



MACQUARIE
UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF
BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS



HOW TO COLLABORATE WITH PEER OBSERVATION

Learning from each other

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Foreword

Peer observation of teaching (or POT) is where two or more colleagues collaborate in observing each other's teaching and then provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. It can provide a number of benefits both to the teacher and the teaching institution.

It is used as a professional development activity to inform and enhance practice, and it can be done informally as an arrangement between just two colleagues or as part of a formal professional development process. Where it is part of a formal process, information is collected to acknowledge that the observation has been done, but the notes about the observations remain confidential to those involved. In a formal arrangement, you can use the peer observation notes for your own performance development and review if you wish.

There are two main purposes of peer observation:

- quality enhancement
- quality assurance.

For *quality enhancement*, peer observation works to build supportive teams and can increase your repertoire of teaching strategies. The opportunity to participate in peer observation focuses on your own development and critical reflection on the practice of teaching. It's surprising how much you can learn by observing other teachers' classes and by looking through their class materials. You can always pick up new and ingenious ways to inform your own practice!

Peer observation for *quality assurance* generally involves more senior colleagues or external reviewers (perhaps in a benchmarking exercise) examining materials and processes to enhance learning and teaching. For example, a unit coordinator may observe new tutors to give them feedback and to support their development. Tutors can also observe each other's tutorials and meet to discuss common problems as part of this process.

There are many benefits associated with peer observation of teaching, with the main purpose being to enhance the teacher's own learning and teaching. It can also bring improved quality of student learning, an increased awareness of what material colleagues are covering, and dissemination of ideas about best practice. This booklet will explain what peer observation is and help you through the process. You will find some sample forms to use in the appendices.

This guide is one of a series produced as part of the Learning Excellence and Development (LEAD) program, which brings together a multi-disciplinary group of university staff, using an action research approach to nurture a responsive teaching culture. Central to the program is pedagogical change for the improvement of learning. The other guides in the series are available in hard copy from the Faculty of Business and Economics, or online at <http://www.be.mq.edu.au/lt>.

Introduction

In this guide

We have set out to give you an overview of different types of peer observation and how to go through the steps, along with some handy hints. In the appendices are forms that can be used for the stages of the process and you can modify these to suit your context. The focus is on quality enhancement here rather than on peer observation as a formal review or an appraisal, that is, the intent is to look at our practice as a continual process of improvement which is informed by our peers and our students. To give you some concrete examples there are three case studies – on peer observation for best practice, professional development and tutor teaching development.

We have also provided a list of publications if you want to find out more about the subject. There are a few websites that we found particularly helpful in compiling this guide:

- http://www.mq.edu.au/lc/eval_teaching/peer_observation.htm
- <http://www.unisa.edu.au/ltu/staff/practice/evaluation/peer-review.asp>
- <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/feedback/gathercolfeed.htm>

What is peer observation?

Peer observation of teaching (or POT) involves two or more colleagues observing each other's teaching according to an agreed set of criteria. They then provide comments – both positive and negative – as well as suggestions for improvement. A form of this is third party observation of teaching (TPOT), in which the teacher is reviewed but does not in turn act as a reviewer.

POT provides a structured framework for the ongoing improvement of teaching and learning practices through peer collaboration and discussion. Observation is a valuable tool for both the observed and the observer as it is about the sharing of excellence, the promotion of a greater sense of collegiality, dissemination of good practice, individual development and improving the quality of student learning.

Why use peer observation?

There are several benefits from using peer observation:

- maintaining and enhancing teaching quality and therefore improving student learning experiences;
- developing self-awareness about a variety of instructional aspects;
- reflecting on various aspects of your teaching practice;
- recognising and identifying good practice in others;
- identifying your own professional development needs;
- providing evidence of quality teaching practice for promotion applications;
- identifying and promoting good practice and innovation in teaching and learning;
- deepening understanding of the work of colleagues in and across teams, departments and faculties;
- networking with colleagues to discuss various learning and teaching issues; and
- increasing the sense of collaboration and enhanced trust through allowing colleagues to observe and comment upon each other's teaching.

The aims of the technique are essentially active self-development in the practice of teaching through reflection and self-awareness; and building mutually supportive teams to improve performance and confidence. These in turn enhance the student learning experience, as one lecturer pointed out:

Peer observation of teaching also benefits students. I advise my students prior to the lecture that an observer will be in attendance, and explain to them that I am undertaking this process in order to improve my teaching which will in turn benefit their learning experience. I also provide students with feedback I receive following the exercise. Students value that lecturer's care about their teaching, and the benefits are reflected not only in improved learning experiences for students, but also in student evaluations.

