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ABSTRACT

          This paper discusses the amelioration of college
teaching by the use of peer review within a supportive mentor
relationship. In such a relationship, the mentor and the more junior
teacher work as peers, and this removes the punitive element from the
evaluation process and adds an element of support. The peer/mentor
evaluator can be simply a colleague who is asked to observe and
provide feedback, or could be part of a project to improve teaching
excellence. The elements of a peer/mentor teaching evaluation
include: (1) positive feedback first; (2) comprehensive evaluation;
(3) recognition of areas where the evaluating peer's expertise is
lacking; (4) emphasis on context; (5) recognition of other
responsibilities that impact on teaching; (6) emphasis on growth and
a "better way" to do things; (7) emphasis on mutual support; (8)
focus on the enhancement of tactics, techniques, and strategies to
improve learning; and (9) separation of the personality of the
instructor from the instructional process. Areas of concern include
discrepancies between peer evaluation and students' evaluation of the
professor's instruction, the consequences if improved teaching does
not result from the peer review process, and consideration of
research and service as other components of college faculty
positions. (Contains 18 references.) (JDD)

Peer Review of Teaching

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Running Head : Peer

Abstract

   This paper discusses the pros and cons of peer review of

teaching and emphasizes the mentoring aspect of peer review.

It further discusses the rather complex issues involved

relative to faculty evaluation.

Teaching is a major part of the professorial task. It is the main focus since, service and research are not observed by as many people, nor do they often affect as many individuals.

The delivery of direct instruction in the college classroom is seen by many as the main part of their job. Many individuals are able to procure tenure by writing grants and doing research, but almost no individual is able to procure tenure without having an adequate record of college teaching.

" Teaching is an art, and, as in the case of all arts, even its most gifted practitioners can improve their skills through review of fundamentals " (Cahn, 1982, p. 36)

Even though most college professors have the earned doctorate, they can still improve their teaching. The issue is how this can best be accomplished.

The term " college teaching " deserves discussion. College teaching can range from teaching large sections of an Introductory course to doctoral seminars. Upper division lab courses as well as graduate level courses must be included in this description.

Kendall (1987) has advocated a "self evaluation system " and has devised a 4 page teaching self evaluation form . In this system, instructors can self-evaluate, which

is at least, a step in the right direction.

Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are somewhat unreliable and often invalid. Many teachers " spoon feed " their students to get good evaluations or simply assign multiple choice tests to avoid grading term papers, projects, portfolios or reports. Student evaluations have been extensively critiziced and reviewed (see Neely and Shaughnessy, 1988) In addition, there is the problem of " outliers " that haunt professors. Outliers are individuals who circle either all positive numbers on the Likert Scale format or all negative numbers on the evaluation sheet. These outliers tend to skew means and make meaningful interpretation difficult.

Student comments are often even more difficult to use as evaluative measures. One student who is taking 18 hours may feel Professor Eyestrain assigns too much work. Another student with a load of 12 hours may feel that the Professor could have assigned more reading and pushed the class at a faster rate.

Students comments are often misinterpreted or misconstrued. Students often have to be repeatedly told that the material that they are about to receive is a THEORY, and not the ultimate truth. Too many students attribute the theory to the Professor, and not to the

theorist who formulated the idea. If students dislike
Darwin or Freud, they may evaluate Professor Eyestrain
negatively.

Unfortunately, evaluations can be very detrimental to
morale. While some administrators do not believe in the
word morale, it does exist, and can deleteriously affect
one's ability to function. If a professor attempts to
improve his/her teaching, then their service or research may
suffer. On the other hand, good, quality research does take
time away from classes. Improving one's writing and
research may hinder progress in ameliorating one's pedagogy.

Evaluations must be taken in context. Some courses are
simply more labor intensive than others and require more
preparation than others. Some examinations can be multiple
choice. Other exams must be of the essay variety. Reading
one hundred essay exams can take it's emotional toll each
semester (and does not reflect the amount of effort
invested in each class in terms of preparation). In the
field of science, labs are a major concern.

