Enhancing the Scholarship of Teaching Through Peer Review

Jeffrey Johnson, PhD
Professor & Assoc Dean (Education)
School of Public Health

Observation > Feedback > Professional Development > Student Learning Gains

“uplifting the whole people” — HENRY MARSHALL TORY, FOUNDING PRESIDENT, 1908
Scholarship in Higher Education

• “the work of the ‘professoriate’ could be thought of as having four separate but overlapping functions: the scholarship of *discovery*, the scholarship of *integration*, the scholarship of *application*, and the scholarship of *teaching*.”

  *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate, Boyer, 1990*

• Boyer’s call was to extend the academic mission beyond the traditional focus on ‘discovery’;

• Boyer’s original thinking evolved into the movement driving the *scholarship of engagement*;

• The expanded definition was well received, but the assessment of quality was a major stumbling block…
The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning

- SoTL is not synonymous with ‘excellent teaching’;
- *communities of engagement* – individuals willing to collaborate with others to explore shared interests and build on accumulated knowledge, theory and experience;
- *production of artefacts* – writing (e.g. narratives, reflections), publications, learning materials, text books, e-learning;
- willingness to subject ideas and practice to *critical evaluation* to meet standards of rigour; and
- respect for recognized and appropriate *principles of enquiry or investigation* to accumulate knowledge, solve or explore problems.

*Hutchings & Shulman, 1999*
In research, having a “problem” is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves.

But in one’s teaching, a “problem” is something you don’t want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it. ... Changing the status of the “problem” in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation is precisely what scholarship of teaching is all about.

(Randy Bass, Carnegie Fellow; quoted in Hutchings & Shulman, 1999)
A teacher scholar is one who engages in a well-prepared, intentional and ongoing investigation of the best ways to promote a deep understanding on the part of as many students as possible.

Teaching Scholarship in Public Health

As more students are attracted to the field, our mandate as educators is crucial: to pay close attention to what we teach and how we teach it.

Frenk, Hunter, Lapp, AJPH 2015

Yet, to date, most of the literature on redesigning the MPH has focused on curriculum choices (what to teach) rather than teaching methods and professional development of teaching faculty (how to teach).

Vian & Ashigbie, J Health Ed Teach 2015
Evaluations of teaching & learning

• Historically, teaching evaluations have relied on student ratings;
  ▪ Known biases;
  ▪ Students not best judge of content/objectives/integration;
  ▪ Students are not experts in pedagogy;

• Increasing attention to multi-faceted evaluations;
  ▪ Including peer review of teaching
What is Peer Review of Teaching (PRT)?

- PRT is a confidential form of evaluation, conducted by colleagues or peers, designed to provide feedback to instructors about their teaching.

- The intention is to enhance the teaching and learning culture of a school, department, faculty, and university;

- Provides a more complex and complete view of an instructor’s teaching;

- Enables instructors and observers to reflect on their teaching practice over an extended period of time.
Two Purposes of PRT: Formative & Summative

• **Formative review** has as its purpose the development and improvement of teaching practice for individuals; it is primarily intended to be used by an individual for their own personal/professional development.

• **Summative review** is informed collegial judgment about teaching intended for evaluative purposes; it is comparative in nature, enabling the evaluator(s) to determine the quality of teaching performance with respect to predetermined standards or criteria.
Challenges with PRT

- Collegiality issues – Can trigger anxiety and tension, therefore must be done with transparency, integrity, and care. Purpose must be made clear – to improve teaching and learning.

- Power relations can also be a factor. Process must be rigorous, open, and transparent.

- Bias – Subjective evaluations – particularly if criteria and standards are not made clear.

- Time & Effort – To be done well, PRT requires time and effort. Administrators need to recognize this.
Benefits of PRT

• Can combat an over-reliance on student ratings, where instructors are overly concerned about good scores (=> reduction in standards, conventional teaching methods, less innovation) (Hutchings, 1996)

• More comprehensive than student ratings;

• May be more appropriate than student ratings;

• Increased teacher confidence, greater insight into teaching practices and the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning (e.g., Schultz & Latif, 2006; Bell & Mladenovic, 2008).

