

Peer Review of Teaching

Using peer review to improve your teaching

Context and Key Issues

Griffith's policies on the evaluation of teaching recognise that there are a number of sources of evidence about teaching. Students are a prime source – both their perceptions, as captured by SET (Student Evaluation of Teaching) and SEC (Student Evaluation of Courses), and their performances on assessment tasks tell us a great deal about what worked and what didn't. Teachers' own reflections on their work can be a key source of evidence about the effectiveness or otherwise of their teaching, although assistance may be required to identify and analyse what really happens in their teaching practice. Peer Review is a valuable third source of information about teaching. It can work in conjunction with feedback from students and or personal reflection, and has the potential to be both more constructive and more supportive than either of these other sources alone.

Peer review is a process whereby your teaching is observed or scrutinized by one or more colleagues. In some cases, the colleague will have expertise in teaching and learning; in others, you may have chosen them for their disciplinary expertise. In all cases, however, their report on your teaching should be governed by guidelines or protocols on which you have agreed. The strength of peer review is that, in comparison with other sources of feedback, it will not just identify problems but will help you, via discussion with your colleagues, to understand and solve them. It offers greatest value when it is used not in a one-off, single snapshot way, but rather in an iterative, progressive way, perhaps over a year or so, around several offerings of a particular course.

Currently, most peer review is conducted for formative or developmental purposes, that is, teachers seek this kind of feedback in order to improve their teaching and to achieve good outcomes on the key indicators of good teaching, namely effective student learning and a satisfying student experience. As Bernstein (2008) puts it: "... to be successful, teaching must produce learning. As in the review of a research or creative project, merely documenting good practice is not enough." Formative peer review can provide analysis and suggestions to complement more summative evidence obtained from SET and SEC. It can drive improvements in practice which will ultimately result in better outcomes on indicators of student satisfaction and student learning.. Engagement in peer review also provides, in and of itself, evidence of commitment to teaching improvement that may be valuable for promotion or for grant and award applications.

Steps for designing peer review

1. Prepare the ground for a conversation with your peer reviewer

- Be able to contextualise your teaching for the reviewer
- Try to identify aspects of your teaching that you would most like to improve, e.g., explaining more clearly, giving better feedback, getting deeper engagement from students in tutorials
- Use previous student feedback, student performance and your own reflection to help determine what you want to know
- Limit your focus to one or two aspects
- Think of instances where something hasn't worked

2. Choose an appropriate reviewer or pair of reviewers

- A colleague with teaching-and-learning expertise may view your teaching through a different lens from a disciplinary colleague; you may want to seek review from both sources
- It is important that you trust the competence and judgment of your reviewer(s); there is an increasing amount

of peer review experience in our university on which to call

- Choose a reviewer with whom you feel you can have a continuing professional relationship; improving teaching is an iterative process. Think about whether you wish to negotiate that your reviewer will not be available to act as a referee in relation to your teaching.

3. Work out what kind of process and what kind of report you want from your reviewer(s)

- Some staff members prefer that their first peer review should be in the form of observation rather than judgment; understanding how your teaching is seen through other eyes can be illuminative
- Observations can be recorded as a time-log that describes student and teacher activity on an every-five-minute basis, as dot points on aspects which strike the observer, or as a prose description
- If you choose to use a criterial tool (where your reviewer will make judgments about effectiveness against criteria), there are numerous tools available (see, e.g. the GIHE Peer Review of Teaching Resource, or Nancy Chism's Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook; also see websites below); you may wish to design or adapt a protocol to suit your own circumstances
- Don't confine your involvement in peer review to your classroom teaching – peer review can provide equally useful information in relation to your curriculum design and to your assessment practices

4. Plan the details of the occasion

- Make sure you have chosen a class in which the relevant aspects of your teaching are evident (e.g. not an hour taken up by student presentations)
- Tell your students that you have invited a colleague to visit the class in order to give you some feedback – encourage them to talk to the reviewer
- If things go wrong, don't panic – teaching is often unpredictable. Remember that the purpose of the review is to assist you to improve rather than to condemn.

5. Schedule a post-review meeting as soon as possible after the class

- Try to have an open mind and avoid feeling defensive
- Take the opportunity to solicit any observations additional to those agreed upon if you feel comfortable to do so
- Offer your sense of how the class went as a starting point
- Ask whether there are any aspects that need immediate remedy (e.g. too many slides, whole class can't hear interactions, etc)
- Discuss with your reviewer(s) where you might best focus your attention to achieve significant improvement in student learning (e.g. scheduling interaction in lectures might give a better pay-off than introducing more humour)

6. Respond immediately and actively to suggestions for change: this is the beginning of your involvement with the scholarship of learning and teaching

- Consult teaching-and-learning literature in relation to the focus you have chosen; it may offer strategies, or it may help you to get a bigger perspective on your teaching
- Be organised about how you are going to make changes and gather feedback
- Document and evaluate the changes to your practice
- Keep your students in the loop – they can give you immediate formative feedback on changes
- Invite your peer reviewer(s) back as your teaching changes; ultimately you are looking for better outcomes on key indicators but you may still need formative feedback along the way
- When you are ready, contribute to the field by making your account public – share it with your school, apply for a teaching grant or award, extend it with a collaboration, write an article.

References/Acknowledgements:

Bernstein, Daniel (2008) Peer Review and Evaluation of the Intellectual Work of Teaching. *Change*, New Rochelle: 40, 2, 48-51.
Chism, Nancy (2007) *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*. Bolton, MA: Anker Pub. Co.
GIHE. *Peer observation of university teaching: A GIHE Resource*.

For further resources and discussion, have a look at the following websites: (they will lead you to many more)

<http://www.prodait.org/approaches/observation/index.php>

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/Peer_Observation_of_Teaching_in_Australia

<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/PeerObserve.html>