Types of peer observation

There are two main types of peer review: formative and summative. Formative reviews are focused on gaining information for the purposes of ongoing improvement of teaching (quality enhancement). For example, you call upon a departmental colleague or an education specialist to assist you with enhancing your classroom management or to give an opinion on a new instructional approach. Summative peer observations, on the other hand, are mainly focused on quality in support of processes such as promotion or formal teaching evaluation (quality assurance). This approach can be used for finding the source of a perceived problem, or for exploring solutions to issues that are causing you concern.

Getting the PROCESS GOING

The first step is to decide what it is you want to achieve by using a peer observation activity. An important point is that it should take place in the context of the program, unit or session learning outcomes. Your aims need to be clearly developed, and so do the areas of teaching that you think the process should consider. It can be quite a simple process – you and another trusted colleague could observe just a few key points – or a more complex or formal process, involving teams of colleagues. Peer observation usually takes place within a particular department, but it can be interesting to involve other departments or faculties as this will give a wider perspective.

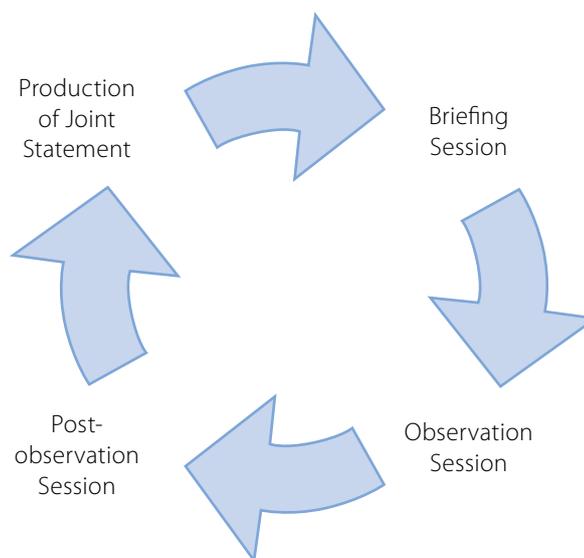
Do you want an opinion on your own teaching? Or are you interested in it for a subject or course you are teaching and so want to involve your co-lecturers in this? Are you setting it up to assess others, such as new staff? Set out your goals first to get the most out of the process and write up a clear statement of your aims as well as the features and materials that you want to be assessed. It is also essential to allow for a period of reflection at the end of the process, to absorb the comments made and develop modifications as necessary. See the “Observation or reflection cues” for some things to consider whether you are being observed, or are the observer.

We describe some of the ways teams can be set up in “Organising the process”, and see also the “Handy hints” we have included.

Once you have established the methodology, the process itself has four main stages:

1. briefing session;
2. observation session;
3. post-observation session; and
4. production of a joint statement.

The figure below shows the dynamics among the four stages:



The peer observation process

The **briefing session**: a discussion between the observer and the observed. First of all, they agree on a session, time and place for the observation, ensuring sufficient time is allocated for the post-observation session.

The colleague to be observed will set out the context of the observation activity, and draw the observer's attention to anything that they particularly want comment on. Any ground rules or mutually agreed approaches to the observation session also need to be set up during the briefing. In general, being observed in your teaching practice is an active process of professional learning (and of course the same also applies if you are the observer). It requires you to discuss with the observer the nature and aims of the activity so that you can both get the most out of it. For example, you need to agree on the focus but, more importantly, the criteria of good practice in the area need to be mutually understood. The kinds of things that might be discussed are: the learning outcomes, lesson plan and/or objectives for the session, and particular issues for consideration or where feedback would be valuable. Any aspect of teaching can be reviewed, and at any level of detail that you consider useful, including:

- assessment
- class delivery (such as lecture, tutorial, lab demonstration, fieldwork)
- teaching materials (including online)
- course design
- presentation skills
- evaluation of a course or program
- small group teaching.

The **observation**: the observer needs to find themselves an unobtrusive position in the teaching space. They then make notes through the session about the various interactions between the teacher and the students with a focus on those things identified in the briefing. POT can also be done by making a video record of the session, which can then be viewed by the observer at a later date. This playback session may also involve the teacher and/or mentor.

Examples of forms for recording observations are provided in the appendices:

- Appendix 1 is a checklist of items to be observed;
- Appendix 2 is a sheet to be used if you are following a free-form kind of response; and
- Appendix 3 is a framework for observer's notes.

