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Peer observation of teaching in university departments: a framework for implementation

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Academics in an engineering school at an Australian university participated in peer observation of a teaching program using a partnership approach. The present case study explains and discusses program aims, design, process and outcomes. The success of the program was dependent on four critical elements: educational leadership; a staged, voluntary, opt-in/out-out process involving a hands-on preparatory workshop and trial observation; partnering early-career and experienced academic staff; and an 'external to faculty' coordinator. The importance of these four elements, the stages of the program and the impact on the development of collegiality within the school and aspects of the teaching role are discussed. This case offers further insights into the complexities of peer observation of teaching and a tested framework for introducing peer observation of teaching programs within schools and departments.

Keywords: academic leadership; collegiality; higher education; peer observation of teaching; peer observation partnerships

Introduction

How does a head of school (HOS) or department lead the teaching development of the academic team? This leadership challenge can be met through utilizing an often overlooked resource for professional development, that is, the team members. Peer observation, as a strategy for peer review of teaching, has been reported as effective for professional development of university teachers (Barnard, Croft, Irons, Cuffe, & Bandara, 2011; Bell, 2001; Blackwell & McLean, 1996; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; McMahon, Barrett, & O'Neill, 2007; Shortland, 2004). Bennett and Barp (2008) report on the challenges of peer observation in the online environment. More broadly, peer observation of teaching has been seen to support the development of a collegial culture within departments and universities (Bell, 2001; Martin & Double, 1998). Guides to peer observation practice have been published (Bell, 2005a; Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001; Gosling & O'Connor, 2006). Projects funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council have published a handbook for developing and embedding peer review of teaching policies and practices (Harris, Farrell, Bell, Devlin, & James, 2008) and a set of protocols, processes and tools for peer review of teaching (Crisp et al., 2009).

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Bennett and Barp (2008) report that peer observation of teaching is increasingly a feature of higher education practice. According to Byrne, Brown, and Challen (2010, p. 215): 'many higher education institutions worldwide require that all academic staff undergo a peer observation of teaching each academic year'. This is not the case in Australia, however. Bell (2002) reported that peer observation of teaching was encouraged in a number of universities and used within some educational development programs, yet by 2008 Harris et al. reported that peer observation of teaching had 'little or no prominence in university policies' and was 'not universally practised in Australian universities' (Harris et al. 2008, p. 3). Thus, in Australian higher education, peer observation of teaching is not yet commonplace.

As Harris et al. (2008) note, implementing peer review of teaching within universities is not a simple or straightforward undertaking, touching as it does on sensitive professional issues. Various concerns have been reported, including the use of observation of teaching by management as a tool for compliance (Shortland, 2004); and links to appraisal, damage to confidence, lack of confidentiality and personal vulnerability (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005). Byrne et al. (2010, p. 225) reported a program in which peer observation was experienced as 'overly introspective'; 'mutual backslapping'; 'lacking any meaningful function'; and 'something to be "ticked off" the annual job list'.

Clearly peer observation of teaching, as with any form of professional development, has its limitations. As yet there is a lack of robust research studies, so it is not always possible to assess the quality of reported peer observation initiatives; however, where an initiative is evaluated negatively it should not be assumed that peer observation has failed because of the nature of the thing itself. Rather, the initiatives should themselves be critiqued with attention paid to program aims and process. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004), Lomas and Kinchin (2006) and McMahon et al. (2007) write of the importance of sensitive management to take account of anxieties and concerns of staff while stressing the importance of process. The case reported here paid close attention to these factors.

Authors such as Byrne et al. (2010) and Gosling and O'Connor (2006, 2009) seek a broader platform for professional development that is not bound by the constraints of that which can be observed. 'We need a wider understanding of what the peer review process will include to go beyond observing teaching to consideration of all aspects of curriculum design, learning support and assessment' (Gosling, 2002, p. 4). Indeed a teacher's 'performance' is only one aspect of the teaching role; however, the ways in which teachers facilitate the learning experience for students in the face-to-face environment are of such significance to the student experience of learning that gathering peer feedback on observed teaching remains an extraordinary professional opportunity within the spectrum of strategies for peer review.