• Provides opportunities for instructors to open their teaching up to a community of colleagues who can nurture improvement (Hutchings, 1996).
Benefits of PRT

- Bernstein, Jonson & Smith (2000) found that peer review processes positively impact faculty attitudes and approaches toward teaching:
  - Dramatic changes to in-class practices. More active & collaborative learning, less lecturing;
  - Instructors more willing to ask students to demonstrate higher order intellectual/critical thinking skills;
  - Improved provision of feedback to students, which positively impacted student learning;
  - Enhanced the scholarly community in departments and faculties (increased dialogue on substantive teaching issues such as desired learning goals)
Experience of PRT in PH Education

• PRT was generally, though not uniformly, well-received;

• Academics who participated in PRT described changes to their teaching processes including course organization, time management, and development of student engagement skills.

• Mutual inspiration through sharing teaching innovation and good teaching practices;

• Creates opportunity for better integration across MPH curriculum;

• One theme emphasized by reviewers was the need to include more practice-based examples in student learning opportunities;

• PRT helps to promote active, practice-based learning because it implicitly recognizes teaching is … a social practice.

Vian & Ashigbie, J Health Ed Teach 2015
Peer-review of Teaching in School of Public Health

- January 2016 – return from 6-month sabbatical;
  ➔ asked by Vice Dean to develop PRT program for SPH
- Consultation/Collaboration with other faculties
- Established small working group
- Engaged Dr. Carla Peck, CTL
  ➔ PRT program development
- July 2016 - elected Chair of FEC
  ➔ Incorporated PRT requirement into FEC guidelines
- January 2017 - appointed Associate Dean (Education)
- July 2017 - Implemented SPH PRT program
Six phases of planning for Peer Review of Teaching:

1. establishing the purpose for peer review ➔ Conduct survey
2. determining what will be reviewed
3. choosing who will be reviewed
4. deciding on procedures for conducting a review
5. implementing the review process
6. revising, renewing and sustaining the review process
SPH Survey of Teaching Evaluation

- Distributed to SPH Faculty & Instructors 2015-16, 2016-17
- Total N=62
  - 34 Faculty Staff;
  - 28 non-Faculty Staff instructors (sessional, CAST, adjuncts);
- Responses N=38 (61%) overall;

![Instructor Rank](chart)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sessional instructor</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistant professor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>associate professor</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professor</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scholarship of Teaching & Research

We don’t practice the scholarship of teaching the way we do for research scholarship. *(NB research not req for all respondents)*
In general, relatively strong support for peer review of teaching.
Peer Review of Teaching

- Relatively little distinction between FORMATIVE across ranks;
- Maybe more value for SUMMATIVE earlier in career trajectory;
Peer Review of Teaching

Frequency of Peer Review of Teaching by Rank

- General support for a regular frequency
- Suggested frequencies of every “2-3” or “3-5 years”
Peer Review of Teaching

Importance of Teaching Performance Indicators

- multifaceted, including USRI (a lot of “A little”);
- but, clear support for peer review
- Training in peer review and expertise in pedagogy most important;
- Mix of internal and external (CTL) reviewers
Some key points:

• We don’t practice the scholarship of teaching the way we do for research scholarship;
• In general, relatively strong support for peer review of teaching;
• Value in both FORMATIVE and SUMMATIVE peer review; maybe some value for SUMMATIVE earlier in career trajectory;
• General support for a regular frequency (for all) – q 3 years;
• Training in peer review and expertise in pedagogy most important;
• Mix of internal and external (CTL) reviewers
• …more on grad student supervision (not covered yet)
Developing SPH PRT Program

Four streams of activity were proposed:

1. Policy development
   • PRT program elements
   • revised FEC Guidelines

2. Training of SPH Instructors to be Peer Consultants
   • CTL Peer Consultant training

3. Development workshops on teaching and learning

4. Formal Evaluation
In evaluating teaching performance, FEC values a wide range of activities. FEC values consistently strong performance in both classroom and non-classroom teaching activities, as evidenced by course load, teaching evaluations, quality and quantity of trainee supervision. FEC particularly values recognition by teaching/supervisory awards to indicated excellent performance.

**FEC values a variety of forms of teaching evaluation, including objective and subjective reflections on teaching, such as peer evaluations of teaching.** All Staff Members are expected to show concern for their teaching and evidence of effort to improve inadequacies in this area. Staff Members must report student evaluations for courses taught. Emphasis will be placed on actions to improve teaching.

FEC also values the conduct and publication of education-related research or experiences in relevant peer-reviewed journals, presentation at national and international education meetings, and teaching engagement with External Stakeholders.
SPH FEC Guidelines (2014)

29. Evaluation of Teaching

29.1 Teaching performance for all Staff Members of the SPH is expected to be of consistently high quality. A sustained effort, with emphasis on continuing improvement or maintenance of performance, is expected of all Staff Members.