Feel free to modify these forms for your own purposes according to the focus of the observation and the context of each teaching setting.

The **post-observation**: a discussion between the observed and the observer, reflecting on the teaching session. This meeting is a collaborative reflection and will involve appraisal of the session by the teacher who was observed and comments from the observer. The observer's feedback should cover good practice seen during the session, as well as areas they think may benefit from future development. Post-observation is usually the most difficult part of the peer observation process as it can be difficult both to give criticism and to receive it, so it demands professional tact and sensitivity by both parties. Some tips for handling the post-observation meeting are provided in the "Handy hints" section.

A **joint statement** or **record**: a simple form setting out where and when the POT occurred, usually only applicable where it is part of a formal process. It is recommended that some record of peer observation is retained by participating faculties or departments. At a minimum this will be a log of who was observed, by whom and when. Ideally this information will also include a summary of good practice observed and any other issues related to the promotion of high-quality learning and teaching. It is essential, however, that the detailed observation sheets and comments remain confidential. Identified areas of good practice or other issues should only be disseminated with the permission of the person observed.

We have provided a sample record form in Appendix 4, which also allows for participants to summarise any examples of good practice. It can be completed and sent to whoever is managing the peer observation process in the department or faculty.

These **written records** may be used by the observed teacher in appraisal, when applying for promotion or seeking membership of a professional body, or as some other part of continuing professional development.

An **observer record**: the observer can also complete a short statement about the experience of being an observer, including reflections on any benefits they saw in the process or whatever they have found useful about the observation activity. This record is retained by the observer. See Appendix 5 for a suggested format.

Observation or reflection cues

Here is a list of things you might focus on when reflecting on your own practice, or during an observation session. You might like to add to or modify the list.

Planning/organisation/content

- Teaching purposes are clear and stated in appropriate term, such as aims, outcomes.
- Teaching purposes are appropriate to the needs, experience and abilities of students.
- Structure of session: introduction, development, conclusion are evident.
- Content is appropriate for the level, abilities, needs and interests of students.
- Content is well researched and up-to-date.

Teaching strategies/resources

- Methods are appropriate to purposes of session.
- Methods are chosen with regard to students' abilities, needs and needs of unit and/or content.
- Methods are chosen to gain interest and participation.
- Class management is effective and appropriate.
- Resources are used effectively and complement content, methods and purposes.

Presentation, management

- Effective presentation/communication skills are used.
- Effective use of questioning to monitor and promote understanding.
- Student contributions and participation are encouraged in a positive atmosphere.
- Equal opportunities exist for all students.

Assessment/monitoring

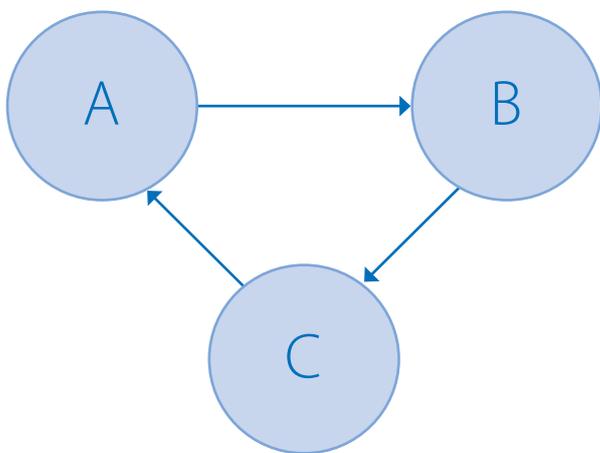
- Suitable methods are used to identify and monitor student progress.
- Constructive feedback is provided.

Organising THE PROCESS

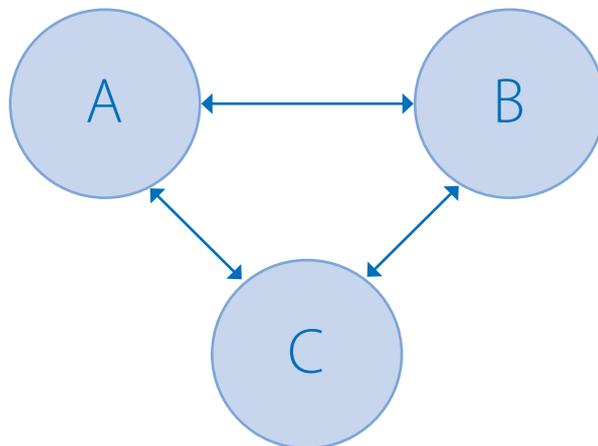
The process of peer observation of teaching (POT) can be undertaken in a number of different ways and we describe the collaborative forms in this section. Alternatively, rather than engaging in a collaborative process, you may wish to use the services of an external observer or team of observers. In this case, you are not involved as a reviewer yourself and this form is referred to as “third party observation of teaching” (or TPOT).

