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Introduction

Peer observation of teaching is a common activity in many, if not most, institutions of higher education in North America and a time-honoured method of assessing, evaluating, developing and/or reflecting on teaching (Lang, 2019). In North America teachers began opening their classrooms to peer observation and review as early as the 1960s (Amrein-Beardsley & Osborn Popp, 2011) and in Canada research on the practice of peer observation of teaching (POT) in higher education began in the 1980s (e.g., Cohen & McKeachie, 1980). While we have over six decades of research on peer observation in North America, and elsewhere (Tenenberg, 2016), we continue to have an uneven picture of its effectiveness (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012; Fletcher, 2018). Acknowledging the uneven findings, consistent in the research is that "classroom observations of faculty teaching are significantly and positively correlated with student learning outcome assessment measures" and "student ratings of teaching effectiveness were less effective at measuring student learning than classroom observations by peers" (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012, p. 48). Research has also shown that POT formative feedback can, under certain conditions, effectively contribute to the development of reflective teaching (Siddiqui, Jonas-Dwyer & Carr, 2007). According to Davis (2011), the benefits of POT that appear throughout the literature include: improvement of teaching practices, enhancement of teaching effectiveness, encouragement of reflection on the teaching process, improvement of morale, reduction of feelings of isolation, and elevation of teaching to a scholarly activity. In general, the research on POT typically involves feedback to teachers in the form of collegial discussions, which is assumed to foster reflection on what might effectively be perceived as advancing student learning (Amrein-Beardsley & Osborn Popp, 2011; O'Leary, 2020). Research has also shown that the effectiveness of POT is not associated with teaching experience (Woodman & Parappilly, 2015).

On the negative side, Davis (2011) notes drawbacks which typically appear in the literature on POT: anxieties and/or fears about being observed and/or scrutinized by a peer, possible threats to academic freedom, concerns revolving around the validity and reliability of the peer review process, overly time consuming and paperwork intensive, and often not representative of actual teaching. Other concerns cited frequently in the literature revolve around the possibility of POT being subjective (e.g., Lee, Sugimoto, Zhang & Cronin, 2013), "overly introspective" with "mutual backslapping" and little, if any, "meaningful function" resulting in something to be "ticked off" the annual job list (Byrne, Brown & Challen, 2010, p. 225).

At least part of the reason for these uneven findings in the literature arises from research that does not account for differences in how the peer review process is conducted, the context in which it is administered, as well as the overarching purpose. Galbraith and Merrill (2012) also note that most often POT involves the use of a single classroom observation for evaluative purposes.

In addition to differences in the process and purpose of POT that has not been accounted for in past research (with the majority of the primary research on POT being conducted between 1980-2010) there is also a wide range of disparate perspectives about effective teaching approaches (Papay, 2012). As Crabtree and Scott (2016) emphasize, approaches to evaluating teaching may be summative (e.g., learning outcomes achieved) or formative (e.g., assessing the process of teaching). Moreover, POT may be systematically organized or *ad hoc*, and may range in settings from classrooms, clinics, and/or labs. The POT review forms may also vary from formal checklists or rubrics to videotaped lectures to informal self-evaluations. Finally, few studies provide evidence of being valid or reliable measures of teaching effectiveness. On this point, as early as the 1980s there were calls to report peer evaluations to student achievement for evidence of validity. Such

investigations conducted over the last five decades have shown that there is "little or no insight regarding the validity of peer evaluations and classroom observations for the purposes of assessing faculty teaching effectiveness. The validity of [student course evaluations] as a measure of teaching effectiveness has been challenged for a number of reasons" (Gailbraith & Merrill, 2012, p. 49). Ramsden's (1991) pivotal work asserts further there is a tendency of over reliance on statistics produced from student course evaluations with an unwarranted leap that teaching evaluations lead to improved practice. While the major criticisms of POT revolve around the validity and reliability of student course evaluations, this line of investigation bypasses the question of: what does effective teaching look like? Donnelly's (2007) conclusion on this topic is that "there is not a generic definition of good teaching that suits all context and student cohorts" (p. 117). Though, most would agree teaching is effective when students learn.