Overall and Marsh (1980) have studied longitudinal
student evaluations of instructors. They found that
students, if repeatedly asked to assess instructors and
their teaching were very consistent. It may be important to
evaluate not just at the beginning of instruction, but also

at the middle and at the end of instruction to get a true

picture of the instructor's teaching effectiveness.

This, however, take time, effort and energy.

Leventhal, Abrami and Perry (1976) found that students who

select instructors on the basis of teacher " reputation "

tend to rate those teachers more favorably. Abrami and

Mizener (1980) discerned that congruence of attitude between

student and instructor is also a variable of importance.

Elmore and Pohlmann (1978) discerned that three main areas

of concern were related to positive student evaluation of

teaching. These areas include a) small class size b)

instructors who perceive themselves as " warm " and c)

students expected high grades. Their Istructional

Improvement Questionnaire (IIQ, Elmore and Pohlmann,1975)

was utilized in this research.

Mentoring for Enhancing Teaching Effectiveness

Mentoring is one methodology for assisting younger

collegues in a variety of settings. Business, industry, and

medicine all employ an apprentice type of situation whereby

an older, wiser, more experienced, knowledgeable individual

is paired with a younger, novice with less experience.

Cordova, Shaughnessy and Neely (1990) have discussed the

use of mentoring with women and minorities in higher

education. One large part of the mentoring process is being

supportive and emotionally available for the protege.
These groups present special challenges and need
additional emotional support and encouragement, especially
if universities are serious about retaining good faculty.
The issues of mentoring and multiculturalism have been
reviewed by Cordova and Shaughnessy (1993a). The
complexities and "nuts and bolts" have been succinctly
addressed by Shaughnessy and Cordova (1993b). Daloz (1986),
Zey (1984) and Torrance (1984) are excellent sources for
mentors, proteges, and those interested in mentoring.

Within the context of a mentor relationship, peer
evaluation of teachers can be effective and helpful.
Certainly the mentor may have a few more years experience,
or may know the student population better than the younger
colleague, but the point is that the Associate and the
Assistant Professor are both peers, and this removes the
punitive element from the evaluation process and adds an
element of support.

Padilla (1994) has discussed mentoring as a major
focus for ethnic minorities. However, " mentoring poses a
major problem for ethnic scholars because of our small
numbers " (p.25). While there are certainly efforts to
recruit minorities, there is a double edged sword facing
them in the universities. While they may have been

recruited highly, there may be significantly fewer efforts
to retain these individuals and to assist them toward tenure
and/or promotion. Mentoring is one tool that can be used to
assist them to at least enhance their teaching. Mentoring
for research development is a separate issue.

The peer/mentor evaluator can be simply a colleague
who is asked to observe and provide feedback, or the
peer/mentor evaluator could be part of a project/grant to
improve teaching excellence.

The elements of a peer/mentor teaching evaluation are
as follows :

1) An emphasis on positive feedback first- Tell the peer
what they are doing well. If they are trying to teach 101
students in a small room, they should be told that under the
existing circumstances, they are doing well.

2) An emphasis on a comprehensive evaluation- regarding the
pacing, the speech, the overheads (if used) the dress and
grooming of the collegue, the use of hand motions or
mannerisms, the eye contact, the use of examples, the use of
questions, the summary at the end and the assigning of
homework all bear mentioning.

3) An emphasis perhaps on the lack of expertise of the peer
who is doing the evaluating. We must all acknowledge our
weaknesses in terms of our skills in clinical supervision

and observation. One infuriating aspect of administrative review is the fact that the evaluators may never have been trained in evaluation and evaluative techniques. They enter the class and then proceed to fill out some form which may be anachronistic or inappropriate and base their evaluation on a very brief period of time.

On the other hand, if the evaluator is competent and trained, they should be able to provide important corrective feedback and assistance in a cordial, congenial manner. They should allow for explanations from the peer as to why they did, what they did, when they did it.

4) An emphasis on context. If Professor Hardworker is currently on 17 committees and is teaching 5 courses due to an overload situation, his or her teaching should be specifically evaluated within this context. If Professor Lazybones is teaching four courses, but they are all Introduction to Sociology, this should also be evaluated in the equation. If Dr. Highbrow is teaching all graduate level courses, this too, should be a major factor in the evaluation.