As yet, little guidance is available for designing and implementing specifically department-/school-based peer observation of teaching programs and few reports of school-/department-based programs are found in the literature. Of these, Webb and McEnerney (1995) provide useful process details for training and Martin and Double (1998) discuss careful program design. The present paper presents a case study into a peer review of teaching program in a school of engineering at an Australian university during the year 2009. Positive outcomes related to teaching skills and approaches were reported; however, the development of collegiality within the school and the significance of the process are the focus of the present paper. The success of the program was dependent on four critical elements: (1) educational leadership by the HOS; (2) a staged, voluntary, opt-in/opt-out process; (3) forming groups of early-career and experienced academic staff as equal partners; and (4) an 'external to faculty' coordinator. This case study outlines in detail the process that led to a positive response from all participants who took part in each stage of the program. A framework has been developed from the process that may be instructive for any head of school/department or faculty seeking to implement a peer observation of teaching program.

Background

Several motivating factors led to the HOS's decision to implement a peer observation program. Formal student evaluation reports suggested improvements could be made to teaching and some staff had not engaged in teaching development for several years. The HOS believed that staff were missing the opportunity to improve and enjoy teaching more by looking at what others did and reflecting on their own teaching in depth. He wanted to involve all staff, including those perceived by colleagues and students as not particularly interested in teaching. The HOS wanted to develop collegiality within the school, which he explained as active participation of all school members in improving teaching, assisting and supporting each other, developing trust and, ultimately, for the school to develop shared goals and objectives rather than having them imposed from above by the HOS and/or dean of faculty.

The HOS and coordinator designed the program (Table 1) to encourage and support staff and to ensure positive experiences and outcomes, demonstrate the ways in which peer observation could take place, and recognize and take part in the cultural change within the school.

The program design was based on an existing program that had been in place within the university's foundations of teaching course for over 14 years. That program was seen to have overcome the criticisms and perceived limitations of peer observation reported in the literature. The approach drew on Brookfield's (1995) four lenses on teaching practice to situate peer observation as a peer review strategy within the broader spectrum of evidence-based feedback on teaching (Figure 1).

A further key principle was the concept of feedback as a non-judgemental dialogue between 'critical friends' as explicated by Stenhouse (1975) and Handal (1999):

> A critical friend can support us in exploring the consistency between (a) what we believe about teaching, (b) what we actually do in our teaching, and (c) the formal theory and practice of education. This type of partnership helps us develop the habit of individual, and collaborative, critical reflection. (Bell, 2005a, p. 8)

This conceptualization of 'feedback' as dialogue not judgement mitigates the concern that staff may be ill-equipped to make judgements about the quality of observed teaching, or that normative aspects of peer observation of teaching may reduce the potential to support individuality (Gosling & O'Connor, 2009).

The program was voluntary, with participants able to opt-out at any stage according to their own level of comfort and workload. In offering a staged opt-in/opt-out program the HOS intended to maximize participation in the early stages, raising awareness and breaking down barriers, thus preparing staff to participate in a partnership within their own time-frames. The HOS asked discipline leaders to join him in providing trial observation sessions after the preparatory workshop in Stage 2. Staff were invited to sit in informally on their lectures or tutorials with a

Table 1. Peer observation program outline.