A helpful sequence is to have at least one round of observing and observation every two years but you are encouraged to increase this if you can. For instance, it does not have to be a full-blown process; there might even be just one particular feature of your teaching that you are unsure of and so would like some feedback.

- 1) *Buddy system*: where two colleagues agree to act as observer and observed. The observation takes place followed by a reversal of the roles at a later date.
- 2) *Circus*: where colleague A observes colleague B, colleague B observes C, and so on round the group until they have all been observed. The process for three people is shown below, but it can be adapted for more than three participants.



- 3) *Teams of three*: the observations are organised within teams of three as in the diagram below. Each colleague is observed twice (perhaps reversing the cycle). Where there are larger groups of people involved, it is helpful to get a person with responsibility for peer observation in the department or faculty to organise the teams.



Handy HINTS

If the process is to be productive, discussion between those involved must be honest and constructive before and after the observation takes place. Here are some tips for fruitful participation.¹

When you are being observed

- Be clear about what you want out of the review and focus on what is useful for your purpose. You may wish to put together your own list of points that you want the observer to address.
- Decide on the overall process and timeframe, and remember to allow sufficient time for each stage.
- Identify the criteria by which the judgements will be made – you need to ensure that you and your observer have a shared understanding of the indicators of good practice in the areas being reviewed.
- Establish what information is relevant – this may include consideration of course and program documents, and teaching materials.
- Ensure you and your reviewer have a mutual understanding of the expectations – it is useful to put the details in writing so that all parties are clear.
- Agree on the form of any written reports and the intended audience. In some cases a verbal report may be sufficient; in others a formal statement may be required.
- Don't be offended! Remember, you asked your colleague to give feedback and any criticism will be offered in the light of improvement, so don't take it as a personal attack.

After the debriefing session it can be useful to ask yourself the following:

- what aspects of your teaching do you feel you ought to improve?
- what aspects do you feel you would like to work on to improve?
- what do you need to do in order to improve in this area?
- who might be able to help you?
- who or what might stop you, and what can you do about it?
- how will you know when you have improved?

Or, perhaps simply say to yourself, "Next time I give this session I will ..."

¹ We found the University of South Australia Learning Connection website particularly useful in putting together these handy hints: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/ltu/staff/practice/evaluation/peer-review.asp>

When you are the observer

- Discuss all aspects of the activity, including whether you can achieve what is required in the time available. Make sure you understand the context, that is, what use is to be made of the outcomes. Spell out any aspects you are either unable or unwilling to undertake.
 - Ensure the feedback is structured in some way – this will save you time and provide you with clear directions. The sample forms in the appendices should help you with this.
 - Request any other information you think will help – you will be of most assistance if you can relate what you are observing to the rest of the course, and so you may find information such as curriculum documents and course notes useful.
 - During the observation, try not to be distracted by the content if you are there to observe teaching strategies and, conversely, if your opinion on the content has been requested then try to concentrate on that. Keep focused on the issues!
 - Allow those being debriefed to say something about the observation session before you give your feedback, and allow them to highlight problems and possible solutions.
 - Focus your comments on the behaviour rather than the person.
 - Be specific – refer to examples rather than generalities.
 - Give feedback as soon as possible after the observation, when it is still fresh in your mind (and your colleague's mind).
- Comment on both the positive and negative aspects – provide feedback on what is being done well before you suggest areas for improvement. When expressing the more negative comments, try to do this in a constructive way so that improvement (rather than judgement) is seen as the ultimate outcome.
 - Be realistic – focus on things that your colleague can change or control and constructively address areas for development. To be effective, feedback should be limited to the amount of information that the receiver can make use of.
 - Prioritise your comments – focus on the most important areas of the teaching you have observed in the context of good practice.
 - Take time to reflect afterwards on what your colleague has said and on the whole process. See Appendix 5 for a sheet you can fill in to keep as a reminder.

Constraints and ALTERNATIVES

Constraints

Although using POT can obviously help improve our practice, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into account to ensure its success.

For instance, a study by the University of Melbourne and the University of Wollongong in 2007-08² reported that the most common challenges to implementing a peer review program were:

- time and workload constraints on staff;
- the teaching culture (where teaching is perceived as a private 'closed door' activity);
- a lack of understanding of the benefits of peer observation of teaching; and
- how it is promoted to staff (there is often suspicion about managerial objectives!).

