

# Having a PAL: Where New-Comers Become Old-Timers

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## TOPIC

Peer-assisted learning (PAL) has been found in medical, nursing, and dental education research to aid in preparing students to develop clinical judgment, leadership, and teamwork skills. This study sought to extend that research by assessing the effect of PAL on dentists in practice.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Studies have found that peer-assisted learning (PAL) was a means to emphasize professional skills development to prepare students for the workforce. Our study aim was to assess if this preparation was not only achieved in school, but then utilized in practice.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the positive social and educational effects of peers in collaborative learning.
2. Describe the communities of practice who benefit from PAL.
3. List the knowledge tools which can be used in PAL: technology, assisting, storytelling, etc.

## SCHOLARSHIP

Although the benefits of peer pairing of professional students have been reported for four decades, there has been a lag in implementing PAL in dental schools. At its inception in 2006, Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine-Arizona (CDMA) promoted the peer pairing clinical model. The college's vision of PAL was to have a third-year dental (D3) student paired with a fourth-year (D4) student throughout clinical education. The pair were selected to practice together for patient care as an operator and assistant team. They learned jointly on clinic protocols, electronic record documentation, patient appointment management, and non-technical aspects. This exposed peers to expanded experiences, teamwork, and collaborative learning in a practice community.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Dean of MWU CDMA, Bradford Smith for his support in the PAL concept in dental education.

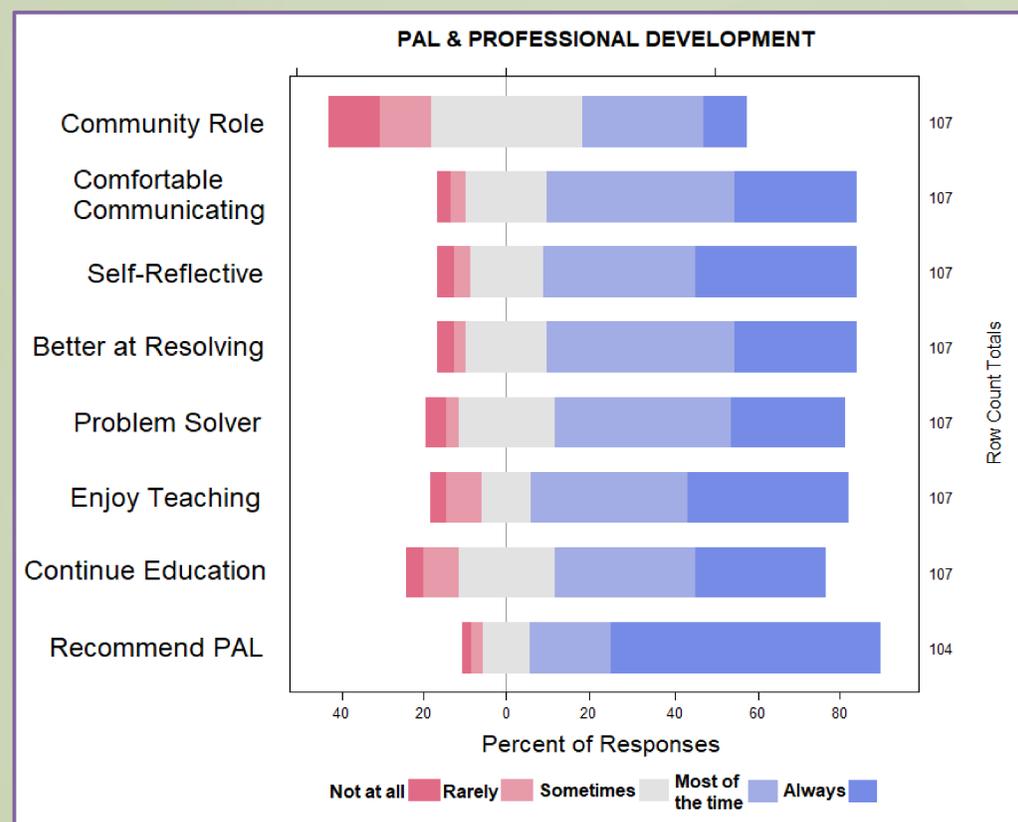
## REFERENCES

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## FINDINGS and REFLECTIONS:

“When one teaches, two learn. - Robert Heinlein”

Peer-assisted learning (PAL) has shown that shared learning builds knowledge for both peers in a positive, informal, and welcoming social environment. PAL has been used effectively in medical, nursing, and now dental education to aid in preparing students to develop clinical judgement, leadership, and teamwork when collaborating with a colleague.



At a glance:

## QUESTION

Knowledge tools used in PAL training, such as technology, assisting, storytelling, and shared experiences have been found to be beneficial, but does PAL last after graduation and make an impact in a dentist's career and practice?

## SAMPLE

An electronic 45-question survey was sent to 667 alumni who graduated from CDMA from years 2012 to 2017 who were trained in the PAL clinical model.

## METHOD/ RESULTS

A total of 107 CDMA dental alumni responded with a 16.0% overall response rate. The majority (83.6%) of responding dentists recommended peer learning in clinical dental education. Survey participants attributed their clinical judgment (72.3%) and teamwork (80.9%) skills to peer pairing in dental school. Among the respondents, 89.8% had taken leadership roles and were training team members, and 75.7% reported enjoying teaching others. Of the 65% who commented on peer pairing enhancements, 15% recommended rotation of peers for greater learning experiences, and 24% advised personality assessments for future pair matching. The figure shows participants perceptions of the effect of PAL on professional development.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that peer-learned skills transferred to dentist's trained in PAL in dental school to their practice of dentistry and professional development as lifelong learners, teachers, and community leaders. So, whether faculty-to-faculty, faculty-to-student, student-to-student, or even student-to-faculty learning, research shows that any community of practice can grow together with peer collaboration. Each member of the community can go from a new-comer trainee to an old-timer knowledgeable trainer by having a PAL.

