 **Exeter Peer Support Resources**

**Teaching vs Facilitation: Breaking the Dependency Cycle**

One of the goals of PAL is to foster independent learners. The Dependency Cycle (sometimes called “learned helplessness”) is a pattern of learned behaviour that allows students to remain dependent upon an authority figure (lecturer or tutor) for learning. Often we foster dependency by relying too heavily on repetition, drill, and memorisation. Without structuring, categorizing, and other forms of manipulation of information, learners will fall back into a mode of memorising isolated facts – a very time-consuming and ineffective way of learning large amounts of meaningful information.

Some students will learn via this format because they already have the sophisticated learning strategies that allow them to convert information into meaningful knowledge. Others, especially students new to a discipline, will have problems, so they will ask a question, which may lead to their being told again, perhaps more slowly the second or third time. Brophy (1995) found that highly successful teachers and facilitators implement strategies to help students overcome this “learned helplessness” or Dependency Cycle by engaging in supportive behaviours, providing reassurance, and making personal appeals to students to improve performance. They de-emphasise activities that promote competition and comparison and emphasise non-evaluative strategies and cooperative strategies, such as matrices, reciprocal questioning, and think-pair-share.

* PAL Leaders should act more as facilitators than as judges.
* PAL Leaders should focus more on learning processes than on outcomes.
* PAL Leaders should react to errors or ‘being stuck’ as natural and useful parts of the learning process rather than evidence of failure.

# Activity:

In their clusters, get the Leaders to come up with questions that will promote discussion and provoke questions from the group.

Get them to think of ways in which asking questions can be made into a non-threatening activity – an example would be to write down questions anonymously on a post-it note so that the learners do not feel “ownership” of the question.

As a follow-up ask them if they’ve ever posted things (or seen things posted) on a social network medium such as Twitter or Facebook which would not be expressed in face-to-face communication.