29.3 Indicators to assess teaching performance in the Year Under Review include:

   a) Quality, breadth, and quantity of classroom teaching;
   b) Leadership and professional development;
   c) Quality and quantity of supervision/mentorship of trainees;
   d) Quantity and quality of engaged teaching conducted for or in conjunction with External Stakeholder;
SPH FEC Guidelines (2014)

a) **Quality, breadth, and quantity of classroom teaching, measured by:**
   - formal evaluations by trainees;
   - unsolicited trainee comments
   - formal/informal evaluations by peers and colleagues and/or administrators; and/or
   - teaching awards.

b) **Leadership and professional development, measured by:**
   - curriculum development or reforms;
   - course development or revision;
   - adoption of innovative teaching methods; and/or
   - commitment to updating teaching skills and technology.

c) **Quality and quantity of supervision/mentorship of trainees, measured by:**
   - number of trainees supervised/mentored;
   - **formal/informal evaluations by trainees or peers**;
   - successful and timely degree completion of trainees;
   - joint publications/presentations with trainees;
   - scholarships or external funding awards for trainees; and/or
   - graduate supervision awards.
33.1 Preamble - Teaching

In evaluating teaching performance, FEC values a wide range of activities. FEC values consistently strong performance in both classroom and non-classroom teaching activities, as evidenced by course load, teaching evaluations, quality and quantity of trainee supervision. FEC particularly values recognition by teaching-supervisory awards to indicated excellent performance.

All Staff Members are expected to undergo peer review of teaching during their progression through the professorial ranks. *The main aim of peer review is intended to be individual Staff Members’ own professional development; that is, a formative review.* Normally, the individual Staff Member, in consultation with a peer reviewer of their choosing, decides on the focus and elements of formative reviews of teaching. Typically, following a formative peer review of teaching, written reports are prepared collaboratively between the individual Staff Member and the peer reviewer. *At certain stages in the progression through the ranks, having undergone a formative review, and acted upon this to modify teaching practices, will provide a demonstration of concern for improving teaching skills, which would be helpful in making career decisions. As such, a recent written report of peer review of teaching will be required at the time of consideration for Tenure and for Promotion to Professor.* Following promotion to Professor, Staff Members are encouraged to undergo formative peer review of teaching on a regular basis, with a suggested interval of every 3 to 4 years.
On or before the first Monday in May, the Staff Member shall submit a Promotion Dossier to the Vice Dean. For promotion to professor, the Staff Member must demonstrate a strong record of achievement in teaching, research, and service, including excellence in teaching and/or research, or, in rare circumstances, a record of exceptional service. The Promotion Dossier shall comprise:

a. A promotion application letter to the Vice Dean;
b. An up-to-date curriculum vitae, including a complete publication list (published and forthcoming);
c. Copies of the Staff Member’s five (5) most significant scholarly contributions, with an annotated summary explaining their significance; and
d. A teaching dossier, which includes a statement of the Staff Members personal teaching philosophy;
e. A recent (i.e., normally, within past 2 years) written report of a peer review of their teaching;
f. Additional material as deemed necessary to support the recommendation.
SPH PRT Program

I. Guiding Principles

II. Recommended Procedures for PRT
   A. Timing
   B. Planning – Request form and pre-meeting
   C. Classroom teaching
   D. Distance teaching
   E. Written summary & de-brief meeting
   F. Disposition of written summary
   G. Evaluation of PRT experience – instructor & peer consultant

i. Appendix 1: Dimensions of Teaching

ii. Appendix 2: Elements to be Considered for PRT Activities
SPH PRT Program

Peer Consultant Training

• Invited volunteers from SPH faculty
  ➔ 3 individuals (2 Professors; 1 Assistant Professor)

• CTL Peer Consultant training (2017-2018)
SPH PRT Program

PRT Consults

• Undertaken 2 consults in past term
  • 1 case in advance of tenure applications
  • 1 case a new Assistant Professor interested in PRT

• 2 consults planned for Fall 2018
  • Both cases in advance of promotion applications
Experience of PRT in PH Education

- Academics who participated in PRT described changes to their teaching processes including course organization, time management, and development of student engagement skills.
- Mutual inspiration through sharing teaching innovation and good teaching practices;
- Creates opportunity for better integration across MPH curriculum;
- PRT helps to promote active, practice-based learning because it implicitly recognizes teaching is … a social practice.

Vian & Ashigbie, J Health Ed Teach 2015
References