Assumptions underpinning the study and purpose

To ascertain what works effectively requires a reflective and inquiring approach – and to continually use what we learn from our students to improve our practice (Ramsden, 2003). Teaching techniques are easily learned and applied; knowing why we use certain instructional strategies (or not) in addition to assessing their effectiveness with our students requires ongoing reflection. Reflecting on our teaching practices, then, is an assumption that underpins this study with respect to facilitating effective teaching. A second assumption underpinning this study is that collegial discussions in the form of caring and critical dialogue can facilitate the reflective process. As Barnett (1992a) notes, critical dialogue is a marker of the academic world, reflecting an environment where truths and realities are open to collegial challenge. If this is the case for research and scholarship "the value for critical and mutual peer dialogue suggests itself as an appropriate principle for evaluating teaching activities" (Barnett, 1992b, p. 13). Given the existence of so many challenges in understanding effective teaching, Donnelly (2007) argues this necessitates academic instructional staff to engage in collegial dialogue about their teaching, encouraging open debate and risk-taking in teaching. Arising from these assumptions, the overarching aim of this investigation was to gain further understandings on how to facilitate collegial engagement in the form of critical dialogue about teaching as well as self and mutual reflection. For this to occur, a trusting and collegial climate must be in place.

Delimitations

Gosling (2002) identified three models which are typically used for POT. Two of the three models of POT fall outside aims and objectives of this investigation. The first is an evaluative model, the second is a developmental model and the third is a peer review model. The evaluative model has an experienced (and/or senior) instructor observe the teaching. This model is used to "identify underperformance, confirm probation, appraisal, promotion, quality assurance, assessment" (Gosling, 2002, p. 5). This model is typically facilitated by administrators and/or senior faculty. As such, power relationships exist for those being observed (Tenenberg, 2016). The developmental model has expert teachers observe colleagues. The purpose of this model is to demonstrate competency and/or improve teaching competencies, as well as assessment. The peer review model has teachers observe each other. The purpose of this model is to facilitate engagement in discussion about teaching as well as self and mutual reflection. This last model is consistent with the purpose of POT in this study.

The focus of this study was narrowed further to one topic: to gain insights on facilitating a POT process that will support caring constructive feedback in the form of collegial scholarly dialogue.

The theoretical framework used to guide the purpose of this study was care theory (Noddings, 1984, 1999). The original care theory as described by Noddings in the 1980s was viewed as a feminine (or in current language, feminist) approach to ethics and moral education. In recent writings, Noddings asserts that ethical caring is a state of being, characterized by receptivity, relatedness and engrossment – or more generally, receptive attention whereby "we are attentive in a special way" (Noddings, 2002, p. 13) – advocating for reciprocity, ensuring everyone gains. Caring *about* (versus *caring for*) underpins care theory. Noddings (2002) states, "Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs" (pp. 23-24). An essential aspect of care theory is reflective dialogue as it helps people to critique and provide insights to understanding their own practice, which contributes to growth (Noddings, 1999).

Care theory as described by Noddings (2002) was selected because it prioritizes the concern for caring relationships. Literature has highlighted the need for feedback from POT that is non-judgmental yet constructive, respectful, and scholarly. Further, the research literature on POT has found there can be difficulty in facilitating critical dialogue in academic settings, especially with respect to the "capacity of colleagues to evaluate and provide critical feedback that can inform a reflective approach to practice" (Yiend, Weller & Kinchin, 2014, p. 465). This concern is in addition to other problems that can arise, such as a tendency to entrench established teaching values and practices (Gosling, 2005), the risk of becoming a "tick box exercise" (Chamberlain, D'Artrey & Rowe, 2011, p. 189), and control over professional autonomy (Carroll & O'Loughlin, 2014).