This study found that peer observation of teaching is not widely used in Australian universities, either for their professional development or for evaluation of teachers. This apparent reluctance to use POT may be based on several misconceptions, including:

- a perception that the process is threatening or critical because it is often assumed an assessment or judgement is being made;
- wariness about not being able to choose one's own reviewer;
- a perception that friends watch each other and are uncritical;
- concerns about breaches of confidentiality; or
- a perception that one lacks ownership of the process.

These reservations are worth bearing in mind when you are designing your observation process and when you are trying to persuade others to join you in the collaboration, as you may need to specifically address them. These problems can be remedied by making sure that all the participants are clearly informed about the full process and the aims of the exercise, and you need to emphasise the benefits to all parties from participation, as well as safeguarding confidentiality of the results.

Another significant barrier is that academics are usually time-poor. POT can be time consuming and therefore many teachers might find it difficult to find time to commit themselves to the whole process. A further problem arises if you decide feedback in the form of written reports is required, since this too may face time constraints on the observer. As a solution, a lecturer recommended instituting a formal process so the professional benefits are more tangible:

Formalising the process would assist staff to use formal feedback for promotions and other professional development activities. Peer observation of teaching has not been valued in the workload previously, and it would be good to incorporate it for this reason.

The most effective way of encouraging participation is to accommodate the program into staff workload models. For example, concessions to staff schedules could be made in recognition of the time taken to undertake the observation and discussions (as well as any paperwork that may be required). Other formal incentives for all the parties outside of workload concessions can also be developed.

² Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne & Centre for Educational Development and Interactive Resources, University of Wollongong (2008) *Peer review of teaching in Australian higher education*. Supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). Available at www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/PeerReviewHandbook_eVersion.pdf

If there is a strong concern about confidentiality, this can be alleviated by selecting an independent outsider (that is, third party observation), as one lecturer recommended:

In my experience there would be less concern if the observer is an independent outsider, for example from another department or from the Learning and Teaching Centre. It might be beneficial to have staff from the Centre and/or department staff with training in learning and teaching to be reviewers. They would not only identify areas for improvement but may also offer solutions.

It is worth remembering that such a review can not only be used for quality assurance, but can also provide supporting evidence for promotions and professional development opportunities.

To promote POT on a faculty level, a staff member could be appointed in each school to have specific responsibility for peer review of teaching. This appointment could be formal or informal. This person would be responsible for the design of peer review of teaching programs, support of their implementation, and for raising awareness of POT in departments and for individual staff.

Alternatives to peer observation

There are several alternative approaches to engaging with other staff about your teaching practice. For example, inviting a colleague to participate in the joint planning and teaching of a class, and/or in the review of study documentation (such as unit outlines, assessment tasks, or lecture handouts and overheads) is an effective way of providing or receiving feedback. While giving a different perspective, it is also an opportunity to share ideas and strategies and can be a rewarding experience. You might find such approaches less confrontational than POT, while still helping you to get a different opinion.

Peer coaching is similar to peer observation, although here an experienced academic is mentoring a more junior colleague about a particular area. The process begins when the leading staff member personally models the targeted skill to his/her colleagues so that eventually they apply the new approach to their teaching. The peer coaching process is accompanied by continuous support, encouragement and feedback as the less experienced academic adopts the new skill.

Case STUDIES

Note – these case studies are all based on the experiences of lecturers at Macquarie University.

Case study 1 – Peer observation for best practice

In a pilot program of peer observation of teaching, the initial stage involved organising an information session. The aim was to set out the steps involved and the discipline requirements, as well as to create teams of “buddies” who would work together to conduct observations, write up reviews and debrief themselves afterwards on the outcomes. The session also provided an opportunity to engage with the participants to find out what they wanted from such a program.

Prior to the information session a package of papers was sent out to participants to prepare them for the process. This included: general information on the process, template review forms and academic articles on peer observation and review of teaching. The papers were provided in case participants wanted to explore the theoretical basis for the process, and materials were kept to a minimum so as not to be a disincentive to participate. Initially ten academics signed up for the project; however, one had to withdraw midway through the program. The session, as was the whole program, was approached in a non-confrontationist way with participants driving the process by focusing on what they wanted out of it, rather than preconceived ideas being imposed on them of what one “should get out of the program”.

