

Developing collegial relationships: Students providing feedback on staff teaching and assessment practices



Traditional Peer Review Process

What is *peer review*?

- Often characterised by an educator being observed by their peer in a lecture or class, and providing constructive feedback on their teaching process.

Why do it?

- To enhance collegiality, develop reflection and improve teaching practices.

What are the current concerns?

- May encourage conformity in teaching and increase the resistance to change.
- 'Review' has managerial and accountability connotations.
- Teaching that occurs online, in informal spaces and in labs or workshops may be implicitly denigrated.
- There is a danger of cliques and complacency.

Students instead of peers!

Why invite students to be colleagues in the review process?

- Students provide staff with an authentic insight into the student perspective.
- Interrupts notion of authority and who is the 'expert'.
- Enculturation into the professional world of teaching.
- Provides a large pool of keen volunteers to engage in, and stimulate, staff development activities.
- Creates student engagement and agency – *Academic Citizenship*.
- Students develop professional capacities through training and practice.

Students as Colleagues in the Review of Teaching Practices Project

- Innovative pilot project conducted across university academic year 14/15.
- 18 staff members and 18 students volunteered to take part and were randomly paired, across disciplines and campuses.
- Students attended training sessions that explored issues on:

Professionalism, trust & confidentiality

What makes 'good' teaching practice?

Golden values of feedback

Evaluation versus judgement

Students were trained and supported to provide constructive feedback to their paired member of staff for the following exercises in Trimester 2:

Trimester Week	Evaluative Exercise
December onwards	Review associated Moodle pages and course material
From Week 2	Observe (minimum of) one lecture/workshop/tutorial
From Week 3	Conduct a small focus group with staff member's students
After coursework has been marked	Review feedback examples from assessed coursework

The lecture began with an interactive quiz. For the most part, the students were engaging with this activity...However, some of the students were using the quiz time as an opportunity to use their mobiles to check their social media sites. The lecturer then moved on to the new topic and presented using PowerPoint slides...The pace of the lecture was quite fast and did not allow for any student note taking, which seemed to result in the students disengaging instead of listening. Each slide contained a lot of information, but the use of graphics within them was useful and relevant to the written word. (*Sophie, First Year Student*)

The lecture slides included those from other lecturers and therefore there was not a uniform 'brand' for the module, perhaps this could be an area for future development to really differentiate this module and give it an even greater sense of being unique and different...Discussion boards were available but basically not used by students. Is this an area for future development? It is likely to only work if there is a compulsory assessed element. What are the 'employability skills' benefits for this? (*Emma, Postgraduate Student*)

Even though students have enjoyed the case study and the idea of it, they believe that there was not enough guidance. It was a first time they were doing a task like this. Even though there was an opportunity to ask questions and there was an informational session about this, students feel that the expectations were not clear. Their suggestion is to hold the informational lecture/tutorial sooner and not 4 days before deadline. It would have also been useful to go through an example. (*Stephanie, Second Year Student*)

You give the student hints and tips on how to reach the final outcome and don't just tell them. This allows the students to continue with their thought processes and can lead them on a journey, in which they can learn and explore other options open to them. Your feedback is very in-depth and there is lots of it! Which is great to see, as students generally want advice on how they can better themselves instead of a few words written on a page e.g. saying this is wrong do it again and make it better, and the students have got no idea where they went wrong or what to do next. (*Cara, First Year Student*)

Reflections

Overall students felt very comfortable with first 3 activities, but less so with reviewing staff feedback on assignments. *Why?*

- Ethical issues with ensuring assignment scripts' anonymity so not many students had option to do this activity.
- Students may not have felt that they had authority to question the type of assessment prescribed by the staff member.
- It is a tough ask for students to understand assessment and feedback criteria as it is often 'black-boxed'.

Students reviewing assessment and feedback is an important area to incorporate in *Students as Colleagues* going forward because:

- To be 'good' at teaching practices, staff need to be thoughtful and informed about designing appropriate assessment and feedback.
- Useful activity for students to understand how staff perceive feedback and reflect on their own feedback.

However, more support and training could be provided for students to feel comfortable reviewing and supporting assessment and feedback techniques.