Another factor that should be taken in context is the fact that some professors teach courses via instructional television. Professor Gutenuf who teaches two " ITV " courses may be much different on the screen than in

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real life. Also, Professor Trublu, who drives two hours to teach at a " satellite " campus may arrive exhausted and not do a good job teaching. Compensations and adjustments may have to be made for these two individuals.

5) An emphasis on other responsibilities. If one faculty member is advising 106 students, and another is advising 25, an observation during " advising week " is not beneficial, nor judicious.

6) An emphasis on growth and a " better way " to do things. Although modifications may be minor, these changes may indeed improve the peer's teaching. Furthermore, many small improvements may " add up " to make a better instructor.

7) An emphasis on mutual support. Let's face it- teaching is not an easy thing and we all need support. Peer review can provide that support and mutual assistance.

8) A focus on the enhancement of tactics, techniques and strategies to improve learning, both in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. This may include a review of syllabi, course assignments, and outside projects.

9) Can we separate the personality of the instructor, from the instruction ? Some instructors get good evaluations simply because they are warm, friendly and behave in an expected manner. Professor Trihard may deliver excellent information, but lack the charisma that some other

individual possesses.

One issue of concern is the discrepancy between the peer evaluation and the student's evaluation. While Professor Prolifik may do a good job explaining existentialism to a colleague, the students may not share exactly the same enthusiastic warmth a colleague has for the topic. Consequently, there may be a discrepancy between a peer evaluation of a fellow instructors pedagogy, and the evaluation the students have of the instructor or his or her instruction.

Students, for whatever reason, may not evaluate a good teacher highly. Students are subject to many outside variables (Jackson & Shaughnessy, 1987) which preoccupy their time, and which interfere with the process of education. Some students work part time, have families, car difficulties, fiscal problems and emotional concerns outside of the university setting. For some students, the teachers who assign the least work, and give the easiest tests and highest grades are often most highly evaluated.

A secondary issue is to what should transpire if improved teaching is not forthcoming. Some possible assignments may rectify the situation. A poor instructor can simply watch the person he/she feels is a good instructor and model their behavior after the superlative

instructor.   Most colleges have " methods and materials "
classes which may review pedagogy.   There are video tapes
available to review the basic components of college teaching
(Shaughnessy, 1994)

Lastly, there must be mention of the fact that research
and service are the c .her two components of evaluation.
While we want to improve ALL instruction, we must not
neglect committees and publishing and presenting. Colleagues
must be warned not to neglect the service and research
component of the job.   All too often, individuals endeavor
to improve their teaching, and their research suffers.
Given the length of time for peer review in refereed
journals, it is not a good idea to devote too much time to
class preparation and outside review sessions.

In a sense, one is walking a very thin tightrope
between teaching, service and research.   Or, we are "
burning the candle at all three ends ".   We do not want to
neglect our families or mental health while improving our
teaching.

A true peer review of one's teaching can be
accomplished, given the expertise of the reviewer, the
diplomacy and skills of the reviewer, and the sincere desire
of the individual observed to improve.   This requires a high
degree of maturity, and an ability to accept constructive

criticism. A true peer review is positive if it is conducted in either a formal or informal manner. This should be determined prior to the observation. A colleague can simply observe or make comments, or can use a structured format. Ross and Regan (1993) have indicated that this type of shared professional experience can have very positive effects on professional development. Harvey and Green (1993) indicate the need for higher education to pursue quality in terms of process, outcomes, and value for money. There is still a need to specify " quality " teaching in a clearly defined context. A professor may be able to deliver quality instruction to ten students in a graduate level class. He or she may be less able to deliver instruction to 30 undergraduates, many of whom work part time or are parents caring for their children.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has attempted to discuss the amelioration of teaching within a supportive mentor relationship. It has discussed some of the major issues of concern relative to the issue of " teacher evaluation ". There are pros, cons and concerns relative to improving teaching, and peer evaluation. The concerns must be addressed in depth and understood by all concerned prior to implementing a formal program.

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