Most teams were able to organise observation of each staff member by at least two others. It was emphasised that the observee was not a passive player, that is, they were required to play an active role in setting the parameters of the observation and in participating in the review and debriefing. Teams met independently to arrange dates and times for the observations, how the observations were to be conducted and who would observe whom, as well as selecting a form of review that each participant was comfortable with. All teams agreed to observe active class-based activities

as opposed to peer reviewing materials or study guides. Most chose a tutorial type class although one group observed lectures and tutorials. One group arranged for all three members to observe each other; the other two groups managed to observe one other member of their team.

Members of each team then wrote up their reviews in consultation with the observee. Some team members met and discussed the experience before writing up the review, while others wrote up the review and then discussed the contents of the review in person or via email. Everyone discussed the observation with the observee at some stage, thereby fulfilling the important requirement that the observee should be active in the process.

The debrief phase took place after our faculty’s end of semester examinations review committee, so as to steer clear of imposing on participants during the marking cycle. The teams reported on the experience and what they had got out of it, and whether the results were in line with their expectations going into the program. The debrief addressed what observees did well in relation to teaching practices and what they could improve on, and care was taken not to allow observers to embark on scathing subjective critiques of teaching practices but rather to frame debrief observations in a positive way and with examples attached to observations. Areas of strengths and weaknesses were identified and participants engaged in reflective observations that allowed them to identify changes to teaching practices that would account for the observation and review.

All participants reported that the process was of benefit to them, with most agreeing that it was a good opportunity to have an objective view of their teaching practices. All agreed that while some of the issues raised were more along the lines of consciousness-raising as opposed to new information or practices, the process of revisiting elements of good teaching practices was therapeutic.

Case study 2 – Peer observation for professional development

In my teaching career I have participated in several peer observation exercises, which have largely been informal. My first peer observation exercise involved being observed by a lecturer with whom I co-taught a unit. I directly approached him and asked if he would be willing to observe my teaching. Once he agreed, we held a brief informal meeting of about five minutes prior to the observation exercise, and then he attended one of my lectures. During a subsequent meeting about the unit, we discussed the peer review exercise. Forms supplied by the university Learning and Teaching Centre [such as those in the Appendices in this guide] were used as a basis to discuss aspects of my classroom teaching including my communication of ideas, strategies to engage the students, teaching methods and modes of delivery.

In my second experience I sent an email to all staff within the department inviting them to peer review my teaching. I received a response from one staff member who was involved in teaching another unit. We followed the process described in my first example, and she attended one of my lectures after an initial briefing. Forms provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre were again used as a basis for discussion.

I was then peer reviewed by a staff member from a different department. The process followed was the same as that in the first two examples.

In all instances the feedback I received was generally focused on the classroom environment, for example the level of interaction and engagement I facilitated with students. I found peer observation beneficial for several reasons. The primary one is that it highlights aspects of your teaching that you have not noticed yourself, both positive and those in need of improvement. When I receive feedback on positive aspects of my teaching it improves my confidence. Another exercise I found useful was to listen to my own i-lecture. When I did this it highlighted things that other reviewers had not pointed out to me!

Case study 3 – Peer observation for tutor teaching development

This is an example of third-party observation of teaching for quality assurance. The project was conceived and developed by the Subject coordinator to support sessional tutor teaching practices and it ran over three semesters. The focus was a core undergraduate finance unit in the Department of Accounting and Finance with a very large (about 1,300-1,500) and diverse student enrolment, as well as a very large and diverse tutor population with a high proportion of sessional tutors. Fifteen sessional tutors participated in total (six in the first semester, three in the second, and six in the third semester). Administering the program over three consecutive semesters ensured that all sessional tutors had participated in the process.

Prior to the in-class observation, tutors completed a self-reflection questionnaire and were asked to complete this questionnaire at specific times during the semester to reflect on their progress. Before tutorials commenced, the Subject coordinator met individually with all tutors for about 15-20 minutes. In week five or six, the Subject coordinator conducted a 20-30 minute observation of teaching practice for each tutor. The self-reflection survey and guide were used as a framework in the observation feedback report discussed at a post-observation meeting of about 20-30 minutes, which was undertaken shortly afterwards. For an observation to provide meaningful feedback, only a few of the aspects included in the self-reflection survey and guide were considered in any one observation session. These aspects included:

1. learning objectives
2. content knowledge
3. pedagogical skills
4. personal characteristics
5. concern for students and their learning
6. engagement with, and commitment to, use of formative assessment procedures
7. focus on encouraging deep learning outcomes
8. consideration of the learning environment and the use of teaching materials and aids, and
9. commitment to improving the tutor's teaching.

