

# Peer observation as a tool for professional development

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## Student Learning Te Taiako

Welcome to  
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

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