

Teaching Tips

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Pimping: Does it Help or Hinder Learning?

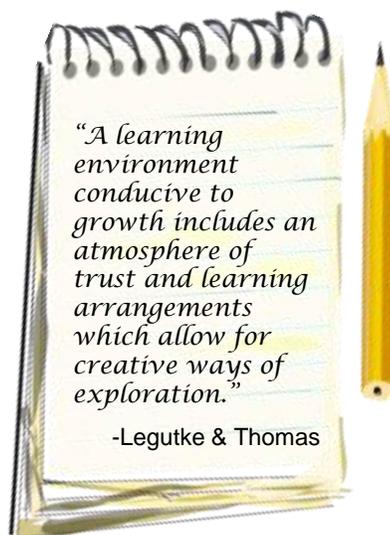
Pimping is a well-known practice in which a learner is rapidly asked a series of clinical questions by a senior physician. While some people associate pimping with the humiliation of answering incorrectly, others feel that they learn more from this style of questioning than any other type of teaching.

Advocates of pimping often describe it as a type of Socratic teaching, which is characterized by the asking and answering of questions to promote critical thinking and discussion. However, in the context of medical education and training, pimping often focuses on evaluating a learner's performance rather than on the process of learning itself. Learners may be more motivated to prepare for sessions in which they anticipate being pipped, and most never forget the answers to questions they miss, but it is important to remember that the anxiety, humiliation and competitiveness engendered by this type of questioning can inhibit learning.

Research among medical students suggests that the learning environment created by the attending or resident who is asking the questions largely determines whether pimping is perceived as a useful teaching tool or a means of embarrassment. As evidenced by the following examples from current medical students and seasoned physicians (recalling their experiences with pimping), it is essential for the senior physician to think about the context in which questions are being asked and the motivation for asking them in this way.

The following table compares what students describe as "benign" (good) and "malignant" (bad) pimping:

Benign Pimping	Malignant Pimping
Aims to identify strengths and deficits in students' knowledge.	Aims to establish a pecking order and reinforce the power relationship between teachers and learners.
Motivates students to keep up with reading and prepare for sessions / rounds in advance.	Creates an atmosphere of humiliation and hostility.
Promotes quick recall, logical thinking, and the practice of backing up statements with evidence.	Inhibits learners willingness to ask honest questions.
Is "nonthreatening" and "noncompetitive".	Is an "ego thing" that often involves 'read-my-mind' questions.
Takes a supportive approach, recognizes that every learner reacts differently to pimping.	Generates competitiveness that inhibits students from learning how to work as a team and may perpetuate the dehumanization for which medical education has been criticized.



"A learning environment conducive to growth includes an atmosphere of trust and learning arrangements which allow for creative ways of exploration."

-Legutke & Thomas

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