To ensure clarity of terminology, we are using the phrase peer observation of teaching (POT*)*. While peer observation of teaching, peer review, peer consulting and peer evaluation are often used interchangeably in the literature, Drew et al. (2017) observe that the use of peer observation of teaching is most frequently associated with formative and/or reflective approaches, which is consistent with the aims and objectives of this study.

Finally, teaching is a personal and highly complex process that involves diversity of skills and techniques which, in turn, continues to make POT one of the more controversial teaching review processes. As such, a key element to an effective POT process is a clearly stated purpose (Byrne, Brown & Challen, 2010; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Taylor, Atwood & Hutchings, 2000*;* Van Note Chism, 1999). Consistent with the literature (e.g., Carroll & O'Loughlin, 2014; Engin, 2016), the POT process began with fostering critical dialogue through collegial discussions about teaching practices. The participants selected their own observers to ensure they felt comfortable, in control, and in a caring and trusting process. When there is an environment of trust and care, research has shown that the use of peer feedback can facilitate a transfer climate (the transfer of knowledge, skills and/or attitudes obtained from programs into job settings) (Donnelly, 2007; Marshall, 2004).

Gosling (2002; see also Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005) also note peer observation often occurs as part of an institutionally mandated process (irrespective of purpose) resulting in social relations between the actors that impact the outcome. To ensure social and institutional relations (inclusive of power differentials) did not impact the POT process, in addition to averting feelings being threatened and/or disempowered that can arise in the POT process (Shortland, 2004), there was no evaluative role. It should also be noted that in Canada there is no national oversight with respect to quality assurance, research excellence frameworks and/or performance-based funding research; though some jurisdictions in Canada have provincial oversight (e.g., the Higher Education Quality Council in the province of Ontario Ontario).

POT and the scholarship of teaching and learning

In spite of the uneven findings of the effectiveness of POT in the literature (e.g., Bell, 2001; Byrne, Brown & Challen, 2010; Crabtree & Scott, 2016; Shortland, 2004), there are several important reasons for the continued use of POT in institutions of higher education, not the least of which is the well-known issues associated with student evaluations and institutional policy stating teaching evaluation and assessment should be a multi-faceted process – inclusive of course evaluations, syllabi, teaching portfolios, statements of philosophy, and/or responses to student feedback (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). While falling outside the scope of this study, POT also provides a shared, public, peer reviewed process. The peer review process is something that is familiar, and accepted, in most institutions of higher education for not only judging the merit of work conducted but also the learning and reflection gained from POT open for collegial critique and input from peers of the academic community (Blackmore, 2005; Shulman, 2000). Davis (2011) asserts that the peer review process elevates teaching to the same scholarly activity as research. On this point, Barnett (1992a) argues that "academic knowledge does not count as knowledge without it having been subjected to some kind of peer evaluation" (p. 123) – which one can presume includes all academic activities, inclusive of teaching. It is in this spirit that we conducted this investigation.

Context

This investigation arose from an interest to gain an improved understanding on how to advance effective teaching within a health sciences faculty (in this case, Pharmacy) in a large publicly funded research-focused university in Canada. At the onset of this investigation the Faculty's Dean supported a working group collaborative with the university's teaching centre to engage in a systematic process to advance teaching practices through a POT program. While the Faculty's Dean supported the implementation of POT, it was made clear by the Dean that this was a voluntary process and was not to be used as an evaluative process for merit and/or tenure. The university's teaching centre staff were asked to join the working group because of their background knowledge in teaching development, including POT. In this case two of the teaching centre's staff involved in this study held tenured faculty positions, with their scholarship focus on teaching development in higher education. The first phase of this project began with a systematic literature review, as well as a search on what other, similar, Universities were doing nationally and internationally.