Following observations, tutors were provided with a written report that they could include in their teaching portfolio, and use in job seeking. Documents that were used in this sessional tutor teaching development program included:

- *self-reflection survey and guide* – this documents tutors' thinking on their tutorial teaching practice and journey;
- *early tutorial evaluation questionnaire* – this allows tutors to make adjustments to their teaching practice early in the semester, informed by tutorial class participant feedback;
- *third-party observation of teaching feedback report* – this gives a snapshot of tutors' current teaching practice, with a focus on a few selected aspects;
- *end-of-semester Learner Experience of Teaching (LET) survey results* – this shows students' perceptions of the quality of teaching practice throughout the semester across several criteria; it is a course evaluation survey administered centrally by the University; and
- *end-of-semester post-LET self-reflection survey* – this documents tutors' own thinking at the end of the semester on their tutorial teaching practice and journey which is informed by the above surveys.

Tutors were also encouraged to write up notes on their own reflections on teaching practice at the end of the semester. These notes could outline actions that tutors were planning in order to address areas for development identified in the survey and observation feedback, and through their self-reflection.

The program was evaluated using Learner Experience of Unit (LEU) questionnaire results, which showed noticeable increases in student LEU tutorial ratings that outsourced increases in all other course evaluation questionnaire measurements. Third-party peer observation of teaching can be offered in conjunction with other student support programs such as Peer Assisted Learning (PAL). In this core undergraduate finance unit, the Subject convenor introduced PAL at the time of the third-party observation, so it was available for the duration of the sessional tutor teaching development program.

Summing UP

The peer observation model is drawn from professional development approaches emphasising collegiality and social construction of knowledge. The aim is to encourage academics to become actively engaged in finding new instructional insights that will benefit their learning and teaching efforts. One of its great advantages is that it can be initiated by anyone at any time, at any scale, and at differing levels of formality. It can thus be adapted to suit a range of needs and requirements.

During peer observation, academics collaborate with one another to visit each other's classes and look for insights that may assist them in improving their own teaching.

This is a very useful form of collegial professional development because staff are able to enrich their instructional repertoire and benefit from a variety of fresh perspectives, as well as obtain assistance from more experienced peers. Peer observation is not without constraints but as one lecturer emphasised:

Peer observation of teaching does pay off and is a great way to improve your teaching, your students' learning outcomes and experience!

If you want to KNOW MORE

If you would like to know more, here are some references on peer observation that you may find helpful. Most of them are available online and a few are websites with other links.

Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne & Centre for Educational Development and Interactive Resources, University of Wollongong (2008) *Peer review of teaching in Australian Higher Education*. Supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). Available online at: http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/PeerReviewHandbook_eVersion.pdf

Macquarie University, Learning and Teaching Centre. *Peer observation and review of teaching, units and programs*. Available online at: http://www.mq.edu.au/ltc/eval_teaching/peer_observation.htm

The Higher Education Academy: Available online at <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk> (This site has links to a number of publications on peer observation.)

University of Queensland Teaching and Educational Development Institute. *Peer review of teaching and learning*. Available online at: <http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/evaluations/resources/peerReview.html> (This site has links to a number of publications on peer observation.)

University of South Australia Learning Connection. *Peer review of teaching*. Available online at: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/ltu/staff/practice/evaluation/peer-review.asp> (This site has a description of peer observation with some links)

University of Sydney Institute for Teaching and Learning. *Gathering feedback from your colleagues*. Available online at: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/feedback/gathercolfeed.htm

University of Wisconsin Madison. *Peer review of teaching*. Available online at: <http://teachingacademy.wisc.edu/archive/Assistance/MOO/index.htm> (This site has links to other references)

And here are a few journal articles you might find interesting:

Bell, M. (2001) Supported reflective practice: A programme of peer observation and feedback for academic teaching development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 6(1), 29–39.

Bernstein, D.J. (2000) An examination of the implementation of peer review of teaching. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 83, 73–86.

Martin, G.A. & Double, J.M. (1998) Developing higher education teaching skills through peer observation and collaborative reflection. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 35(2), 161–170.

A note on THE APPENDICES

Macquarie University does not have official peer review instruments, however, to support staff in the process of peer review the following forms have been developed by the Learning and Teaching Centre to assist discussions, and can be modified as needed. We have included them here for you to use.

