Peer observation as a tool for professional development

ATLAANZ December 2018

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Student Learning Te Taiako
Background

• Pressure on HE institutions to report on services provided, how well they do this and impacts and outcomes of these provisions (Office of the Auditor-General, 2012, p.28)

• This pressure means that units such as student learning centres have also been looking at how to evaluate their services (Gao & Reid, 2017, p.220)
Evaluation at Student Learning Te Taiako

• What we did in 2009, 2014 and 2017

• Peer observation in 2018
  – As part of regular professional development
  – To prevent us from becoming ‘isolated and routinized’ (Cosh, 1998, p. 173)
Some reminders from the literature

Peer observation is useful to prevent us from becoming ‘isolated and routinized’ (Cosh, 1998, p. 173)

• Purpose needs to be clear
• POP should be ‘formal’ rather than ad hoc – but not too formal. Structured, consistent and regular
• Anxiety re observation tends to decrease over time
• Important that POP does not become ‘stale’

From Hammersley-Fletcher & Osmond (2004)
How we carried out POP
Staff feedback

• The thought of doing [POP] was “a drag” but “the outcome was great”.

• Staff liked “autonomous” organization (reflected need for control and autonomy mentioned by Cosh, 1998)

• Confirmed that LA “was developing independent learners”.

• “Validated” my practice
Staff feedback

• Increased “connection” and “rapport” between staff.
  – “We trust each other”

• “Fostered understanding” of other people’s practice

• Was beneficial for both observer and person being observed

• I became “more conscious of the shape of my session”

• “I marvel that students trust us with their writing”
Some suggestions

• Re-format and shorten the form
  – Did the form ‘constrain’ (Shortland, 2010, p. 296) the session

• Schedule calendar time more deliberately for set-up and debrief straight after the POP sessions
  – Very time consuming, but need to make this a firm commitment
Some things to think about

• Giving constructive feedback is an ‘extremely demanding skill’ (Cosh, 1998, p. 172)
  – Learning Advisors might already have ‘an edge’ in this area (Gao & Reid, 2015:43)

• How willing are people to accept feedback?
The [potential] problem of ‘cosiness’

“I don’t think there’s any benefit in having your best mate who’s also down the corridor”

Hammersley-Fletcher & Osmond (2004: 496)

“I found myself my own best critic”

(Donnelly, 2007: 127)
Quick student survey

- IPad at reception
- 5 short questions
- carried out over the 6 week POP period
- not necessarily the students involved in POP

Results suggest that LAs

- encourage active participation
- help students leave with a clear action plan
- build confidence in general and in development of skills for the future
1 What did you want to discuss in your appointment? (n=141)
   98 assignment planning and writing
   10 reading and note-taking
   9  oral presentations
   24 other including maths and stats help and time management
       and unspecified issues

2 Did you participate actively in your discussion? (n=110)
   106 yes
   3  no
   1  not sure
3 Did you leave with a clear and manageable action plan? (n=107)
   106 yes
   1 not sure

4 Will you be able to do similar tasks in the future? (n=108)
   103 yes
   5 not sure

5 Are you more confident as a result of the appointment? (n=108)
   104 yes
   2 no
   2 not sure
References