Stage	Detail
1. School meeting	HOS and the coordinator present information on proposed peer observation program at school meeting.
2. Program development	Coordinator and HOS tailor program and choose appropriate resources.
3. Discipline leaders meeting	Proposed program presented to discipline leaders and refined following feedback.
4. Preparatory workshop	Two-hour workshop designed to provide information and skills needed to participate effectively and support colleagues. All school staff requested to attend. Workshop presented by coordinator involving role-play and skills demonstration. (i) Introduction to workshop, topic and process (ii) Pre-observation planning (iii) Teaching observation (iv) Participants write, discuss, refine feedback (v) DVD *Giving and Receiving Feedback* (Bell, 2005b) (vi) Giving/receiving verbal feedback (vii) Reflecting on feedback (viii) Outline forthcoming program
5. Trial observation sessions	HOS and discipline leaders offered lectures/tutorials for informal observation and discussion.
6. Partnerships formed	Interested staff confidentially email coordinator indicating staff with whom they would like to work. Coordinator forms groups.
7. Resources	Participants provided with HERDSA Guide as a handbook: *Peer Observation Partnerships in Higher Education* (Bell, 2005a).
8. Planning meetings	Groups plan observations with input from coordinator where requested.
9. Observations and feedback	Observations according to each group's plan. Groups meet for feedback and discussion with support of coordinator where requested.
10. Evaluation	Post-program questionnaire and interview administered by coordinator.
11. Report	Formal report provided to HOS, dean of faculty, deputy vice-chancellor academic, and all participants.
12. Planning proforma	Action planning proforma for follow-up activities provided to participants.

Notes: HOS, head of school; HERDSA, Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

follow-up discussion in order to demonstrate the ways in which peer observation could take place. Those who then opted out of the partnership stage (Stage 3) would, therefore, have the basis for joining a partnership in a future semester.

Of the school's full-time teaching staff, all 20 attended the workshop; 18 of these attended a trial observation; and 12 (including the HOS) joined a partnership. Of the eight who chose not to participate in a partnership, two were already partnered in an equivalent central program and three would not be available during the program. It is known that three of the staff who did not participate in partnerships did so in a later semester when the program was continued by the new HOS and coordinator.

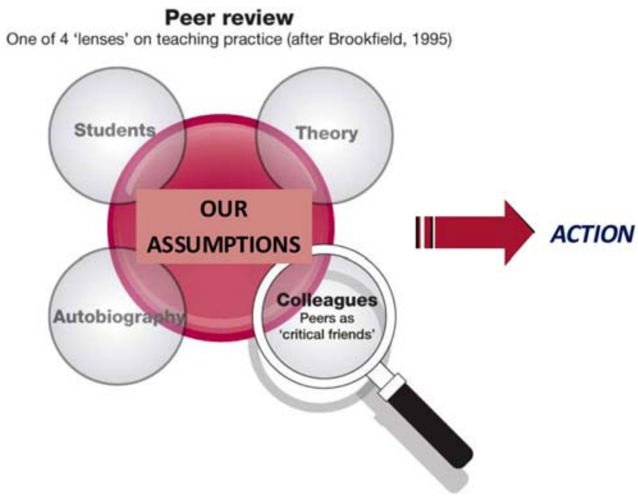

Figure 1. Four lenses on teaching.

Method and project evaluation

At the request of the HOS, the program was evaluated by the coordinator (the author of the present paper), an educational developer with experience in coordinating peer observation programs. As a non-faculty member the coordinator may be considered an 'outsider'; however, she had worked with many faculty members on various professional development programs over a number of years. It was agreed that the advantage of evaluation by the coordinator as 'outsider' would be augmented by those 'insider' characteristics noted by Chesterton and Rick (2007), including an understanding of the context and a pre-existing network of contacts. Through a case study method, as outlined by Stake (2000), it was hoped to understand the experiences of the participants and study the design, coordination and outcomes of the program.

All 12 Stage 3 participants completed a questionnaire and were interviewed. Categories were pre-set from the program aims and structure and further themes emerged from interview data. The questionnaire used two demographic questions, four multiple-choice questions, nine Likert scale questions and one open-ended question. Interview data were gathered by the coordinator by semi-structured interview, audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Questions covered reasons for participating, overall impressions, outcomes, strengths, improvements, trial observations, preparatory workshop, program coordination and future plans. Data were not gathered from those who opted out after Stage 2 as the HOS wanted to avoid the possibility of prejudicing future involvement of these staff members. Anonymous interview comments are used as illustrative quotes.

Responses to key elements of the program

The program was overwhelmingly positively evaluated by all 12 Stage 3 participants through questionnaire and interview with regard to teaching skills and ideas, confidence, collegiality, giving and receiving feedback, resources and training (Table 2). Key aspects of the program evaluation are discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections.

