

Sharing online teaching and learning practices

Peer review of teaching practice: alternatives to classroom observation

[UAL's Peer Observation Scheme](#) recognises the developmental benefits of peer review of teaching practice. All staff on teaching contracts undertake peer review at least once every 3 years.

Now is a great time to review teaching practice. Either out of opportunity or necessity, many of us are now teaching differently, and peer review is an effective means of developing and sharing our knowledge of new modes of teaching. Our students are currently spread around the world, and online learning provides the opportunity for peer observation to be likewise dispersed. Why not review practice with a colleague from another programme or College, or even a different institution altogether?

'...in peer observation of classroom teaching, it is often the case that the observer learns at least as much as the observed. Peer observation is more about mutual peer learning, and is not a matter simply of the observed learning from the observer.' (Marshall 2004, p.187)

Brief a colleague to observe you

You will both get more out of the review if the reviewer knows the following:

- Why this session/activity has been chosen for review
- The context of this session/activity in the curriculum (placement & purpose)
- A brief history of the teacher's work with this group
- The expected learning outcomes for the session/activity & how they relate to the course outcomes
- The anticipated outputs from the session/activity (anything students will make/do)
- Any potential difficulties or areas of concern
- How students will be informed of the observation
- What the teacher would particularly like feedback on
- How you would both prefer feedback to be exchanged

Differences observing online practices

'...the fundamental contribution of the peer observer lies not in the production of a record but rather in the pivotal role of 'the other in stimulating opportunities for reflection' (Peel 2005, p.498) and providing a third-party perspective in interpreting practice.' (Bennett & Barp 2008, p.566).

Online interactions are very different to being in a physical classroom. It is not that there is necessarily more or less information to review, so much as the information being of a different nature. Pre- and post- session interactions *may* appear to be of greater relevance for an online session than an in-person one, so you may wish to including organisational exchanges and related online discussions in a review of online teaching. However, the wealth and variety of information available can be overwhelming for a peer reviewer, so agree limits on what will be taken into account at the outset.

Provided an online session has been recorded, there is less of a need for the reviewer to document things that they may have done when reviewing in-person, for example timings, what the teacher said and how, student contributions, etc. The reviewer may still comment on these aspects, but if the teacher can review the recording themselves, this activity should be incorporated into the process.

Need some inspiration? Suggestions for peer review activities

Here are some ideas of activities you can use to reflect on and share your practice at this time. Let us know if you have any others:

1. Peer discussion of self-evaluation of online teaching

Watch back a recording of an online session you've taught. Note down what you observe, and some questions and/or suggestions. Send your recording and your own self-evaluation to your peer. Exchange your thoughts and ideas.

2. Design & plan for online learning with peer feedback

Write an action plan in the form of a table, map or diagram to show how you are going to move to online teaching, and why you are doing it this way. Your peer can either annotate and/or exchange text-based feedback, or you can discuss. Amend the plan as necessary.

3. Peer discussion of task, resource or brief

Share a task, resource or brief you've created with your peer for review. Exchange your thoughts and ideas.

4. Peer discussion of work in progress and formative feedback

Invite your peer to review students' online work in progress and your input/feedback. They might log in several times over the course of the activity. Exchange your thoughts and ideas.

5. Peer discussion of outcomes and assessment

Share students' final outcome(s) and assessment feedback with your peer. Exchange your thoughts and ideas.

References

Bennett, S., & Barp, D. 2008. Peer observation – a case for doing it online. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(5), pp.559–570.

Marshall, B. 2004. Learning from the academy: From peer observation of teaching to peer enhancement of learning and teaching. *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 1(2), pp.185–204.

Peel, D. 2005. Peer observation as a transformatory tool? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10(4), pp.489–504.

*Lindsay Jordan & Katharine Dwyer 2020
Teaching, Learning & Employability Exchange*