As noted above, instructors who wished to be involved in the POT process were asked to select their own observers. There were several reasons for requesting the instructors select their own observers arising from the research on this topic. Servilio, Hollingshead and Holt (2017), for example, note in their review of the literature that while senior faculty are typically paired with junior faculty for POT, there is little evidence that this kind of pairing is more effective than pairing with junior faculty in similar ranks. Research has revealed that it is what the peers actually do together that provide a high-quality POT process, not the pairing. A peer-to-peer pairing for POT may also be less intimidating when it is between peers of the same rank, in addition to avoiding power differentials which can occur between junior and senior faculty.

Current and related literature

The literature reviewed involved a structured narrative review. Existing library and internet resources were examined about the processes for implementing POT. Most POT resource materials recommend a pre-observation meeting, followed by observation and a post-feedback session (e.g., Chism, 2007; Hendry & Oliver, 2012). An observation guide was created for this study based on

the research literature and resources reviewed, followed by a pilot. The guide included comment categories for lectures, small group activities, laboratories, and/or skills and clinical demonstrations. The pre-observation meeting between the instructor and peer observer involved reviewing the form and an open discussion on the process and/or specific areas of focus. The observation guide was designed to be flexible with options to delete, edit and/or re-write any, or all, of the guide. It was recommended that feedback meetings be held immediately after the observation session to ensure there was freshness of mind for both the peer observer and the instructor. In keeping with the purpose of this study, it was important that both the instructor and peer observer understand not only the purpose, but the process (reflective and caring dialogue) – as well as a willingness for mutual, non-judgmental reflection.

Research Design

The investigation was designed as a single case study. The participants in this study (n=22) were faculty members, ranging in experience from relatively new (one-three years) to seasoned faculty members (more than 10 years). The pre-observation phase was essential to identify priorities and the purpose of the POT. The pre-observation phase included a discussion on previous teaching experiences, an overview of the process objectives, the type of teaching (class/course) session to be observed, teaching materials, and lesson plans. Participants were assured that the reports of the observation would be kept confidential and would not be used for assessment and/or evaluation purposes. Students were also informed of the observer prior to the class, inclusive of the rationale and purpose.

The observational phase involved the observer meeting with the instructor prior to the class commencement, usually a week or two prior. When there was a request, the observational phase was also conducted with a faculty member from the teaching centre who was involved in the POT development with the Faculty. At the onset of the class, students were reminded that the observer(s) was(were) joining the class and formally introduced.

The last phase of the POT was reflective debriefing. Immediately following the observation, the observer debriefed with the instructor. Both the instructor and observer then discussed how they thought the session went, inclusive of what was perceived to go well and perceptions of difficulties (if any), concluding with suggestions for solutions and/or alternative activities.

Data Collection

A decision was made to use an online form to collect comments from the participants to ensure anonymity. Other forms of data collection, such as an open-ended or semi-structured interview were considered and would have been preferred. However, given the perceived risks with respect to confidentiality in a, relatively, small faculty it was decided an online form with a combination of closed and open-ended questions would provide participants with the opportunity to provide complete and honest responses to the POT process. Upon the completion of the peer review process, data were collected from the participants with the online form. The form did not ask respondents to record personal characteristics such as teaching specialty, age, gender, race or ethnicity.

The questions were prepared by a working group within the faculty and included the following topics: the value of the feedback, the importance of peer dialogue, facilitation of the reflective dialogue, perceived meaningful changes in approaches to teaching as an outcome of the POT process. All faculty members in the faculty (Pharmacy) were invited to participate in the survey (n=35); twenty-two faculty members responded to the survey invitation.

Open ended questions were included after each closed question (Likert-type) to gain insights about faculty perceptions into the POT process. A thematic analysis was conducted on the open-ended questions. The process of coding the open-ended questions involved the manual allocation of categories to each response as well as the use of the analysis conducted on Google forms. Microsoft Excel was used for the closed questions (Likert-type questions) and graphic representations.