Table 2. Questionnaire data.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral or N/A	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The peer observation program helped me develop my teaching skills	3	7	1	0	1
I got some useful ideas for teaching	3	8	1	0	0
The peer observation program helped me develop my confidence in teaching	3	6	1	2	0
The peer observation program helped develop a collegial approach to teaching in the school.	5	7	0	0	0
The peer observation program helped me develop a collegial relationship with the other members of the group	7	4	0	0	1
The peer observation program helped me develop my skills in giving feedback	3	8	1*	0	0
The peer observation program helped me develop my skills in receiving feedback	3	8	1*	0	0
The *Peer Observation Partnerships* booklet was helpful	5	4	3	0	0
The preparatory workshop was effective in preparing me for the peer observation program	7	5	0	0	0

Notes: Written comment on the questionnaire indicated the participant already felt their teaching skills were highly developed; *at the time of the questionnaire one participant had not met with their group for feedback.

Preparatory workshop

The preparatory workshop was designed to explain each step in the process and to provide practice in observation and feedback. Early in the workshop a 10-minute ‘teaching session’ was role-played, followed by participants writing, discussing and refining forms of written feedback including free-form notes, classroom interaction maps, and a variety of checklists sourced from Bell (2005a). An in-house DVD (Bell, 2005b) demonstrated three scenarios of giving and receiving feedback (directive, defensive and collaborative). Representatives from some of the groups role-played giving verbal feedback to the coordinator. The problematic nature of giving and receiving feedback, highlighted in the DVD and in the live role-plays, was discussed working through the stages of discussion outlined in the handbook (Bell, 2005a). The feedback scenarios helped participants to understand the importance of mutual respect in their discussions: ‘Without the video many of us would have fallen into the trap of thinking we were giving straightforward feedback but being hurtful’ (05).

Each of these feedback sessions was followed by discussion of the forms of feedback given, the resultant response, the usefulness of reference to proposed learning outcomes for the teaching session, the educational principles underpinning the feedback provided, and the role of the ‘critical friend’. Role-play and discussion were useful in dealing with some of the problematic issues in feedback such as mutual reinforcement of assumptions and less than effective practices (Gosling, 2002; Chism, 2007). Some of the ideas demonstrated in role play included feedback beginning with partners discussing the teaching plan for the session prior to the observation, and feedback as dialogue. The teaching session that was role-played demonstrated learning outcomes for the class as in conflict with the observed teaching strategies, which led to a discussion on the ways to achieve desired outcomes rather than what comprised 'good teaching'.

All participants agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop was effective in preparing for the program, helping reduce concerns and fears:

> It certainly gave a good insight into the way in which it was going to be done and allowed people to explore the kind of challenges as well as the process, and hopefully took some of the fears out of it. (02)

Good attendance and the level of discussion surprised some people: 'I thought it was good in setting the scene, and sort of setting an agenda. I found it most useful actually. Surprising thing so many turned up, I guess, because of the emphasis in this place on research' (10). The workshop was seen by some as important in getting broad involvement and the HOS believed the workshop to be a critical factor in the success of the program.

Trial observation

Almost all of those interviewed found the trial observation was an informal, commitment-free opportunity to see what peer observation would be like and, importantly, they demonstrated the commitment and support of senior staff:

> I guess the purpose of it was an icebreaker, to show that the world wasn't going to end if somebody comes and watches your class. Half-a-dozen people came and saw my different lectures... and so therefore enabled the whole process to proceed. (05)

The HOS initiated the trial observations as a key 'stepping stone' in the whole process: 'So the sequence of having a workshop about what the whole process is about, having an initial observation that everybody goes to and then the coordinator helps people into that first small group interaction, it's quite important' (HOS).

