Modeling for teaching improvement

While trial and error plays a part, much of human behaviour is learned observationally through perceiving others model that behaviour. Yet learning observationally by watching colleagues teaching well (without reviewing or judging them) is not common practice in most Australian universities. Early career academics in particular are often thrown into their teaching roles without any peer observational learning experience.

Recent research shows that university teachers can learn from observing teaching models. In one study (Hendry, Bell & Thomson, 2014) 23 out of 28 academics who had observed a colleague in their teaching (without reviewing them) reported that they had learned about at least one new teaching strategy, and were motivated to try the strategy; 74% of those academics thought that their trial of the strategy was successful. As one experienced teacher commented about their lectures, “I felt empowered to try things other than the ‘stand and deliver’ style and to be creative in [the] use of small groups”. In another study of both peer observation and peer review in a peer assisted study session (PASS) program, 20 new student facilitators thought they learned about effective facilitation strategies from seeing them performed. As one facilitator commented, “you’ve got almost a bird’s eye view of what is going on and how the students are engaging with each other … you get that sort of different perspective, as you watch the students as well as the facilitator”. These facilitators recommended that peer observation occur before peer review.

The poster below summarises a staged model of peer observation and review based on the research above, which could be used in faculties to support teachers in improving their practice. In the Faculty of Science, for example, stages two and three are already well implemented as the faculty component of the University’s Principles & Practice of University Teaching and Learning (P&P) program.

To download a copy of the poster click here.