Data analysis and discussion

Overall, the data indicate that participants believe that the POT process lead to changes in their teaching, was easy to work through, and was a constructive process. The participants also believe that the reflective feedback was a positive and useful process. As noted in the literature in the introduction, those who engage in the POT process when the purpose is to facilitate engagement in reflective discussions about teaching find the process to be of value, especially with respect to fostering collegial relationships. The survey results add to the literature in this respect. The survey results also show (and in alignment with research by Kohut, Burnap & Yon, 2007), both the instructors and peer observers did not find the process onerous or stressful, and appreciated the feedback that was perceived to improve their teaching. Additionally, the survey comments indicated the integration of an academic who is knowledgeable in teaching development was perceived as a valued addition with respect to providing an overview of the research, structuring the observation process, and feedback. Finally, the survey data revealed that observing a peer whose teaching practices are unfamiliar is of significant value for the peer observer.

Table 1

Closed survey (7-point Likert-type scale; n=22)

Question	Agree/Strongly agree %
Participating in a peer teaching review lead to changes in how I teach.	100
The peer teaching review process was easy to work through.	77
The peer teaching review process was a constructive experience.	75
The feedback that was generated as a part of the peer teaching review process was specific and useful	100
The time afforded to complete the process is not sufficient.	25
The process is unclear and hard to implement.	10
It is hard to find a person to act as a reviewer	18
I am uncomfortable being evaluated by my peers	9
I was able to provide useful feedback for the instructors I reviewed	69
I was able to provide useful feedback for the instructors I reviewed	83
Acting as a reviewer lead to meaningful changes in my own teaching	84
Participating in a CTL* teaching review lead to meaningful changes in how I teach	100
The CTL teaching review process was a constructive experience	100
The feedback that was generated as a part of the CTL teaching review process was specific and useful	100

*CTL = Centre for Teaching and Learning

As table 1 shows, when asked about barriers to participation, the majority of respondents indicated that time was not a significant factor, nor was the process hard to implement, or discomfort with the observation process, and/or being observed. The open-ended comments shed further insights on these responses, as well revealing some inconsistencies in the survey responses.

Open-ended Comments

As a key purpose of the POT process was to engage in reflective teaching, it was important to gather data on how to facilitate collegial engagement in the form of critical dialogue about teaching as well as self and mutual reflection in the comment sections. In the comment sections, faculty were asked to describe what they valued and did not value about the POT process. Using Nodding's (2002) care theory to guide the data analysis, following are the themes that emerged.

The reflective process is valuable for both junior and senior faculty

Participants indicated the reflective aspect of the POT process was valuable and was not an intimidating process. The following comment, for example, illustrates the process was non-intimidating/judgmental: "the process is not a punitive activity and simply engaging in a peer teaching review shows a commitment to teaching and professional development". Other comments such as, "peer teaching review is valuable at all stages of an academic career", "[the process was valued because] the direction of the peer teaching review is in the hands of the faculty member being reviewed". Some respondents went further, asserting "all faculty members should participate. Both junior and senior faculty members can learn from the review process as well as provide fresh ideas and perspective on the review" and "peer review fosters innovation and trying new ways of interacting with students and course content". Comments tended to revolve around innovations related to teaching strategies and techniques that were unfamiliar. In particular, the ability to open classroom doors in what is otherwise a private activity between students and their instructors was a valued opportunity for the observers. This was an opportunity to entertain the possibility of integrating unfamiliar teaching strategies they observed into their own teaching practices.

Perceived changes in teaching practice

While there were some criticisms of the process (described below) overall comments indicated the POT was perceived as valuable with comments often relating to the value of fostering collegial relations. Comments also indicated that faculty believe the POT process facilitated positive changes in teaching practices through reflective dialogue using a structured but flexible format. The following comment is representative of the opinions provided about their teaching development: "The forms [and] process in my opinion works very well and [improved] my teaching".