The peer observation partnerships

It was recognized that in the formation of partnerships each member of staff might have colleagues with whom they felt more or less confident working, and groups were formed by the coordinator on that basis. All partners were provided with a copy of the handbook (Bell, 2005a) and all reported that it was a helpful resource, for example: 'That resource was quite a key resource. I only read the bits that I needed to read very soon before each observation or meeting but it was still a key document because everybody was on the same page' (07). The partners reported various outcomes including development of a range of skills and ideas for teaching. All participants commented that the program was, in various ways, useful, effective, and valuable. Two recently arrived academics commented that the program helped orient them to teaching in Australia:

> I was in China before, and also know how to be an effective teacher, but this is a different country, you go to class pretty differently, so this is why I'm keen to look at my colleagues use a different style. (03)

In interview, all participants commented on the developing collegiality and sense of cohesion across the school, mentioning the building of relationships and camaraderie. Several early-career academics mentioned a positive change in their approach to senior staff; for example:

> I found the other side of [senior colleagues] so I feel much closer to them and also I have a chance to express my points, which apparently they as senior teachers can appreciate, so I feel better and I feel I can talk. If I have other ideas I can just go directly. (09)

One noted a new sense of freedom to discuss things with senior academics as equals: 'I'm an early-career lecturer and I was giving feedback to the senior lecturers. It puts you on a more level field. Not that you probably shouldn't be anyway because we're all lecturers down the corridor' (04). For a young, female academic the opportunity to work in partnership with senior academics dispelled some myths:

> I'm finding it's good because they are pretty senior staff and I'm just new and the junior one. So normally I wouldn't have a chance to talk to them about the lecture skills. This provides me opportunity to discuss with them and also, from their feedback I find they are quite nice persons, you know, not as I initially thought. (12)

All survey respondents agreed that the program helped develop a collegial approach. The notion of collegiality is complex, however, and it has been argued that the notion of collegiality may simply be a positive view of a climate of conformity. Fischer (2009, p. 22), in discussing AAUP (American Association of University Professors) criticisms that a climate of collegiality risks 'weeding out the gadflies, critics, and malcontents' leaving 'a pall of stale uniformity' on what should be a 'scene of vibrant debate', proposes that harmonious human relations can actually make dissent easier. The findings from this case study support Fischer's view that collegiality, rather than causing conformity, can make dissent easier. In this case it is clear that conformity was not a result of the program. Indeed participants valued the difference they observed and were comfortable with offering what might have been perceived as critical comments to senior staff.

For some participants, feedback affirmed their approach or helped build confidence. One participant found that observing experienced colleagues teach helped develop a realistic view of teaching standards: 'Before I was not sure how good or bad I was doing. I have observed experienced colleagues. Now if I stumble I know I am human' (09). The importance of this opportunity for early-career academics was discussed by a senior academic, pointing out: 'It was a useful exercise, seeing younger guys having the training we didn't receive… and you don't have to sort of struggle with it yourself, trial and error, as you work your way through your career' (08). The link between the development of a collegial approach and the giving of feedback was important for several senior academics. The interactions that occurred as a part of the program helped the important shift to collegiality, for example:

> It was very enlightening to see how other people do things and it was really good to be able to offer less experienced people advice and it was really good to get that advice from peers in particular. We had a range of people in our group from [Professor] at the top down to people who have got much less experience, and to get

[Professor]'s ideas was absolutely brilliant, but also the people at the bottom are coming in and saying 'Did you know this was happening?' (02)

Rather than building conformity the climate that was developed enhanced the confidence of early-career academics in particular to offer feedback to their seniors:

That was a huge outcome, a very successful outcome. Just to talk about these things as colleagues, it's just amazing – it was a wonderful thing. It's not something you get in research because you're not watching somebody perform when they're researching. You're just discussing this third party inanimate information. I mean it can be exciting but it's not a personal thing you're talking about, the research, the knowledge. Whereas when you're watching somebody else and then interpreting what they've done and commenting on what they've done, it's quite a strong interpersonal interaction that requires a lot of trust. (HOS)

An 'external' coordinator

A broad perspective on the role of facilitator for the partnership groups was expressed in the following way:

Definitely an advantage having someone on the outside coming in, who is experienced and seen all this before, explaining some things and pointing out some of the bits and pieces in the handbook which was useful... And to explain in general terms what was going to happen and the purposes behind it. (08)

