The Power of Observation:
How Librarians can Benefit from the Peer Review of Teaching
—Even Without a Formal Program

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Today...

How did we get here?

Where are we?

What can you take from PROT?
How did we get here?
“Peer review of teaching is informed colleague judgment about faculty teaching for either fostering improvement or making personnel decisions.”

(Chism, N.V.N., 2007, p. 3)
Key concept

Formative evaluation

“Within the context of teacher evaluation, the term formative evaluation describes activities that provide teachers with information that they can use to improve their teaching. The information is intended for their personal use, rather than for public inspection and thus is private and confidential” (Chism, p. 5).

When PROT is formative, it is used to help improve teaching.

Summative evaluation

“In contrast, summative evaluation of teaching focuses on information needed to make a personnel decision--for example, hiring, promotion, tenure, merit pay. Consequently, the information is for public inspection rather than for the individual faculty member” (Chism, p. 5).

When PROT is summative, it is used to assess the quality of teaching--and it may be part of the tenure and promotion process.
Three-part process

- Pre-observation conference
- Classroom observation
- Post-observation conference
# Cases in the library literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication Details</th>
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Mankato State University (Minnesota)

“Noticing the informal coaching that exists among trusted colleagues, some libraries have given structure to this exchange through peer coaching programs” (p. 35).
What is peer coaching?

“To coach one another, instruction librarians form pairs, select focus areas, and observe one another’s classes. The coaching process allows librarians to work together, refining, extending, and building new skills. This reciprocal arrangement, where librarians pair off to coach one another, helps establish one of the basic components of peer coaching—a mutually supportive environment.”

(Levene & Frank, 1993, p. 35)
Levene & Frank

- Formative/developmental/non-evaluative
- Three-part process
- Librarians choose their own partner/relationship is reciprocal
- Mutually supportive environment
- Voluntary
- Confidential/respect for privacy
- Process must have administrative support

Aston University (UK)

Preconditions for a successful PROT program:
- A supportive environment
- An organizational culture open to new ideas
- Support from senior management
- Support from colleagues
“This paper describes the development and implementation of a formal program of peer observation of library instruction, both to improve library instruction and to satisfy promotion and tenure requirements at Oregon State Universities Libraries” (p. 70).

Pennsylvania State University

The Curricular and Instructional Affairs committee of the Library Faculty Organization “felt it was important to include both formative and summative assessments, so that librarians could receive constructive feedback through which they might improve their teaching before receiving an evaluation that would affect their annual review and eventually their tenure and promotion” (p. 346).
Four-part process

(Snavely & Dewald, 2011, p. 347)

Lund University (Sweden)

“The aim of this study was to implement the critical friend method and explore the perceptions of the participants in an academic library setting” (p. 70)
What is the critical friend method?

“. . . a powerful tool to facilitate the process of continuous improvement in teaching.”

“. . . involves observing and giving friendly criticism on a colleague’s teaching, and it is based on integrity and mutual trust between colleagues.”

“For the academic librarian as a teacher, the critical friend method can aid self-reflection”

(Özek, Edgren, & Jandér, 2012, p.70)
“The IUPUI peer group did not establish dedicated partners or triads; members were free to invite any other member to observe a class. . . This approach allowed us to observe a wide variety of classes, to be exposed to multiple instructional styles, and to receive feedback from several peers with different perspectives” (p. 168).
Related publications


Reflective Peer Coaching

“Reflective peer coaching is a formative model that examines intentions prior to teaching and reflections afterwards. The purpose of reflective peer coaching is to promote self-assessment in a non-threatening, supportive arena. Colleagues engage in ten-minute planning conversations and ten-minute reflective conversations. These conversations happen regularly and frequently and are intended to promote change and profound thinking about an instructor’s personal craft of teaching.” (Vidmar, p. 146).
“Suppose a colleague has asked you to observe a library instruction session and provide feedback. You have agreed. Unfortunately, your colleague was poorly prepared, technical difficulties forced her to improvise, and the students did not pay attention—much less participate. In essence, things went wrong. Your colleague has asked for your opinion, but you are not sure how to respond. Should you tell her what you really think? What obligation do you have to her? Can you provide honest feedback without causing her to become defensive or hurt?”
Other publications addressing PROT


### A note about terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Used</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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| peer review of teaching                     | Samson & McCrea, 2008  
Snavely & Dewald, 2011  
Aldridge, 2012  
Alabi & Weare, in press |
| peer appraisal                              | Peacock, 2001                                                            |
| peer coaching                               | Burnam, 1993  
Levene & Frank, 1993  
Vidmar, 2005  
Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008  
Sinkerson, 2011 |
| peer evaluation of instruction             | Middleton, 2002                                                          |
| peer feedback                               | Ozek, Edgren, & Jander, 2012                                            |
| peer observation                            | Norbury, 2001  
Castle, 2009                                                             |
| peer observation and review                 | Brewerton, 2004                                                          |
| informal, reciprocal colleague observation  | Isbell & Kammerlocher, 1994                                              |
The enhancement team applied a version of peer coaching to the planning phase of the library instruction sessions. The team schedule brainstorming sessions with instruction librarians who wanted to experiment with new teaching techniques or modification in their classes. . .