Observation forms need to be streamline

While participants indicated that the POT process was valuable, resulted in perceived changes in teaching practices and was not an intimidating experience there were several notable criticisms. One criticism was about the POT guide developed for feedback. While the forms were designed to be encompassing of all teaching activities in the Faculty (clinical, labs, simulations, classroom instruction, seminar) the forms provided tended to be overwhelming for many participants. Specifically, while the POT guides were designed to allow for maximum flexibility it would appear participants preferred a focused and tailored guide. Based on these comments a recommendation would be to prepare POT guides that are tailored for each teaching context (lab, clinical or classroom lecture).

An academic who is knowledgeable in teaching development should be embedded in the observation

It was an option for the POT participants to have a faculty member from the university's teaching centre to also participate as a peer observer and provide feedback. Comments from the faculty who used this option revolved around the notion that they were inclined to be more accepting of external observer than a peer. This suggestion diverges, somewhat, with the purpose of the peer review process which is anchored in a caring and a mutually reflective peer process versus developmental (see Gosling, 2002). This noted, the survey participants felt that the training and support to promote constructive feedback and discussion was enhanced by having an academic who is knowledgeable in teaching development, in addition to a peer (colleague) observer. As one comment notes: "[I am] more accepting of expert review [because] the training and support to promote constructive feedback and discussion are enhanced by having educational consultants that have experience and resources on a wide range of [teaching] topics". Hence, it was expressed by some of the survey respondents that academics whose area of expertise and research is teaching development have expertise on a wide range of topics about teaching and added value to the POT process. On this point, Kohut et al. (2007) have also pointed to the benefits of faculty who are trained in POT and have both expert knowledge and experience in providing feedback on teaching.

Reconsider the timeframe and requirements for the POT process

Survey comments also related to a concern about the possibility of the POT process eventually becoming evaluative, and used by the administration for annual reviews. To ensure that the peer review process does not become an administrative process for evaluation and assessment, survey comments revolved around suggesting that procedures need to be put in place. In particular, comments revolved around the Dean's mandatory requirements and the differential expectations for junior and senior faculty. As was noted by one survey participant, "the mandatory requirements … do not support innovation and collaboration; they encourage an administrative focus where the process is about compliance, not professional development".

Issues revolving around the commitment required for the POT process

Finally, there were general comments on several issues, many of which focused on the issue of time for the POT process which, as noted earlier, is inconsistent with the closed question results. Comments such as "…I am too busy" or "the process is too long" illustrate issues related to committing to the POT process. Other general comments included: "[POT] has not been around long enough", "To be honest, I keep forgetting", "I'm too new to the Faculty" and "I don't know much about the process". These comments point to the ongoing issues related to the value of the POT process, as well as a perceived lack of return on investment. The lack of return on time invested is an important finding and has not been given much attention in the research literature. Specifically, if one's teaching evaluations are satisfactory (or better), what is the incentive to engage in the POT process?

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, the findings are limited to a faculty in the health sciences located within a large and publicly funded research-focused Canadian university. The insights gained from this study are likely only transferable to similar contexts. Second, participant bias is a factor that cannot be overlooked. In particular, as the POT process was voluntary and participants may already hold positive expectations with respect to the effectiveness of the process.

Third, it is also important to acknowledge that universities are complex environments and implementing the POT process can be a complex undertaking (Bell & Cooper, 2013); as such it is difficult to gain a complete picture of the value of the process and/or assess the reporting of the POT process in this study.

Finally, while perceived changes are important data to gather, and the data from this investigation are promising, the perceptions were not tracked over time using additional metrics about the kinds of change occurring. This additional data could have been used to measure whether teaching practice changes as a result of participating in the POT process.