The coordinator's role within the partnership groups varied according to each group's request. Two groups worked independently, a third group requesting some facilitation and the fourth group requesting facilitation after their first feedback meeting. Other roles of the coordinator across the partnerships that were mentioned included: someone who can help suggest ideas and increase awareness, help in difficult situations, and support early-career academics:

I thought that was actually quite important [the coordinator] could provide support without having any bias... you haven't got any political baggage associated with teaching in the school, because you're from outside. I think people were probably much more comfortable about saying... 'I'm not okay to work with these people' to an external because they're neutral... the fact that you are someone we could go to and say, 'we found this – it's really difficult; have you got some suggestions or some ideas?' is also valuable. (01)

Most participants responded positively to the role of the coordinator and the importance of a facilitator who is seen as unbiased seems significant in supporting the program.

Leadership

The prerequisites for an effective school-/department- or faculty-based peer observation program include clear and agreed intentions and a structured and organized approach that involves training (Blackwell & McLean, 1996). Any educational change process requires a fine balance of pressure and support (Fullan, 1991), and implementing peer observation is no exception. Bryman (2007) refers to aspects of leadership that are especially significant at departmental level in universities, including: trustworthiness and personal integrity; acting as a role model; and fostering a positive/collegial atmosphere. Martin, Trigwell, Prosser, and Ramsden (2003), Ramsden (2003) and Scott, Coates, and Anderson (2008) all confirm the importance of role-modelling by academic leaders. The HOS in the present study offered the following comment:

> I always knew that you had to lead by example. So that's why we had the initial trial observations, to let people get their feet wet. Just be in somebody else's lecture instead of launching into peer observation and I'm absolutely convinced that's the best way to do it. (HOS)

Effective educational leaders create a sense of community among staff, model the culture they want to develop and take on the role of learner (Fullan & Scott, 2009):

> Well, it's a cultural change – trying to shift the culture. The culture has been that one would never expect to see a colleague in your lecture or tutorial and so it's a big barrier, and to be observed is a big threshold. So we got everybody to step over the threshold of observing somebody and I just wanted to try and get people to feel that it wasn't such a big deal. (HOS)

The HOS joined the staff as an equal partner in the learning process, building a perception about teaching as a public activity and modelling the attitudes, values and activities of the program. Several participants commented on the leadership of the HOS and one early-career academic noted:

> We were reassured that this will be a very friendly atmosphere and it showed us that we should be very candid to each other so I won't be too much punished even if I did worse… and the other is the pushing force from (HOS)… encouraging us like all time, so we think this is not really something like email – we read it and forget about it. (09)

Comments from two of the experienced academics also point to the importance of trust: 'It's important to make sure [the program] doesn't all blow up … because it could be undermined pretty easily – you've got to have trust' (05); and of leaders participating as equals: 'The people who were leading the activity were prepared to be involved in it; they weren't just saying, 'Oh, this is good for you – you go and do it and I'll watch from the outside' (01).

A framework for school-/department-based peer observation of teaching

Following the process documented in the present case study, a framework for school-/department-based peer observation of teaching (Figure 2) has been developed that could be applied to a range of university schools and departments.

The framework explicates the stages of a flexible program tailored to school/department needs. The framework is supported by four critical elements: (1) educational leadership by the HOS; (2) staged, voluntary, opt-in/opt-out process; (3) groups of early-career and experienced academic staff as equal partners; and (4) external to faculty coordinator. Stage 1 (Initiation) includes: (i) planning the program, choosing resource materials and other requirements, discussing opportunities and overcoming any possible threats; (ii) gaining agreement from discipline leaders to participate and offer trial observation sessions; (iii) presentation to all staff demystifying peer observation principles and practices. Stage 2 (Preparation)

