to support the validation of the new pre-registration nursing  
196 curriculum programme, for 2020 in a UK-based University. It shaped the new programme,  
197 and it is now mandatory to attend the peer teaching sessions though it's limited to the  
198 intended hours. This is structured into the classes in students' final module where they are  
199 prepared to teach and learn about the different teaching styles, the assessment process and  
200 giving feedback. They also must complete the University online Practice Supervisor course.

### 201 **Conclusion**

202 Benefits to peer-led skills teaching were suggested in this research, both actively and through  
203 the hidden curriculum suggested in the nursing literature. From the perspective of nursing  
204 students, peer teaching provides an opportunity to reinforce their knowledge, clinical and  
205 communication skills. It supports and prepares them for their role of practice supervisors  
206 upon registration, which is an NMC requirement. Other universities may benefit from  
207 introducing peer-led teaching into the curriculum to support this supervisory competency and  
208 skill.

### 209 **Limitations**

210 This is a small, single-setting study and this compromised the generalizability of  
211 findings. It could be interesting to perform similar research when peer teaching has become  
212 mandatory in nursing students' curriculum and there is formal preparation. Also, it would be  
213 beneficial to replicate the same study in clinical settings and compare findings. Future, wider  
214 research is needed to explore the phenomena of the hidden curriculum for peer teachers too.

215 This study had a low response rate (51.51%), which can also be viewed as a  
216 limitation. This is not unusual for the survey research method. Wang and Cheng (2020)  
217 noticed that using questionnaires to reach a large sample of the population of interest is  
218 relatively inexpensive but can result in low response rates. This low response can be due to a  
219 nonresponse bias, a systematic difference between responders (people who complete a  
220 survey) and non-responders (people who did not complete a survey), which is usually  
221 encountered in survey studies with mailed questionnaires (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

222 The response bias and social desirability could also influence the results. and that  
223 those who chose to participate in the near-peer teaching may be more intrinsically motivated.  
224 Social desirability bias refers to the tendency to present oneself and one's social context in a  
225 way that is perceived to be socially acceptable, but not wholly reflective of one's reality  
226 (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Many students have completed the questionnaire straight after the  
227 skills session finished which could affect rushing their answers. Therefore, their responses  
228 may have been not thoroughly considered. The same could happen with the questions, as  
229 some of them, focused only on the benefits of near-peer teaching and did not consider the  
230 negative side of this experience.

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