Conclusions and significance: Flipping the POT

Using care theory (Noddings, 1989, 2002) this study presented a single case of peer observation of teaching which detailed the findings of academic teaching experiences of POT on teaching practices. The findings of study show that peer observation programs are not an intimidating and/or judgmental process. This supports the critical role of reflective dialogue for the facilitation of a trusting and caring peer observation process, as well as supportive of feedback through scholarly dialogue by caring about one's colleagues. Consistent with the work by Hendry and Oliver (2012; see also Hendry, Bell & Thomson, 2014) the POT process was viewed by the participants in this study as not only supportive of teaching improvement and innovation, but valuable for the observed, as well as the observer. Perceived value for the observer tends to be under-investigated and/or reported in the literature with respect to (1) fostering collegial relationships and (2) observing a peer, especially with instructional strategies that are unfamiliar for the observer. Hence, an important finding from this study is the further insights on the benefits of observing colleagues teach, as well as the benefits of providing collegial and caring feedback. As Tenenberg (2017) has asserted, teaching is different from most professional environments in that we do not have opportunities to observe our colleagues. POT, however, provides an opportunity for us to observe our colleagues – and is of perceived value for the observed, as well as the observer. The data in this study adds to the research on the benefits for the observer with respect to observing the unfamiliar, as well as for both the observer and observed with respect to fostering collegial relationships.

The data from this study also contribute to the literature on issues revolving around feelings of being judged when observed by a peer (i.e., power differential between the observer and observed, arising in a 'fear of the peer'). In this respect, Nodding's theory (1999, 2002) provides an important contribution. The data from this study indicate that when the purpose of the POT process is to facilitate engagement in the form of critical and non-judgemental dialogue about teaching, as well as self and mutual reflection, negative perceptions did not surface in the data. Rather, the process was perceived as valued. As such an important finding in this study is that the emphasis of the POT process, when the purpose is for reflection, should not be solely on observing an instructor; rather, the process should also integrate mutual reflection. This can result in a shared reflection with the purpose of enhancing teaching practices for the observer – which could be described as 'flipping the POT'. Similar to the findings of Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004), junior and senior faculty can both benefit from the role of a peer observer. Peel's (2005) experience of being an observer and being observed captures the essence of the POT process: *"*I experienced Sartre's 'regard d'autrui'; the gaze of the other was both confirming and threatening, at once undesirable yet essential, challenging and enlightening" (p. 489).

Finally, another germane finding was the use of faculty who specialise in the area of teaching development (in this study from the teaching centre) to participate in the POT process. There was a

perception that an external observer who conducts scholarship in teaching can provide knowledgeable feedback about pedagogical theory and course development, resulting in the reflective discussions being enhanced. This finding builds on the work by Shortland (2010; see also Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004) who stressed that feedback by peers relies on interpretations and perceptions. Reliance on perceptions and interpretation, in turn, can be inherently dangerous given most peer observers have little expertise in pedagogical theory and course development and/or a solid base with respect to the research in teaching within higher education environments.

Further research

Nicolson and Harper (2014) contend that at some point instructors need to move beyond being a reflective practitioner (e.g., Schön, 1983), and move toward being a transformative intellectual (Giroux, 1988) whereby educational reforms (arising from, for example, teacher disempowerment, instrumental approaches, management pedagogies) are requiring changes in teacher roles and understandings. Peel (2005) observed further that there is also a lack of critical theorizing on the POT process, which "… demands an active engagement with abstract pedagogical theory, purposeful critical reflection on classroom practice, and a challenging of assumptions through shared critical reflection with colleagues, during both formal and informal conversations about teaching" (p. 489). While there is value in knowing the instrumental aspects of teaching (e.g., creating course syllabi, learning outcomes, teaching methods, inclusivity, etc.) knowledge of these aspects are insufficient for transformative intellectualism. Linked to the notion of moving toward becoming a transformative intellectual, the literature has also brought forward the risk that the POT process can result in the perpetuation of teaching conformity and a blame culture, rather than a culture of constructive criticism (Blackmore 2005). Further research should consider how (or if) the POT process can be used to move instructors beyond a reflective teacher to a transformative intellectual.

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