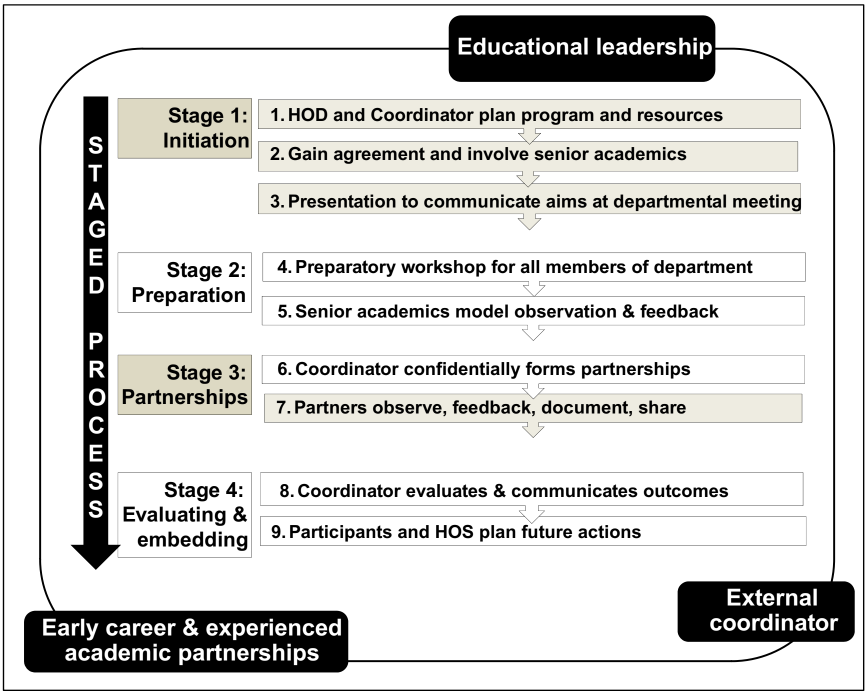

Figure 2. Framework for school-/department-based peer observation of teaching.

includes: (iv) hands-on, preparatory workshop focusing on practice in verbal and written feedback with the underpinning concept of 'critical friends'; (v) educational leaders modelling trial observation sessions. Stage 3 (Partnership) includes: (vi) coordinator forming partnership groups of early-career and experienced academics according to confidential choice; (vii) partners working through observation, feedback, sharing ideas and reflections. Stage 4 (Evaluation and embedding) includes: (viii) program evaluation and communicating outcomes to participants and stakeholders; and (ix) participants documenting reflections and plans for further professional development.

Conclusion

The present study reports on a staged, voluntary, opt-in/op-out peer observation program within an engineering school at an Australian university. Almost all available staff participated in Stage 2 of the program and those in Stages 2–3 reported very strong positive outcomes in the development of teaching skills, approaches, perspectives and confidence. It was not possible to follow-up this case study to evaluate longer-term outcomes; however, Stage 3 has been continued by the new HOS and some of the staff who opted out of Stage 3 are now reported as participating in partnerships, suggesting that the opt-in/opt-out staged program strategy has drawn more academics into partnerships over time. The case supports the use of school-/department-based peer observation of teaching programs in developing teaching skills and approaches and in building collegiality among junior and senior staff members.

Counter-productive efforts are likely to arise when implementation of peer observation has been clumsy (Blackwell & McLean, 1996); however, in this case only positive views were expressed by the participants. Potential problems and concerns were overcome through educational leadership, attention to process, trial observation sessions, effective training and confidential partner choice. It is, therefore, proposed that where peer observation is conceived broadly as a partnership of equals and is implemented in a structured and sensitive manner, outcomes may go beyond the development of face-to-face teaching skills to the building of a collegial environment that is, in particular, supportive of early-career academics.

The complexity and significance of peer observation partnerships within academic schools and departments was expressed by one senior academic in the present study thus:

> We're talking about pretty high-level interpersonal negotiations… and dealings with one another that could turn pear-shaped, just because of personalities. But that's a risk that I think is worth taking, because the benefits of just being able to talk with colleagues about teaching would I think be enormous. (05)

The framework for school-/department-based peer observation of teaching developed from the present case study is recommended as a support for leaders who recognize these complexities and wish to develop and implement school-/department-based peer observation of teaching programs in their universities.

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Paul Cooper has been involved in research and teaching in energy systems and fluid mechanics over the past 25 years. He was head of the School of Mechanical, Materials and Mechatronic Engineering at the University of Wollongong until July 2010, when he took up his present appointment as director of the university's Sustainable Buildings Research Centre.

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