



# Develop your Teaching through Peer Review

**Janet MacDonald and Clare Kell**

Teaching is a task undertaken by many health care professionals, often without the opportunity to analyse and further develop these skills. Peer review of teaching is a chance for colleagues to help each other explore the whole range of their teaching practice. Modern approaches to peer review value the full range of teaching activities and learning settings. The possibilities are endless but you may wish to use peer review of your teaching to address one of the following questions. What do you do that affects the learning of others? How do you know you are being effective? Are your sessions and materials accessible to different types of learner and styles of learning? What are you trying to do with the feedback you give – what lasting impact does it have on the learner? Peer review of teaching activities can offer an excellent opportunity for individuals to reflect on their current teaching and identify ways in which some of these issues can be considered.

## Establishing the climate

Essentially peer review of teaching is centred around facilitating the reflective practice of the person who is teaching and a reflective dialogue should ensue. This is difficult to achieve without a sense of safety and trust within the relationship. A key aspect of peer review of teaching is that it should be developmental rather than judgemental and the reviewee should have an opportunity to decide what the focus of the review should be.

## Some Steps to Follow

While there is a range of possible foci for peer review of teaching, the reflective dialogue is most effective when it follows the steps below. Please note that, dependent upon the topic of the review, the data collection stage may merge with the reflective dialogue session.

### Step 1: Advance Meeting

#### Reviewer

- ▶ Meet your peer partner (reviewee) to discuss the context, purpose and scope of the peer review.
- ▶ Try to find out what is important in the reviewee's view of teaching.

#### Reviewee

- ▶ Use the meeting to establish the ground rules for the process including the extent to which confidentiality applies.
- ▶ Try to find out what is important in the reviewer's view of teaching.
- ▶ Discuss your learning styles and approaches.

## Step 2: Discuss the focus of the peer review

### Reviewer

- ▶ Establish what evidence/data would the reviewee like you to collect to support the reflective dialogue.
- ▶ Identify how and when this data will be collected e.g. will you sit in a room mapping teacher/learner activity for an hour or will you read all the formative comments written on a piece of work?

### Reviewee

- ▶ You need to consider whether you wish to have a specific aspect of your teaching reviewed or are you trying out something new?

## Step 3: Collect the evidence

### Reviewer

- ▶ Collect the data or any evidence that will support the reflective dialogue.
- ▶ The evidence may also include a search of the related generic and/or subject-specific literature. You may want to consider what is recognised as good practice within GP teaching? What theory underpins this practice?

## Step 4: The reflective dialogue

### Reviewer

- ▶ Help the reviewee to explore their practice, its underpinning assumptions and effects on learning based upon the evidence collected.
- ▶ It is good practice to adopt a 'question-only' approach. This will help maximise the reflective practice and forestall the urge to say 'Well, I would have . . .!'

### Reviewee

- ▶ As the meeting concludes, it is helpful for both parties to exchange 'gains' from the peer review process. This is an opportunity for you both to acknowledge the contribution of the other to your learning.
- ▶ If your Practice does not require outcomes for dissemination, it might be appropriate to consider how to disseminate features of your peer review findings/process/innovations that would be of interest to others e.g. meetings, newsletters, teaching sessions.

## Step 5: Implications for your practice – the key step

### Reviewer

- ▶ Document how the process has informed your own teaching practice.

### Reviewee

- ▶ Record/write a reflective account of the effects on your teaching of undertaking the peer review process.

## Gains

There are many potential gains for both the reviewer and reviewee but also for the Practice in terms of improving the quality of teaching. The process can:

- ▶ Promote discussion and dissemination of good practice within your Practice
- ▶ Provide material for CPD portfolios
- ▶ Identify areas for development and enable the production of an action plan.

## Conclusions

Peer review should form an integral part of all teaching activities carried out in a variety of teaching settings. It is crucial that it is perceived as and implemented in a developmental manner with no judgemental elements included. A strong element is one of reflection with the reviewer entering into a reflective dialogue with the reviewee. In many situations people often feel more comfortable if they identify 'peer partners' where they each review the other's teaching with mutual gain.

## Further Information

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

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