APPENDIX 1

Observation check list

Confidential

Teacher:		Observer:	
Observation date:		Timing:	
Activity type:		Unit:	

	Observed?	Brief comment
Planning/organisation/content		
Teaching purposes are clear and stated in appropriate term e.g. aims, outcomes etc		
Teaching purposes are appropriate to the needs, experience and abilities of students		
Structure of session: introduction, development, conclusion are evident		
Content is appropriate for the level, abilities, needs and interests of students		
Content is well researched and up-to-date		
Teaching strategies/resources		
Methods are appropriate to purposes of session		
Methods are chosen with regard to students' abilities, needs and needs of unit/content		
Methods are chosen to gain interest and participation		
Class management is effective and appropriate		
Resources are used effectively and complement content, methods and purposes		

Presentation, management		
Effective presentation/communication skills are used		
Employs effective use of questioning to promote monitoring and understanding		
Student contributions and participation are encouraged in a positive atmosphere		
Equal opportunities exist for all students		
Assessment/monitoring		
Suitable methods are used to identify and monitor student progress		
Constructive feedback is provided		

Extra comments:

Planning/organisation/content
Teaching strategies/resources
Presentation/class relationships/class management
Assessment and monitoring of students
Additional comments and suggestions for future development

When completed, this form stays with the observed teacher for their records

APPENDIX 2

Guidelines for observation – free response

Confidential

Teacher:		Observer:	
Observation date:		Timing:	
Activity type:		Unit:	

When recording in free response mode you might like to focus on some of the following: Context (e.g. links between other areas of the curriculum), Structure (well organised, key points signposted), Level pitch and pace (could students cope; any provision for students experiencing difficulties?), Clarity, Use of examples, Preparation undertaken by the teacher, Student responses, Interactions (between student & teacher or teacher & student), Involvement (active/passive?), Venue suitability (seating, lighting, AV aids).

When completed, this form stays with the observed teacher for their records

APPENDIX 3

Framework for observer's notes

Confidential

Teacher:		Observer:	
Observation date:		Timing:	
Activity type:		Unit:	

Planning the session

- how does the plan relate to the previous session?
- are there clear aims and objectives?
- how does the session fit with the overall program or unit outcomes?
- how are resources organised for the session?

Introduction

- is it clear how the work relates to other sessions?
- does the introduction set the scene and give an overview of outcomes expected?

Delivering and developing the session

- is the communication of ideas relevant, clear and coherent?
- is there opportunity for the students to clarify their understanding? How is this handled?
- what strategies are used to gain attention, and to ensure attention is maintained?
- are the students motivated?
- are the teaching methods appropriate to the tasks in hand?
- are there opportunities for the students to think, question and feedback?
- what modes of delivery are used; is more than one mode used?

Concluding the session

- is the session drawn to a satisfactory conclusion?
- is there a summary of the main ideas or a review of the point reached so far?
- does the conclusion look forward to the next session?

APPENDIX 4

Summary overview record and permission note

Section A (Please complete this part)			
Teacher:		Observer:	
Observation date:		Timing:	
Activity type:		Unit:	

We confirm that the observation has taken place and feedback has been given. We agree to the release of the information listed or attached below.

Observed..... Date.....

Observer..... Date.....

When completed, copy this form and give to your peer observation coordinator.

Section B (This part is optionally completed)
Summary of shared good practice – perhaps three things that went really well (either as part of the observation process or as teaching practice).
Any other agreed comments

APPENDIX 5

Observer record

Teacher:		Observer:	
Observation date:		Timing:	
Activity type:		Unit:	

Record your thoughts and comments on the experience of observing. This might include your impression of being an observer, examples of teaching methods that you might find useful in your own teaching.

When completed, this form stays with the observer for their records

This booklet is one of a series produced for the Learning Excellence and Development (LEAD) program. The program brings together as a team a multi-disciplinary group of university staff- general staff as well as academics – each working on a separate but related project to enhance student learning. The projects use an action research approach to nurture a research-based and responsive teaching culture. The program is managed by the Faculty of Business and Economics.



Do you want to:

- Get some new ideas to enhance your teaching?
- Improve the quality of your students' learning experience?
- Identify your own professional development needs?
- Collaborate with other teachers for mutual benefit?
- Obtain evidence of the excellence of your teaching practice for promotion applications?

Have you considered using peer observation?

Peer observation of teaching provides a structured framework for the improvement of teaching practices through peer collaboration, discussion and the dissemination of ideas. It can bring improved quality of student learning, an increased awareness of what material your colleagues are covering, and innovative ideas to brighten up your practice. This booklet will explain what peer observation is and help you through the process.

Faculty of Business and Economics
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