(Finley, Skarl, & Cox, 2005, p. 113)
Themes and commonalities

Most programs were:
- formative, not evaluative
- voluntary
- confidential

In many programs, participants:
- worked in pairs or groups of three
- selected their own partners
- used an observation checklist or form

Some programs:
- were initiated by the library administration
- included a report or summary of the observation
- required training
- were conducted with a high degree of autonomy
Additional themes

“The word ‘peer’ in peer coaching is significant because it distinguishes the practice from mentoring, emphasizing an equal relationship between two educators in which each party coaches the other” (Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008, p. 40)

“... the simple act of taking time to think about teaching in pre- and post-observation conferences promoted critical reflection. ...” (Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008, p. 44)
Outcomes

“Certainly new teaching faculty garnered ideas and pedagogy from their more experienced colleagues, but experience librarians were also inspired by the fresh perspectives and insights of newer teachers” (Samson & McCrea, 2008, pp. 66-67)

“Perhaps the most unexpected result of peer observation is that the observer gets as much out of the process as the person being observed” (Castle, 2009, p. 74)
Outcomes

“The peer review program assists in fostering a culture of teaching with the libraries. . .” (Snavely & Dewald, 2011, p. 350)

“In the discussions that took place both before and after teaching sessions, the participants had opportunities to exchange knowledge and ideas about teaching” (Özek, 2012, p. 76)

“Peer coaching also has the potential to address the feelings of alienation and isolation that teachers can face” (Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008, p. 44)
“Peer review can provide valuable criticism and praise to emerging professionals, as well as bring fresh ideas and energy to seasoned team members.”

(Aldridge, 2012, p. 29)
You can’t do it alone.

Find somebody else.
Communication is key.

Talk about it.
Focus on something.

One thing. Not everything.
Verbatim Log
Videotaping
## Checklists

<table>
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<th>Individual Style</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Vocal delivery (volume, pace, articulation, modulation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Shows enthusiasm, humor</td>
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<td>- Uses gestures appropriately</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Makes eye contact with audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Clear introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Organized</td>
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<td>- Minimizes use of jargon</td>
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<td>- Explains terms &amp; concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Incorporates examples relevant to students (and to course content)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Matches stated objectives of the session to the course assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Clear conclusion</td>
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<th>Active learning strategies</th>
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<td>- Appropriate</td>
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<td>- Clearly explains objective of activity</td>
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<td>- Allows time for completion &amp; debriefing</td>
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<th>Visual aids (e.g. handouts, web guides, Presentation slides)</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Relevant, used appropriately</td>
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<td>- Used effectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Organized, legible, not text-dense</td>
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<th>Rapport/Interaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Asks for feedback</td>
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<td>- Responds to changes in student engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Listens carefully and responds appropriately to comments &amp; questions</td>
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Checklists

Peer Review of Teaching Worksheet

Teaching Librarian: ________________________________

Reviewing Librarian: ________________________________

Course Number/Title of Session: ________________________________

Date of Session: ________________________________

Audience: Number of students: __________

_____ Undergraduate Students  _____Graduate/Professional Students

_____ Faculty/Staff  _____ Other

Rate the teaching librarian on the following scale:

5 = Excellent
4 = Good
3 = Neutral
2 = Marginal
1 = Poor

Organization:

Goals and Objectives well developed.  5  4  3  2  1

Content of class consistent with stated goals and objectives.  5  4  3  2  1

Material worth knowing and presented accurately, logically, creatively, thoroughly.  5  4  3  2  1

Content appropriate to level of students.  5  4  3  2  1

Instructional method appropriate for students and subject of session.  5  4  3  2  1

Well-designed handouts and/or teaching aids (if developed by the teaching librarian).  5  4  3  2  1

Good division of labor (for team-taught sessions)  5  4  3  2  1

revised 3/23/04
Calendars & Scheduling

October 27 - November 02, 2013

- 8:00 am
- 9:00
- 10:00
- 11:00
- 12:00
- 1:00
- 2:00
- 3:00
- 4:00
- 5:00
- 6:00
- 7:00

Don’t start PROT without them.
Investing time, energy, and care into the peer review of teaching can lead to significant gains, including individual improvement, cross-pollination of ideas, and an increased sense of community.


Photo Credits (in order of appearance)

Hands slide:

How did we get here slide:

Mirroring/scripting slide:

Verbatim log slide:

Videotaping slide:
Questions, Comments, Discussion
Contact us

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